

Promoting gender equality: An examination of feminist rhetoric in Kaleni Hiyalwa's novel *Meekulu's Children*

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Abstract

Women's rhetorical contributions have been overlooked in the field of rhetoric because the rhetorical tradition has a long history of excluding female or feminine ways of speaking and writing. It is also worth noting that the analyses of women's writings have been restricted to the coverage of the feminist perspectives and not necessarily the domain of rhetoric and the analysis of their works of fiction. This has therefore, led to the realisation of a gap in the present paper regarding the examination of feminist rhetoric in literary studies. Through a rhetorical lens, this paper examined the arguments that demonstrate that women have immensely contributed to the liberation struggle in Namibia alongside men; hence, there is a need for equal acknowledgment. Based on the Aristotelian rhetorical theory, the study established how the arguments (logos) provided in Kaleni Hiyalwa's novel, *Meekulu's Children*, provide evidence that women indeed actively participated in the liberation struggle and how these proofs stir the readers' emotions (pathos). Furthermore, the determination and willingness of characters (ethos) to collaborate with other characters to promote gender equality was examined. Invitational rhetoric was also used to determine whether the novel has promoted feminist principles of equality, self-determination and immanent value. The paper found that arguments can be made to provide evidence for feminist rhetorical analysis with regards to how Dila and his wife were murdered by the *omakakunya*; the raping of his wife, how Meekulu cooks for *eendume domomufitu*, and also how Kamati and Estela make seemingly insensible choices to run out of the country. As a result, these supportive arguments stimulate emotions as exemplified by the descriptions of the murder of Dila and his wife and how Ketja copes with the death of both parents, which stirs empathy from the readers. Moreover, the novel presents how the men and women of Elombe have been supportive of each

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other in good and bad times throughout the time of war thereby bringing to the fore views geared towards appreciating the African sense of *Ubuntu*. Lastly, the study determined that invitational rhetoric allows readers to participate in conversations in the novel through the use of rhetorical strategies like: emotional utterances, respect of different ideologies, and rhetorical questions.

Keywords: *equality, liberation struggle, rhetoric, complement, feminist, politic*

Introduction

Many women have historically been excluded from political participation, particularly in Africa. However, Africa has recently seen a rapid increase of women participation in political structures and as such, there are various interventions that women have been advocating for as a way to accelerate the participation of women in political matters. Ndlovu and Mutale (2013) note that despite the fact that African women's political participation has increased tremendously, there is still a huge gender gap that needs to be filled for equality to be fully realised. This inequality is evidenced in relation to women, and a closer analysis of Kaleni Hiyalwa's novel, *Meekulu's Children*, shows how the text highlights the need to recognise women's contributions to the Namibian liberation struggle. It can also be noted that African women's writings have flourished in the 21st century, and these writers have interrogated practices and institutions which are patriarchal (Bouziani, 2015). Regardless of this increase, Matos (2015, p. 1) observes that in most cases women do not enjoy the same representation of power and equality within the private and public spheres. Therefore, through literature women have and continue to resist patriarchal settings so that all social classes can have equal representation in the private and public spheres. Some critics have studied and analysed women's fictional writing by focusing on gender and female oppression; however, they have neglected the rhetorical aspects of the novels. It was, therefore, the intention of this study to recognise the rhetoric of women's fiction that is used as a weapon to invade the rhetorical battlefield that has been occupied and dominated by men.

Literature Review

African Feminism

It is to some extent understandable why some women in Africa refuse to be associated with the notion of Western feminism when one considers some of the negative connotations that are contrary to African culture. These women rebut this feminism because Western feminism generalises African women's contexts as well as unique challenges by assuming that Western perspectives are universal as well as the misguided assumption that all African women have similar challenges which may not be the case. Thus some African women like Ketja in Kaleni Hiyalwa's novel *Meekulu's Children*, have tasted the bitter fruit of colonialism, while some have not, so they do not have similar experiences, neither can men be generalised as subjugators because they are different depending on their culture, exposure, colonial experience. Because of these differences, there must be African feminisms that articulate the experiences of diverse women (Nnaemeka, 2004); in this case, these differences can probably be explored according to geographic spaces or regional blocks. Consequently, African feminisms should not contain a monolithic view of the continent, but rather be aware of the context of a pluralism of African feminisms that encompass the fluidity and dynamism of different cultural beliefs and historical forces (Attanga, 2013; Nnaemeka, 1998). Thus, in the novel *Meekulu's Children*, Hiyalwa (2000) has declared her commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of Ketja by making her an active member of her society in order to ascertain that generalising African feminism might not work. Therefore, this paper looks at how women and men relate to each other during the difficult times of the liberation struggle.

This study was borne out of the realisation that a gap exists in feminist rhetorical analysis and that there is need for a rhetorical analysis of women's feministic literary works as a means of

persuasion. Matos (2015) indicates that women's rhetorical contributions are still overlooked in the field of rhetoric. The rhetorical movement has had little scholarship that analyses and critiques modern discourses about women's rights in public discourses. Furthermore, Ullen (2016, p. 142) indicates that literary studies have shown little interest in pursuing rhetorical analyses because rhetoric and literature have come to be seen as contrasting rather than complementary practices. Hence, Whitehead (2007, p. 1) underscores that the subject (rhetoric) needs to attract rhetorical critics so as to examine the novel as a vehicle of persuasion. "To increase communication about the novel as source of persuasion is important because fictive worlds exert influence beyond that of aesthetics" (Whitehead, 2007, p. 1). When rhetorical critics apply rhetoric to fiction, they look at the novel as an instrument for communication; therefore, it is important to scrutinise how the novel persuades the readers with the arguments made by the writer. Booth (1983) asserts that novels are rhetorical, not necessarily because they persuade us to do what the text implies, but as an instrument where the author tries to convey his/her vision to the readers and to persuade them of its realness. This implies that Hiyalwa saw what was happening in her society, and used the literary form of communication as a persuasive tool to speak for and about Elombe people.

Theoretical frameworks

Aristotelian rhetorical theory

This study used the Aristotelian rhetorical theory to show how this novel employs feminist persuasive arguments. Murthy and Ghosal (2014) and Collieran (1988) indicate that effective persuasion is possible with three appeals; when persuading an audience, the writer/speaker has to be concerned about the logical proof, emotional responses of the audience and his/her credibility; so this study employed the three proofs of persuasion, namely pathos, ethos and logos. Collieran (1988) states that Aristotle divides the proofs into three modes of appeal: the appeal to reason (logical), the appeal of speakers (ethical) and the appeal to audience emotions (pathos). For example, in the novel *Meekulu's Children*, Hiyalwa (2000) stirs the emotions of the readers with the scene of Meekulu kissing two dead and naked bodies that are laid in a row; which are the bodies of Dila and his wife. This gives the readers evidence to buy into the idea that the liberation struggle in Namibia had the same impact to both men and women; hence recognitions of liberation participation must be equally credited to both male and female participants of the liberation struggle. Borg (2004) points out that the choice of words and the use of anecdote, quotations and facts are important in moving the audience to be in agreement with your point of view. Logos relies on the audience's ability to perceive information in a logical way so as to arrive at some conclusions. These conclusions come from assumptions derived from solid facts.

Even if the study analyses fictitious piece of work, this work is derived from real situations, which brings about a heightened sense of verisimilitude, and the novel provide a series of answers to questions posed by situations in which it arose. Pathos is defined by Murthy and Ghosal (2014) as the speaker's appeal to his/her audience's sense of emotions and their interests. With the help of pathos, the speaker can get emotionally connected with his/her audience. For example, in Mariama Ba's novel *So Long a Letter*, Ba stirs the emotions of the readers by appealing to their imagination. She captures the emotions by word-painting that uses sensory and specific details (Mafiadoc.com, n.d.). Aristotle (as quoted in Murthy & Ghosal, 2014, p. 17) argues that "a man is by nature a political animal not simply because he possesses reason but also because he experiences emotions", and the emotions of individuals influence their thinking and they are also powerful motivators to stimulate the hearts and minds of the listeners to accept the claims of the speaker. The goal of rhetoric is to persuade towards a particular frame of view or particular course of action, so appropriate rhetorical devices are used to construct sentences that are designed both to make the reader receptive through emotional changes and to provide a rational argument for the frame of view or course of action (Albashir & Alfaki, 2015, p. 37).

Even though rhetoric is the study of persuasion, the message sent must carry the truth and values of the society. Murthy and Ghosal (2014) as well as Collieran (1988) emphasise that rhetoric is the art of mere persuasion, but according to Aristotle, it is an effective tool to establish what is true and just. Sometimes the speaker convinces his/her audience of the values of his/her arguments in spite of his/her full knowledge of the subject. The speaker cannot leave the audience in doubt, and in such cases it is important that he/she establishes his/her credibility in the minds of the listeners by establishing the truth. Although the work analysed in this study are based on fiction, there must be truth in it based on the society where the novel is set so that the readers can connect it to their experiences and knowledge.

Invitational rhetorical theory

This study made use of the concept of invitational rhetoric which was developed by Foss and Griffin in 1995. Foss and Griffin (1995) among other scholars questioned and challenged the classical rhetorical theories by claiming that they contain patriarchal bias, as well as that they embody the experiences and concerns of males, while distorting and omitting the experiences and concerns of women (Foss & Griffin, 1995). According to Foss and Griffin (1995):

Invitational rhetoric is an invitation to understanding as a means to create relationship rooted in feminist principles of equality, immanent value, and self-determination. Equality is a commitment to replace dominance that characterises most human relationships with intimacy, mutuality and camaraderie. Invitational rhetoric eschews a hierarchical ranking of individuals according to external criteria, instead recognising the immanent value of all living beings. They see every human being as a unique and necessary part of the pattern of the universe and thus valuable (p. 5).

Invitational rhetoric argues that every human being is special and deserves to be recognised, thus it is rooted in feminist principles that acknowledge the value of all human beings. This means that a patriarchal society may be eschewed if invitational rhetoric is employed since domination cannot be applied. Rather, it promotes equality in all spheres of life.

Moreover, Bone, Griffin and Scholz (2008) indicated that the proposal of invitational rhetoric suggests that invitational rhetoric can be viewed as a communication where participants create a conducive environment where growth and change occur, but change is not its ultimate goal. In contrast to attempting to change another person, when the rhetor uses invitational rhetoric their aim is to enter in a conversation where they can share their perspectives and positions, discuss an issue where no party necessarily agrees but increases understanding. This relationship is rooted in respect and reciprocity; and this kind of relationship may be present in other forms of rhetoric, what makes it unique in invitational rhetoric is the willingness of the rhetor to converse with the audience rather than debating with them and forgoing efforts to change others (Bone et al., 2008). For example, when the villagers come to sympathise with Meekulu every day, Tate Mbela who has seen the incident of the brutal killing of Dila and his wife narrates the story. Tate Mbela invites the listeners to visualise what has happened by giving them exact details of the incident. First he creates awareness so that they can respond in any manner they may like to. The listeners choose to partake in the narration with comments of support, encouragement and warnings to show that they value Tate Mbela's narration. The reaction of the audience indicates that transformation would be achieved when all perspectives offered are understood by participants. Transformation is an optional process in invitational rhetoric because participants are free to decide if they are willing to change after being exposed to other people's ideas and experiences (Mihalcea, 2014).

In invitational rhetoric, the rhetor just offers a point of view to the audience instead of imposing ideas on them. Makinen (2016) points out that when a rhetor offers perspectives in her/his speech, the audience is given a view through the rhetor's eyes to the surrounding world or on a specific issue. The aim of invitational rhetoric is to provide the audience, in a dialogic-oriented situation, the rhetor included, with new perspectives instead of trying to inflict changes on the audience. Fictional writers do not convince their readers to change towards their views, rather they offer perspectives on certain issues and the readers will see to it themselves whether they want to change or not. Diverse perspectives are viewed as important resources in the interaction. Kindred (2007) indicates that not only different perspectives are respected, but also they are honoured as valuable resources. Individuals have to choose whether they want to engage in the dialogue or not. For example, in Starhawk's *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, the North's central sense of respect and sharing are emulated through actions and through their speech acts; when they meet together to make a decision everyone is represented, but participants have the choice to participate individually. This represents the feminist principle of self-determination since everyone in the group has the freedom to engage in the community's decision-making process (Lozano, 2013).

Discussion of the findings

The participation of women in the liberation struggle

In most parts of historical Africa, women were said to have opted to be out of politics because the patriarchal power structures were found to be hostile towards the entry of women into politics, but they then managed to make their way into this male domain with amazing speed and determination (Geisler, 2004). Even though fighting colonialism was equally executed by women who fought alongside men, their efforts were unappreciated (Geisler, 2014). African women contributed to their countries' anti-colonial wars differently which invariably needs to be recognised. This novel calls for the recognition of the contribution that women made to the liberation struggle in Namibia. Hiyalwa's novel sets off with the emotions of pity that are provoked by the first encounter of war in the village of Elombe. Ketja, the protagonist is exactly nine years old when both of her parents are killed by the *omakakunya* (colonial army). Ketja has to be the one to discover the death of her mother by first seeing the arm that is sliced off; "Oh, God! It is my mother's arm!" (Hiyalwa, 2000, p. 1). It is not just pity that the reader may have for this young girl; it is also terrifying to have seen what Ketja sees at the entrance of her parents' house and also the intensity of the violence. Ketja's age is an indication that war had a profound effect on everyone that experienced it, despite their age.

Although Ketja has managed to handle the sight of her mother's severed arm, she cannot handle seeing both of her naked and dead parents lying in a row. The whole scene has sent Ketja into an emotional and psychological interruption, and this is marked by the emotive words encapsulated in the following; "What I saw was unbearable. Meekulu was kissing two dead bodies laid in a row. They were my mother and father. What struck me most was they were naked" (Hiyalwa, 2000, p. 6). Hiyalwa provides evidence that the intensity of the brutality of Ketja's parents' deaths is unbearable. When the sight of this scene affects Ketja psychologically, the readers can understand and empathise because they can correlate it to the evidence of their severed bodies. Murthy and Ghosal (2014) point out that if the statement is attempting to persuade the audience with a reasonable claim, the speaker offers proof in support of his/her statement using logical arguments. Thus Hiyalwa (2000) does not only inform the audience of the death of Ketja's parents; she also gives the evidence of how the parents look in their death for the audience to feel the immensity of the suffering this young girl has to endure.

Furthermore, the writer seems to illustrate Ketja's parents' deaths graphically thus underlining that men and women were similarly subjected to despicable trauma during the liberation struggle of Namibia. One can conclude that in some instances, women suffered more than men because

they were both raped and murdered by the colonial forces. This statement attempts to persuade the audience with a reasonable claim, and the speaker offers proof in support of his/her statement using logical arguments (Murthy & Ghosal, 2014). Ketja's mother suffers the impact of a two-edged sword because she is also gang raped by the soldiers before she is killed. Soldiers take turns on her in the open and also in front of her husband. Not only that, her arm is cut off when she is still alive. This can be likened to Kiyimba (2008) who detects that in Alan Taca's *The Silent Rebel*, the scene that is memorable is when Mrs Lamo is raped by soldiers before she is killed together with her husband. In the same vein, in Gorreti Kyomuhendo's *Secrets No More* which is set in the turbulent time of the Rwandan genocide, the soldiers rape Mariana's mother in the presence of her father and other children, and this has a lasting psychological impact on Mariana (Kiyimba, 2008). The *omakakunya* (colonial soldiers) rape Ketja's mother in front of her husband to use her as bait for the husband to talk about all political activities that *eendume do momufitu* (soldiers of the forest) do in their village, which he has declined to have any knowledge of. Ketja's parents show bravery because in spite of the pain inflicted on them, they do not reveal the liberation soldiers' activities in their village; the only sound that can be heard from their mouth is whines of pain; even the mother does not show feminine deportment of being 'soft'. Furthermore, they did not implicate their fellow villagers as it is a promise to some members of the village that such activities are to remain unspoken of to anyone, despite the pain one may endure as a way to coerce one into revealing such a secret. Consequently, they die without compromising the freedom fighters (*eendume do momufitu*) and their activities. The impression that they give to the readers is the one that creates a sense of trust and respect.

Similarly, equality is depicted by Estela and Kamati, who at a young age have gone into exile because of political instability in Elombe village. Though Estela and Kamati do not understand the implications they are subjected to at the time, they have crossed the borders into Djambia (Zambia) with *eendume do momufitu* (soldiers of the forest), who are left with no option but to take them along, and this is especially that the children cannot tell where they come from and where they are heading. This tells us of the brave choices that children made to run away from their home country because of political instability. More telling is that these choices had to be made by both girls and boys; and by looking at the case of Estela and Kamati; both have no clue of where they are going. The only thing that is observable about them is fear; fear of what is happening at their house where they have left their parents in the hands of *omakakunya* (colonial soldiers) and fear of what they are looking at now, *eendume do momufitu* (soldiers of the forest). Thinking of what these children are going through, one gets emotional by thinking of their age and the incidents occurring to them. Resultantly, our judgment might be affected by how we feel towards what happened to them. Fosmire (2015, p. 196) illustrates that emotions are those things on account of which people change and differ in regard to judgments and upon which attend feelings of pain and pleasure, for example, anger, pity, fear and all other things and their opposites.

Another notable contribution made by women is the provision of food to *eendume do momufitu*. Geisler (2014) notes that:

In Zimbabwe it was ultimately the realities of the struggle that forced men to admit women into the armed struggle. We could not win the struggle without the help of women. It is like a family, the two have to contribute. The people that were cooking food for fighters were women. So there was a need for the two to work together (p. 50).

The above account can be related to what women did in the case of Namibia. Meekulu is evidence that women cooked food for *eendume do momufitu*. To give credence to this point, Geisler (2014) states that "rural women, such as in northern Namibia, become involved in supporting guerrilla

fighters, supplying food, shelter and hiding places” (p. 49). So Meekulu becomes a reliable character by giving food to *eendume do momufitu* who are deemed to bring freedom to the people of Elombe. *Eendume do momufitu* come to Meekulu’s homestead on several occasions to eat and it is known to them that if they appear from their hideouts, they are hungry and of course the supportive villagers have to cook for them. In some instances, there is no food in the house and Meekulu has to tell them to go somewhere else. Meekulu’s credibility is also displayed through her sensitivity towards the appearance of *eembulu do momufitu*. It is a subject that cannot be discussed with anyone; therefore, she warns Ketja, “She told me not to say any word about the visits to anyone even a best friend” (Hiyalwa, 2000, p. 54). She is shielding the *eendume do momufitu* from being found by *omakakunya* and from some community members who are against them. At the same time, she is protecting herself from being harmed by *omakakunya* as this war situation is also a complicated state of affairs. If one partakes in such activities, his/her life is at stake, for example, “As I gave a glance to Meekulu, I saw her busy trying to erase the military boot prints on the ground, left by two previous visitors. She was using the broom to sweep away the foot prints” (Hiyalwa, 2000, p. 68). They have to save themselves from the wrath of *omakakunya* or else they will be killed and this becomes the new normal in this society that wants to liberate itself from the colonial system.

The complementarity of men and women

It seems indisputable that some African males have not been enemies to their female counterparts. “Historically, African males and females found it necessary to cooperate in order to liberate the entire African community from enslavement, poverty and marginalization” (Izgarjan & Markov, 2012, p. 58). Cooperative effort has been pervasive in African cultures. A close reading of *Meekulu’s Children* shows that some men have positive relationships with women in Elombe. They often complement each other in providing the necessary assistance when there is need. On many occasions, a man, excluding the *omakakunya*, is portrayed to be the other hand of the woman. This complementarity helps women to feel better about themselves and to achieve their desired goals. This co-action of the people of Elombe is likened to the African womanist point of view that celebrates the compatibility of males and females to ensure the survival of the entire community (Izgarjan & Markov, 2012). This is not therefore to necessarily say women do not strive on their own as they actually do. Throughout the novel, Ketja is the leading character in decision-making, endurance and achievement, but she does all these in relation to men and the significant others. According to Kwatsha (2015):

Feminist theory has given women authors the opportunity to write and define themselves from a female point of view. It is believed that by taking this bold step, readers will be able to read about female characters that can stand up for themselves without the support of a man. (p. 9).

However, Hiyalwa’s stance differs from Kwatsha’s viewpoint of using female characters that can stand up for themselves without the support of men. Hiyalwa portrays a mutual relationship between males and females and it is this relationship that enabled the victories of the depicted characters. In reality, it is practically difficult for women to strive on their own without the support of men and visa versa. Men and women need each other for them to reach their full potential and to have harmonious societies as underlined by Hiyalwa. Kwatsha’s statement diverges from the theory of nego-feminism that “African women are more inclined to reach out and work with men in achieving set goals (Nnaemeka, 2004, p. 380). Thus, even if women are advised to excel in their endeavours, they need to work hand in hand with men. The protagonist, Ketja has excelled as a character in collaboration with male characters as indicated by the following: “I thought of going to Tate Mbela’s homestead instead. I wanted to tell him what happened and probably get his advice and support” (Hiyalwa, 2000, p. 79). This is to say the writer portrays the female

character's freedom to make her own decisions and choices, but her undertakings worked accordingly in collaboration with males. Ketja is enthused with an African feminism that is built on the feelings of ownership that opens the door of participation and democracy. In another instance, Ketja has evidently shown that assistance is required to take Meekulu to the hospital; "Meekulu's life was at stake and something had to be done immediately" (Hiyalwa, 2000, p. 86). Meekulu has to be carried on a stretcher which Ketja cannot carry alone as it is heavy and the hospital is far. Assessing the evidence given by Ketja that she needs help, we are not surprised that she gets the assistance of Tate Mbela and Kashoko.

From the above evidence, Hiyalwa's (2000) writing is inclusive of everyone in society (good and bad). This is emphasised by Asante (2002) who highlights that African writers aim to enhance inclusivity as their ideology is integrative rather than singularly adversarial; thus their views are community centred rather than self-oriented. The novelist integrates the voices of women and men and at the same time acknowledging their cooperation that leads to harmonious living. The people of Elombe may persuade the readers that they live in the African sense of 'Ubuntu' because they live as a community rather than individuals. *Ubuntu* means, "I am what I am because of who we all are" (Maluleke, 2012, p. 4), and the overall concept of *Ubuntu* values people as a community rather than as individuals.

Women and education in pre-independent Namibia

Following the unrestful life during the times of the liberation struggle in Elombe, challenges continue to manifest in the villagers' quest to get an education. Even though Ketja is faced with challenges of colonial oppressions, she is determined to stand against all odds. The novel expresses the willingness of Ketja to free herself from poverty and societal orders through formal education. Hiyalwa employed different incidents to demonstrate this willingness. In this context, the woman is dynamic; she rules and she is ruled. Perhaps, Hiyalwa (2000) has seen the need of urgency to replace the ideas of patriarchal constraints that limit women from realising their dreams.

Hiyalwa (2000) portrays the protagonist, Ketja, as a remarkable, strong, competent and courageous woman. Nevertheless, one may also raise some doubt if how the writer depicts Ketja's determination at the young age is the true reflection of this society. Despite this shortcoming, the writer, Hiyalwa, has good intentions of demonstrating how the women have to transcend the normality of economic dependence. Furthermore, Ketja, a determined young girl, is yearning to confront the institutional structures of patriarchy by gaining freedom through education. The appeal to pathos comes in when the limitation to Ketja's education is mentioned; "But there was no money to pay for my school fees in the first place" (Hiyalwa, 2000, p. 25). This evokes the feelings of pity that a woman may want to break the chains of subjugation but the means are scarce and she sometimes ends up being tied to the societal patriarchal structure. Ketja becomes sad about having to remain poor for the rest of her life, but she resolves to do something about this situation. True to Ketja's ethos, she starts thinking of doing odd jobs to earn money to pay for her school fees at a very young age. Even though the cases of their limitations are different, Ketja and Tambudzai in Dangarembga's *Nervous Condition* share the same determination. Moyana (1994) observes that Tambudzai refuses to be cornered into gender apartheid from an early age; as a child of eight, she works on her own plot determinedly and successfully in spite of the problems of earning enough money to finance her whole primary education.

We also learn that Ketja gains trust from her teachers at school, therefore creating an ethos of trustworthiness. This persuades the readers because seeing a woman leading others is something that may have been considered out of bounds then, but she defies traditional

structures. Keith and Lundberg (2006, p. 36) concur that ethos is established when the rhetor mentions what she/he has done; achievements and expertise say something good about character. It is in fact what is said about Ketja that makes her trustworthy. Ketja's commitment leads to her nomination to become the leader of the choir group that Tate Mwati, one of the well-educated teachers of Elombe, has created. In the same vein, Mr Job also praises a woman's character that is determined to surpass the normal behaviours. Ketja is doing well at school, thus Mr Job starts to trust her, and "even started to leave his class in my care whenever he went to the school office or to see another teacher." (Hiyalwa, 2000, p. 42). The trust emanates from the woman's defiance over dependence. Ketja is excelling in her activities to achieve freedom, which culminates in her ability to be able to work and earn a salary in future. By making Ketja the leader and best learner in her class, the writer seems to advance the notion of women recognition and participation in education guided by the African womanist philosophy that acknowledges the role of men in the emancipatory process.

One of the unique features of *Meekulu's Children* as a novel is how the novelist defines and explains the operations of patriarchy among Elombe people. Hiyaalwa (2000) has not made a woman the only receiver, but the woman is depicted as both the sufferer under patriarchal settings and at the same time the one who defies it. Ketja again demonstrates that she is not standing the belief that a woman cannot fight a man because of the societal order that presupposes the power of a man to rule a woman. She cannot take Paulusa's disturbance and accusation of stealing other children's territories in class, "He struggled to get loose but I was too strong for him. I punched him with heavy fists" (Hiyalwa, 2000, p. 39). Through Ketja, the author is advocating for equality as Ketja can also take a stand in fighting to protect her territory and win the fight. Taking this position, the writer credits the idea that women can take the authority that was believed to be men's, but only if they act without wavering.

Elombe people and invitational rhetoric

Invitational rhetoric gives interlocutors an opportunity to listen to ideas without being forced to accept them. The dialogue offers them the liberty to choose what is right for them. In many accounts in the novel, people of Elombe are engaged in conversations that embody feminist principles of equality, self-determination and immanent value. The villagers are supportive of each other especially in times of trial. The death of Dila and his wife introduces the beginning of war and throughout the time of the ordeals caused by war, the villagers have been supportive and cooperative. When the villagers come to sympathise with Meekulu every day, Tate Mbela who has seen the incident of the brutal killing of Dila and his wife narrates the story. Tate Mbela is inviting the listeners to visualise what happened by giving them exact details of the incident. First, he creates awareness so that they can respond in whatever manner they may like to. The listeners choose to partake in the narration with comments of support, encouragement and warning to show that they value Tate Mbela's narration. The contributors respond in anger in that view, Foss and Foss (2003, p. 77) suggest emotions to be an elaboration of invitational rhetoric because "they can be a powerful way to develop ideas". The response in anger shows that the listeners share the same perspective with Tate Mbela who is equally disappointed by the death of Dila and his wife, as shown in the narration from the novel. The society demonstrates the feminist principle of self-determination because every listener is free to engage with their emotions and reactions to the sense of immanent value as everyone is considered as an important part of the conversation as they are not limited from expressing their emotions.

Moreover, the Elombe people again show cooperation when Meekulu is burnt by the *omakakunya*. People gather in Meekulu's house to offer support and the herbalist is in attendance to provide traditional medicine to Meekulu; "In the hut where Meekulu lay, the herbalist was busy. She cut Meekulu with her blades several times on her body, and smeared her whole body with

the liquid from her pot of herbs” (Hiyalwa, 2000, p. 83). Ketja has decided to take Meekulu to the hospital after realising that she is not getting any better; “I decided that Meekulu should be taken to the hospital” (Hiyalwa, 2000, p. 84). These scenes are the manifestations that this society believes in two syncretic ideologies; the prowess of traditional medicine and western medicine. They support each other despite their differences to reach a common goal, which is Meekulu’s healing. They respected all these ideologies even if they are based on different foundations, as supported by Lozano (2013). On their way to the hospital, Kashoko, Tate Mbela and Ketja support each other to carry Meekulu on the stretcher. They appreciate each other’s immanent value and respect the fact that everyone’s contribution is equally valued irrespective of gender.

One of the elements used to promote equality, immanent value and self-determination in the novel is the use of rhetorical questions. Mihalcea (2014) argues that when using rhetorical questions, the rhetor does not expect immediate answers, however, they are used to challenge the audience members to reflect upon the ideas being discussed. Hiyalwa (2000) uses the technique of rhetorical questions to challenge the readers to think critically about the issue of the brutal killing of Dila and his wife. Through Tatekulu Topi, who is a listener in a group of mourners, rhetorical questions are presented to show emotions and to challenge the audience to think critically about the topic; “What is going on in this, our world?” (Hiyalwa, 2000, p. 19). Tatekulu Topi has just listened to the account of what has happened but he stands up to ask the same question and this instance, he does not necessarily need the answer but he is stressing the point under discussion. This question goes to everyone present in his community as he says, “People of Elombe, do you hear my questions?” (Hiyalwa, 2000, p. 19), and this is done to make sure that the hearers can know that his questions are directed to everyone. He values everyone in the community because he gives them a fair chance to think about the issue, thus promoting self-determination, immanent value and equality in return.

The people of Elombe are there for each other in good and bad times. When the neighbours hear Meekulu ululating because of Ketja’s return, they send word to each other that something good is happening. This humanistic way of living reflects the *Ubuntu* that Maluleke (2012) refers to as an African harmonious way of living where joys and sufferings are shared by all the members of the community. Older women and men, young women and men, boys and girls are all in attendance to welcome Ketja; some ululating and lifting *eedibo* sticks into the air as a sign of happiness among them all. Young boys and girls keep on smiling also to show that they appreciate the moment. The society enacts different ways of showing excitement, but they depict the appreciation of each other despite these differences. They manifest the feminist principle of equality because each chooses how he/she wants to show his/her happiness. The power to choose lies with everybody as Foss and Foss (2003, p. 11) state that “power is not a quality to exercise over others but something that can be employed by all members of the interaction so that it energises, facilitates and enables all individuals involved to contribute and learn from the interaction”. This supports Bone et al.’s (2008) critical view that communicators in invitational rhetoric need not share equal economic, political and social standpoints for it to exist. This however, is rare in society and if strictly applied in conversations, invitational rhetoric, this would make life an impractical and rigid form of existence. The present researchers comment that the novelist might be credited for reflecting the African cultural way of living in which everybody’s contribution is celebrated.

Conclusion

In the analysis of *Meekulu’s Children*, it was established that the challenges that arose in Elombe due to the liberation struggle have assisted Ketja to be empowered at a very young age. Ketja’s endurance and her surpassing of the normal set of societal orders is persuasion through the characterisation that women can search for freedom despite the challenges in their societies.

Men and women participated in the liberation struggle and the novel highlights the importance of each gender's contribution to the liberation struggle which promotes the sense of equality. The evidence of how both men and women suffered is provided by describing the scenes of Dila and his wife's brutal killing, Kamati and Estela crossing the border and the burning of Meekulu. Furthermore, the evidence of the willingness of Ketja to attain education shows an indication that women are keen to be independent and to be able to contribute to their societies. Moreover, there are good and bad men in the societies the paper showed how we must not treat them as monolithic. The men of Elombe have been shown to be very supportive in assisting women to reach their desired potential by embracing African womanism and nego-feminism philosophies. Ketja, the main character, is astonished by the cooperative attitudes of the people of Elombe because they have been their shoulder to cry on during the time of loneliness, disappointments and joys. The interaction of the people of Elombe demonstrates the feminist principles of equality, immanent value and self-determination as everyone has the liberty to choose to participate in different discourses. In their conversations, they acknowledge the value of the rhetor by offering their perspectives through rhetorical questioning led by emotions of anger.

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