
Research Article**The Modern African Woman and the Politics of Reconciling Career and Domestic Activities****Ophilia Abianji-Menang, PhD**

Abstract: In early African male fiction, women were not allowed to go to school. They were pushed to the periphery where they occupied marginal spaces. They had no voice in public. They were expected to perform household duties concerning childbearing and domestic functions. These are roles that domesticated women and made them dependent on their husbands for survival. However, urbanization and the spread of female education has given women more space and opportunities for survival and livelihood. In addition to culturally assigned roles, women are now educated and have acquired skills which enable them to have paid jobs and pursue a career in different walks of life thereby rendering them economically empowered and making positive contributions to the growth of their communities and families. This blend of domestic activities and pursuing a career is not without its own challenges. This article aims at examining the politics of reconciling career and domestic activities through the prism of Alobwed'Epie's *Patching the Broken Dream*. It looks at the challenges that women/widows go through as wives, mothers and being career women. It reveals how the woman/widow rises above these challenges and reconstructs her image. Informed by the womanist ideology of Micere Mugo, E Modupe Kolawole and Chikwenye Ogunyemi, this paper justifies the view that domestic activities and career in the novel under study is challenging for women especially widows. However, these challenges do not limit the woman. They make her strong and develop hidden potentials that change their perception about life and people's view about women and widows.

Introduction

In the past two decades, feminist movements and individuals have been concerned with identifying the true value and potential of an African woman and situating her within her society. Most African cultures and some existing cultural values have continued to relegate women to inferior roles and positions in society. Women have been ascribed stereotypical roles like housewives, maids, cooks, caregivers, and child bearers in different parts of the world. Some women are very comfortable in these roles as they execute them in silence and dedication. These are roles that domesticate women and place them under a restricted sphere of influence which make them dependent on their husbands for survival. These stereotyped notions about women constitute the main causes of their marginalization in both literature and society. Some women who are culturally enlightened and educated, and most of whom live in urban areas, have questioned these stereotypes about women. They are of the opinion that in addition to their cultural ascribed roles, education is a critical tool for female emancipation. They encourage young girls to go to school and acquire knowledge that will enable them to take responsibility for their development and growth. Today, most women both in rural and urban areas all over the world are educated. As a result, they have made a powerful entrance into the work force where they earn an income outside of the home and have become "partners rather than servants of their husbands" (Rosemarie Tong 19). This blend of domestic activities and career development cannot be without its own challenges. I will examine the challenges and the strategies used by women to reconcile domestic activities and career through an analysis of Alobwed'Epie's novel *Patching the Broken Dream*.

Alobwed'Epie is a postcolonial, Anglophone Cameroonian writer whose writing deals with burning issues on marriage, family life and widowhood in his society. Through setting, plot, characterization and narrative techniques, he describes the world of Diana, the heroine of the novel, in marriage and widowhood. Being a wife, mother and a university student, Alobwed'Epie does not only present the challenges that go with wifery, motherhood and the quest for a career, but also presents the strategies used by women to blend domestic activities and work. Alobwed'Epie's work is inclusive. He challenges some cultural norms with regards to what a man should do and not do. He portrays that masculinity and femininity in literature are culturally loaded terms with no one to one relationship. Such concepts include all the values that society or culture attach to being a woman or man. Through the novelist's portrayal of David, Diana's husband, he reveals that he is not an ordinary man. He accepts to carry out tasks normally assigned to women because he wants to complement the woman in order to form a useful combination of skills and qualities. He carries out womanly task in child rearing and domestic activities to the annoyance of his mother-in-law. This is to break away from male defined canons of what is masculine and feminine hence, corroborating archbishop Calestino Migliore's view that equality for women and men will be accomplished if the differences and complementarity between the sexes are recognized (Daily Bread 10). How Alobwed'Epie does this in his novel, constitutes the major focus of my work. However, before I pursue this, it will be expedient to define the key terms and concepts which I use in this paper which include career, politics and domestic

activities.

The politics I refer to in my title refers to a perspective of seeing reality, that is, in order words, the principles relating to or inherent in a particular context or activity, especially when this has to do with power and status. How career perspective and domestic activities are conveniently reconciled in the text and extension, the contemporary Cameroon society, to underscore its dynamics, constitute the focus of my paper.

Career is an occupation that a person undertakes during his/her working life which involves making progress. It is a process that begins with the education one acquires, the training one receives and culminates in the job one gets at the end. This paper will focus on a career woman in general while using the Cameroonian experience as case study. A career woman is a married or unmarried woman that pursues a career to make a living and for personal advancement rather than being a housewife. The word "career women" is often associated with women and not men. It has a pejorative meaning with regard to women who have chosen a career in life. It is assumed that a career woman does not care about getting married and having children. Even when she does, it is believed that she does not have time for her family and home as her ultimate focus is her job. This stereotype about women who work is a perspective that has been challenged by most womanists who consider the family central to feminist standpoint. Alobwed'Epie in *Patching the Broken Dream* focuses on the woman within her family, her community and work. His heroine, Diana is happily married, with children while pursuing her education. In spite of the challenges that she encounters as a woman a wife, mother, and student, this does hinder her from moving on. She completes her university education and enters the higher teacher's training college where she graduates as a teacher.

Domestic means relating to someone's family or home. Domestic activities or duties are concerned with things that are done in the home or pertain to running a home or family. It comes from the Latin word "domesticus" which means belonging to the house. From this latin interpretation, a domestic is someone who belongs to the house and runs the activities of a home or family. Traditionally in africa, it is believed that a woman's place is in the home. She is seen as a care-giver where she is supposed to take care of her husband, children and her home. This places the woman in a position of vulnerability as she is in the position of "waiting for others particularly her man" to take care of her needs (Rus Erwin 38). This is the place that most African women have occupied for long without questioning. Women have been very visible at home where they perform their household duties concerning child rearing and domestic functions. Men are the ones who are expected to leave the home to work with the primary responsibility for "supporting the family economically and protecting its members (Martin Marger 315). While men are presented to fulfil instrumental roles that take them out of the home as breadwinners, women continue to fulfil traditional roles of wife and mother. Rus Ervin Funk maintains that this traditional masculinity that defines men's role as that of "protector of his woman and family" is a threat to women and the family as they are "less identifiable" (33). Domestic roles

make women not to have a status of their own, always prepared to do the bidding of their husbands and passively. such passivity puts them in a difficult position of not having the experience or training to assertively work and meet their own needs. Rosemarie Tong corroborates this view when she notes that "the traditional role of wife and mother has left women...feeling empty and miserable" (22).

This traditional arrangement has been brought into question by the number of women who go to school. Their entrance into mainstream workforce where they have also become breadwinners cannot be underestimated. As a result, women have taken up occupations that take them out of the home. They spend little or no time on domestic activities. Domestic activities like cooking, housework and taking care of children and the family are usually done for them by others. It is thus evident that a woman with a career cannot be a domestic. She has to employ the service of a housemaid or domestic servant to assist in the running of the home. Alobwed'Epie is a womanist who presents the woman differently from his male counterparts in African fiction. Diana, the heroine in his novel, is interested in her education, career and family. She is happily married without any hindrance to her education and career. Together with her role as a mother and wife, she is actively preoccupied with her education. Upon completing university, when her third child is six-months old, Diana enters the Higher Teacher's Training College dubbed Ecole Normale Superieure, a prestigious school in her country where she graduates as a teacher. Through Diana's story one comes to an understanding that although there has been a change in the traditional work role of women, this change has not affected the African family very much. Women, like Diana who go to school or work continue to do the bulk of child care and household tasks. In situations where she has a tight schedule and cannot meet up with domestic activities, the service of a maid or domestic servant, and most often a relative, is employed. In some cases, the husband at times has to create time to take care of the children and attend to domestic chores. This is what one finds in *Patching the Broken Dream*. I employ the womanist theoretical perspective to elucidate these facts and more.

The womanist approach to literary criticism centers on the woman and her role within the family, community and the work place. A womanist "loves other women and/or men sexually and/nonsexually, appreciates and prefers... women's strength and is committed to "survival and wholeness of entire people, *male and female*" (Aleksandra Izgarjan and S. Markov 305). It better describes the experiences of the black woman and the nature of her oppression. It is a concept wherein the African woman expresses her thoughts and feelings and asserts herself with a cultural context. This concept looks at the society, the characters living in it and how their cultures can affect their behavior and opportunities. In line with this thought, Clenora Hudson-Weems, a womanist from the African diaspora sees womanism as an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. She argues that it is "grounded in African culture, and focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of African women" (24). She sees this as the starting point of the African women's

consciousness to name herself. To Mary E. Modupe Kolawole, womanism is the, “totality feminine self-expression, retrieval, and self-assertiveness in positive cultural ways. It combats the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that women of colour face. It is a global ideology for African women which “embraces racial, gender, class and cultural consciousness” (Kolawole 24).

The centrality of the family is very important to womanists. The family is the basic unit of society wherein men and women in Africa learn traditional and cultural values and pass them on from one generation to the other. Men and women play important roles in the family to ensure growth and cultural continuity without which the society will disappear. Men constitute an integral part of the family which womanists cannot negate. For this reason, they valorize marriage. That is why they focuses on the history and experiences of the black woman within the family and society. It is against this backdrop that Chikwenye Ogunyemi points out that womanist critics do not negate men; rather, in their quest for independence and freedom, they want partnership with men in order to change their sexist views, “womanism is black-centred and accommodationist. It believes in the freedom and independence of women like feminist but...it wants a meaningful union between black women, black men and children and will see to it that men change their sexist stands (251). To corroborate this view, Hudson-Weems opines that womanism is not a “men-hating ideology” (Kolawole 25). She acknowledges the biological differences in the sexes but argues men and women have the same values so they have to complement each other. To her, difference becomes “a stepping stone for self-identity and a strong drive for cultural self-retrieval” (Kolawole 25). The idea of complementarity and accommodation is the basis of womanism from which Africans and African-Americans draw. Micere Mugo believes that the voice of the African woman must be heard in its own space. In an interview with Adeola James, she opines that the African woman should be the one to “sing her own song” (Kolawole 7) for she can better talk and describe the nature of her oppression. This may explain why many African writers like Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo and others have mobilized for right for women’s rights.

Womanists advocate inclusiveness and not exclusiveness. As a theory, It developed from the exclusionary practice of feminism wherein coloured women were excluded or relegated to the margins in the field of literature. In order to create a womanist paradigm which would include other women and support women, womanists insist on self-sufficiency and self-confidence of women. They lay emphasis on the need to build a strong community of women who are helpful to each other in providing the support needed to “resist oppression and patriarchal dominance and transform traditional systems into new ones in which they would have more possibilities to express themselves” (Izgarjan and Markov 309). In order to provide women with positive values which would sustain them, women are called upon to build networks among themselves so that there should be solidarity among women. This solidarity enables women to support each other and to

form alliances with oppressed groups of men. Alobwed’Epie is a womanist who believes in the African culture and acknowledges the importance of men. Through his representation of his heroine, Diana, he debunks sexism and advocates a just society in which freedom flourishes for both men and women. Womanist ideology becomes relevant to my study because it offers an alternative way of seeing women and analyzing women’s experiences in literature.

Atmosphere of Bliss and Sadness: The Woman in *Patching the Broken Dream*

Set in Nylon, a city in present day Cameroon, Alobwed’s narrative space in *Patching the Broken Dream* takes us to an urban city to present the cordial relationship that exists between Diana and David. He narrates the story of Diana in marriage and widowhood. The society he presents in the novel is a modern day society where the woman’s role is transformed due to urbanization and the education she has received. There is a breakdown in many cultural barriers so much so that the traditional roles of women as wife and mother has been reversed. The place of the woman is no longer in the home. The woman is allowed to go to school. In addition to her traditional role, she has acquired knowledge and skill that takes her out of the home where she also becomes a breadwinner. Diana is educated and make positive contributions to the growth of her community and her family.

The narrative presents the harmony and love that reigns in her marriage. Told from Diana’s perspective, she presents David as an ‘ideal’ husband that every woman would like to have. Eunice Ngongkum describes their relationship as “a loving relationship in which David is not the ‘typical’ African man” (144). Though Diana is still a student, David seeks her opinion on family matters, his salary and management is known by his wife, he takes care of the family while his wife is at school, he does laundry and saves for his family. His family is his “dream”. This is a realistic picture of what marriage should be and the kind of marriage womanists clamour for. Emecheta describes this kind of marriage and man as “an ideal and happy marriage” and “a good man. He is the salt of the earth”. “I love men and good men are the salt of the earth...I’ll like to see the ideal, happy marriage (Kolawole 11). To Diana, “David was an indescribable husband and father” (Alobwed 6).

Considering the fact that his wife, Diana, is a student, he does not allow the burden of the home on her. He comes home promptly to ensure that his children take their bathe, eat and go to bed on time. They agree to have three children. To show the love and togetherness that exists in their marriage, David coins the word “twinity” to mean the two have become one so they are inseparable (37). They share their aspirations and difficulties. After her university studies, he sends her to the Higher Teacher’s Training College after which she will join him in building their dream. He equally prepares her for future responsibility by orientation her on how to handle the family in his absence. Diana could not assign any weakness to David, “he was a loving husband in all aspects” (7). The love is made manifest in the way they called each Dave for David and Dii for Diana. David is presented as a companion and helper, who

assists his wife to achieve her aims. All this comes about thanks to the modern context where education has enabled both parties to view themselves positively. David does not see his wife as an object whose role is to bear children and take care of the home. He sees her as a partner who has an important role to play in the development of the family that's why he encourages her to concentrate on her studies by assisting with domestic activities. In spite of Diana's plea for a house-help and the presence of her mother, David still returned home promptly every evening to see to it that the children were bathed, fed and sent to bed on time" (7). Diana tells us that "it was to remove every aspect of extra strain on me and make me concentrate on my studies; complete university, then enter a professional school and after a few years, join him in building our dream" (7). David knows that child bearing and education are very strenuous that's why he gives his wife the assistance that she deserves. He does not only assist in domestic chores, but he also supplements breastfeeding with artificial feeding "powdered milk" because he knows that "breastfeeding and studies sucks a woman dry" (9).

From our presentation of Diana above, we notice that the woman in the modern African society is different from their mothers presented in the precolonial and colonial novels like Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* and Buchi Emechta's *The Bride Price*. The woman in these novels were not educated, had huge families and their lives centred around the home and family. The modern woman or the post-colonial woman is transformed. This transformation arises from the new role of women in society and in particular women's level of education, higher level of training, work experience and labour market attachment. This has led to delay in family formation, reduction in family size, attachment to education, paid work and career.

Diana's attachment to education and the division of both caring and domestic responsibilities with her husband is dissatisfactory to her mother. She is a traditional African woman who is not happy with the paradigm shift. She reproaches her daughter for allowing her husband give a helping hand in washing the children's dresses and his. She thinks, "domestic work is a woman's affair" (20). Uncomfortable with this new order, we see her interject David when he wants to join his wife do laundry during the weekend; "my father, leave the laundry today to your wife" (27). To her, her daughter is not bedridden for her husband to be doing house chores and what will he tell them "supposed in doing that his friends visit him?" (28) This question symbolizes the difficulty she has in internalizing change in the modern society where men and women complement each other and do not care about what people think or say? The use of the third person object "what will he tell them" in her question refers to the society that is gender sensitive to roles for women and men and will not accept a breakdown in gender roles. Noticing that her son-in-law is not happy with the decision, she casts a long and ferocious stare at him. In an angry tone, she turns to her daughter and remarks, "your husband is a disappointment. I shall never pity him anymore. If you like you can ask him to wash even your pants" (27). The tone in her speech shows her

disgust for modern values which "feminises" men. Being a traditional woman, she valorizes African cultural values with respect to running of the home even in town where people think that traditional values have no place. That is why she asks David to leave the laundry to his wife. To her, a real man does not do domestic work that is why she is disappointed with David symbolized by the ferocious stare she casts at him.

Diana is surprised that her mother is not abreast with the way life is in the modern setting. To prepare her mother for the challenges that goes with her status as mother, wife and worker, she tells her mother out rightly that David takes pleasure in what he is doing, so he is not ashamed of it and no one could dissuade him," he knows that if I complete my course, we shall pay house-helps who would take care of the laundry and the cooking to ease things up. "most civil service women prepare food for their husbands only on weekends. What Dave is doing now is to facilitate that" (28). Diana's point of view is to school her mother on the fact that the correct gender roles for men and women in the modern society have changed. As social conditions for women change, gender roles are equally bound to change as the standards that define masculinity and femininity have equally undergone change. Women, like men now leave the home to work in order to support the family economically so, fulfilling traditional roles for women alone is challenging. It is a clarion call to her mother in particular and women in general that as women enter into professional occupations, men can equally take responsibility in child rearing and domestic activities hence a call for more "nurturant behaviour" (Martin Marger 304). "David loves his children and does not want me to complain of being overworked in caring for them" (28). Thus, she has to acquaint herself with the fact that as a civil service, a woman: has no time to run her home on daily basis. She has just the week end to take care of her home and cook for her family. To make up for this, the service of a house-help is indispensable. However, Diana's mother does not agree with her because this is a form of dependence on her husband that spoils her instead "he is spoiling you...to much dependence on one another is dangerous as aloofness. Be careful" (29).

It is worth noting that, not only has the traditional role of women has undergone change, even the economic role has equally changed. The economy in the traditional society was predominantly agrarian and women depended on agriculture for a livelihood. Women and their children made up the work force hence contributing in building a man's wealth. The new role for women as seen above, has also change women's perception about agriculture. The modern African woman does not only have time for domestic activities, she equally does not depend on farming for a livelihood. Unlike the traditional setting which is agrarian and farming is the main source of livelihood where women and their children make up for the work force, this area has also witnessed a change in recent times. Men engage in agriculture while women have the choice to either accompany them or not.

In *Patching the Broken Dream*, we are told that every Saturday, David gets up early in the morning and goes to the farm without his wife. Diana's mother is not happy with this

paradigm shift because she grew up farming and had trained her daughter to farm from childhood; “I grew up farming... When she was a baby, I sat her under a tree-shed while I worked. As she grew up, I introduced her to hoeing (32). She does not understand why in marriage her daughter will not assist her husband on the farm. So, she prepares some sugarcane and cassava cuttings and proposed that her daughter and her accompany David to the farm because he cannot be going to the farm “every Saturday alone as if he is not married” (31). She retaliates by asking “what has farming got to do with marriage?” (29). Her point of view reiterates the fact that the standards that define women in the rural setting are not the same standards in the urban setting. Secondly, that farming is not a condition to judge a woman in marriage. A successful marriage has nothing to do with farming hence, she should not be judged by traditional standards; “I can’t beg him to take me to his farm” (29). The day he wants me to go to the farm he will tell me. Diana has refused to be socialized into traditional gender roles that define women as making-up the work force for men on the farm. As mentioned above, Saturday is the day she takes care of her home and cooks for her family. She sees nothing wrong in staying at home while her husband goes to the farm.

Farming for a working class woman is a choice and not an obligation hence, she cannot beg her husband to take her to the farm. To justify Diana’s view, David vehemently refuses when Diana’s mother proposes that he takes them to his farm to plant vegetables; “my wife! Horrible! I can’t expose my wife to such danger? And when she develops blotches and other skin diseases... and the disease leaves indelible puffed-up scars on her legs and hands, not to talk of her face.” “Then she would lose her, e e beau, beauty, terrible! My wife!” (29), (31). David’s choice of words here, “danger,” “blotches,” “skin disease,” “indelible puff-up scars” are figurative. They indicate that farming leaves indelible scars on a woman’s body that spoils her beauty. He cannot expose his wife to an activity that may cause her a skin disease and destroy her beauty. This corroborates the view that, financial independence for women leads to empowerment. Men, like David, recognize their wives as breadwinners and their financial contributions are not undermined. Due to the nature of her job, he cares much about the physical beauty of his wife and the income she earns from her job will enable her buy whatever she wants. Surprised by David response, she questions; “I grew up farming-how blemished am I? How mottled is your wife? Just say you don’t want your wife and children to touch grass” (32). This argument between David and his mother-in-law brings to light the conflict between traditional and modern values they both represent. David challenges stereotypes about women and children who were used in the past as work force to boost agriculture. He does not want his wife and children to touch grass, “I don’t want my wife and my children to touch grass. There is no reason why they should touch grass” (32). The fact that she was trained to farm is no guarantee that his children will be socialized into this gender role/culture. Her status has changes as well as the gender roles that define her as a woman. After all, her income permits her to buy whatever she wants

from the market without necessarily getting it from the farm. All these point to a change in the politics of viewing the woman in the context of modernity which is the focus of my paper.

The atmosphere of bliss that Alobwed’Epie presents of marriage in the first part of the novel is contrasted with that of sadness and pain that characterizes the second part of the novel when where Diana’s dream of a “good life” is shattered by the tragic death of her husband in a car accident. In a state of frustration, Diana contemplates suicide. She finds life unbearable without David coupled with the thought of burying her husband when she has no money. However, with assistance from family members, friends and the government, Diana succeeds to bury husband. Left overs from the support she gets, she decides to engage in a building project that David had started. It is worth noting that David’s death and burial is not given much attention in the narrative. Unlike John Nkemngong Nkengasong’s *The Widow’s Might* where the widow is made to go through obnoxious widowhood rites, Alobwed’Epie presents a widow whom tradition forbids to perform mourning rites. Because of the love that Diana has for her husband, she decides to mourn him in private by wearing black underwears. Her point of view reflects her devotion to her dead husband and patching up the broken dream. This narrative space is a pointer to the fact that the status of the widow has evolved due to the influence of national and regional instruments like the Convention on the elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) that protect the rights of women and widows. They have contributed to bring change in society whereby many cultural practices such as widowhood has been modernized thereby changing people’s perception about widows. Diana takes advantage of the global stage to better her situation a widow. This explains why Alobwed’Epie focuses on the challenges in widowhood and how the widow copes with these challenges.

Widowhood is problematic for the widow especially in the first two years after the death of the spouse. The widow suffers social and psychological problems. The most painful void left by the death of a spouse is loneliness and stress. The widow is not only to bear the pain of losing a partner, she has to assume the new role of family head and bread winner and its attendant stress. The fact that widows are not well treated in African societies make widowhood stressful for widows. In *Patching the Broken Dream*, “the full torrent of what Diana’s new life as a widow would be, buffets her squarely in the face when she comes back from her husband’s burial only to find her compound in disarray” (82). The landlord’s son has broken into her compound and vandalized the fruit trees; branches of trees were torn off, unripe fruits littered the place” (82). Some few months later, the same gentleman comes harvests her plums in broad daylight. When Diana asks him why he did that, he threatens her and leaves. In order to secure her rights in the place, Diana reports the matter to the police and the fellow is incarcerated. News of the boy’s incarceration reaches the landlord. He storms into Diana’s house two days later and

gives her two months to leave his house. A month later, he sends a forewarning from a bailiff asking her to evacuate the house within a month or face forceful eviction. When Diana presents the receipts of her rents that have not yet expired, the landlord insults her to the hearing of everybody, am I the one who killed your husband? (84). Diana's landlord's heartless reaction points to the different forms of disinheritance both physical and symbolic that widows suffer in patriarchal setting. This affects Diana psychologically and socially because there is an automatic change in status. Diana acknowledges this when she posits that "I am reduced to a bunch of wants, a pauper" (79). Faced with this hardship, Diana contemplates suicide as a way of escape. To her, widowhood reduces a widow to a bunch of wants and pauperizes her to the extent of pushing her to desired death. A widow from the perspective of her plight, is a person who is in distress. This is because widowhood has an adverse effect on her socio-economic life, family system which contributes to aggravate her loneliness and stress symbolized by the life of bliss and harmony that she lived in the first part of the story as contrasted to the life she will live as a widow in the second part of the novel. Due to brutalization from her landlord and his son, Diana has no option than to pack out of the house and seek refuge in her friend's house where she lives in the garage with her kids. This justifies Teddy Kuyela's view that widowhood represents social death for widows because they have lost their husbands, the main breadwinner and supporter of their children, and also their social status. Thus, they are consigned to the margins of society where they suffer all forms of hardship. Diana reiterates this view when she notes that "widowhood is the most ugly, unimaginable and hideous thing in the whole wide world. (117). There is no civility in widowhood. The only civility in widowhood is to respond to challenges as they present themselves (127).

Diana responds to these challenges by setting standards for herself and challenging stereotypes about widows as being vulnerable and helpless. Devoted to her dead husband, she becomes a husband to herself in words, thoughts and deeds, in patching the broken dream. She helps every member of the family to fit into the new situation. While her brother-in-law takes over house care and the children, Diana's mind is on her building project and the education of her children. Without waiting for the luxury of a completed house, she moves into her uncompleted building after completing the slap of the house which she covers the windows and doors with cardboards and corrugated iron sheets. she succeeds to give her children "the best education in the best schools as her husband had wanted" (103), and she sends his brother-in-law to a driving school with the aim of buying him a taxi. When she gets her arrears, her situation improves. Her children adapt themselves with every changing stage, their health is good, she succeeds in painting the inside of the building, procure a taxi for her junior brother and buys a Toyota Starlet for herself. The decision to paint the inside of the building and not the outside is very symbolic. This means she cares much about her inner being and that of her family which is represented by the inside painting of the house than the outside as represented by the

outside which she does not paint. The outside also represents those pleasures that she foregoes for the sake of patching her broken dream such as merry-making with friends, going out with men or looking for another husband. She is described as arrogant and snobbish on the pretext that she "is carrying a false imperial air" (108) while others blame her for exaggerating the loss of her husband. She refuses marriage to Dr Maurice and advances from Peter, neither does she join her friends for merry making. Her dignity as a widow which is represented by the inner painting attracts people to build in the neighborhood that was inhibited by her alone. Being a "novice husband and a daring wife" Diana tackled her problems with determination (100) which earns her membership into the men's club as an honorary member. Diana sets standards that are appreciated by the menfolk and her community and the world is called to learn from her. She becomes famous for mourning her husband as she defies all the challenges on her way and ends up building a house for her family as a way of fulfilling their dream. There is no better way Diana could show love for her late husband than to be a woman of integrity.

Networking is an important aspect of the global era that helps in the development of women and widows. In the world of the novel, solidarity among women and men are networks that are created to help each other and provide support for those in need. Imelda, her husband, Dr Maurice, workers, and the men's club are informal networks that Alobwed'Epie makes use of in the novel to support the woman/widow. They are conscious of the plight of the widow and they are determined to help overcome her pain. When David dies, they are very supportive to his widow. Dr Maurice refuses to collect payment for Diana's treatment when she goes unconscious. Imelda and her husband are always available to assist and provide help where need be. They harbor her when she is evicted from her house by her landlord. The men's club support Diana with the sum of 400,000francs after her husband's burial "I opened the envelop and I saw money, good money". She uses the money to complete her building project and pleads for a special dispensation to host the club on behalf of her late husband in her premises/ They join their voices to fight for the liberation of the woman/widow and justifies the womanist view that men are an important in the fight against the woman/widow's plight.

This paper has examined the modern African woman and shown that the relationship between family life and work can be very challenging for women. Urbanization and female education has however led to a paradigm shift in roles between men and women. Men and women as seen have overcome traditional gender stereotypes about their roles in and beyond the home. Through Alobwed'Epie's presentation of David, he is calling on the men to play more active roles in the family by sharing the burden of housework and childcare with their wives. The paper reveals that for there to be a balance in work and domestic activities, there has to be a break down in cultural barriers on gender roles and society must be able to accept this break. Men could get involved in caring and domestic activities which will change well established gender roles for men and women. There is an undefined division of both caring and

domestic responsibilities for men/women to avoid domestic activities overbearing on the woman and there could also be a reduction in family size.

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