

## A Critical Evaluation of the Theme of Womanhood and Infertility in New African Novel: A Study of Asare Konadu's *A Woman in Her Prime* and Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the Clouds*

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<p><b>Corresponding Author</b> Isaac O. ATERE, Ph.D</p> <p>Department of English, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma</p> <p><b>Article History</b></p> <p>Received: 27/12/2024</p> <p>Accepted: 13/01/2025</p> <p>Published: 16/01/2025</p>	<p><b>Abstract:</b> This paper examines the predicament of infertility and how women often bear the blame for it in patriarchal African societies. The study explores the themes of womanhood and infertility in modern African novels, focusing on Asare Konadu's <i>A Woman in Her Prime</i> and Ifeoma Okoye's <i>Behind the Clouds</i>. In these novels, Konadu and Okoye address various cultural pressures within marriage that are prevalent among Black women in many African communities. The paper discusses the dilemmas, challenges and unbearable pain faced by women who are frequently blamed for infertility in marriage, without consideration of the fact that medical causes of infertility are non-discriminatory. The study is anchored in womanism as its theoretical framework, an offshoot of feminist theory, which advocates for the removal of legal and social restrictions on women to achieve equality between the sexes in both private and public life. The research concludes that although African women's identities are often tied to motherhood, they are unjustly subjected to harassment and dehumanization due to the sterility of their male counterparts.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> <i>Feminist, Literature, Patriarchal tyranny, Infertility, African woman.</i></p>
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### Introduction

Childlessness is a major concern in our society due to its associated consequences for women and family structures. Consequently, childless women go to great lengths in an attempt to find a solution to the problem. This paper relies on data gleaned from Asare Konadu's *A Woman in Her Prime* and Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the Clouds*, which are analysed to illustrate the theme of womanhood and infertility.

As a phenomenon, childlessness is perceived in African discourse as a significant drawback in marriage. In fact, Africans believe that any marriage without offspring is unsuccessful. Through the perspective of the texts, it is observed that women are always blamed for infertility. As a result, they endure excruciating psychological pain and trauma, often resorting to desperate measures to seek a solution to their socially induced 'problem,' regardless of the potential dangers of consulting unreliable sources. The likelihood of being debased and harmed is considerably high, as these women strictly adhere to the instructions of quacks, fraudulent pastors, and native doctors, often at the expense of their health, dignity, and pride.

Different communities approach the issue of infertility through various mediums. Marcia Inhorn posits (1996) that:

Fertility is deified in two ways – through its capacity to ensure the continuation of a lineage and to satisfy a man's greatest creation in Egyptian society – a child. As

such, the consequences of infertility far outweigh the burden, embarrassment or fear of de-polluting healing rituals that infertile women undergo to subscribe to Egyptian rituals and distance themselves from accusations of infertility. (489)

Many African societies have spiritual and social explanations for infertility. For instance, many attribute infertility to "God's will," contraceptive use, lack of adherence to tradition, and witchcraft. These causes are commonly cited throughout developing countries. According to Guntupalli Meera's qualitative study on the Chenchu tribe of India, "infertility was attributed to supernatural powers, God, black magic, body heat, and nutrition" (253). Similarly, Adre Hollos notes that "witchcraft and spirit possession are referenced as the most commonly perceived causes of infertility in several African countries. The next most common causes include women's sexual promiscuity, blood incompatibility, abortion, and STDs" (161).

The intersection between the value placed on children and the perceived causes of infertility has several implications for experiences of infertility in African societies. Fledder Johann conducted semi-structured interviews in gynaecological and obstetric clinics in Accra, Ghana, to analyse the social and gendered experiences of infertile women. She asserts that:

Upon discovery of a woman's infertile status, a marriage often either suffers from high conflict and instability, is

riddled with extramarital affairs, transforms into a polygynous marriage, or ends in divorce. While 99 per cent of the sample of infertile women were currently married, 26 per cent had been previously divorced or abandoned, 35 per cent had been married before, and within this latter group, 16 per cent had also been married once before that. Additional sexual partners for either member of the couple increase the risk of exposure to STDs or reproductive tract infections, which can further compound the infertility problem in future relationships. (184).

Furthermore, in Africa, it is a fact that children are constructed as socio-economic symbols of value for the family and as symbols of group continuity, strength, pride and honour for the kin group and the community as a whole. "African women link infertility to feelings of vulnerability in a broader social context of increased migration, high poverty levels, or economic dependency, which in turn places a high social value on children" (Feldman 471). This high social value implies that producing more children equates to higher income returns for the family, increased labour for subsistence farming, and elevated social status in the community.

Another point of note is that, throughout Africa, marriages often occur at a young age, primarily for procreation rather than for love. According to Dyer S. J., "the presence of children often acts as a confirmation of conjugal ties for the couple" (75). Dyer further reiterates that:

The inability to have children can often lead to marital instability, whether through divorce, polygamy, or extramarital affairs. Again, in African rural communities where land is owned by men, the only economic return women can gain from the land is through their children, who either inherit it, submit land claims, or carry out subsistence work on the land (70).

Hollos expands on this assessment by highlighting six economic advantages that children bring to their families, identified as: The labour children provide in producing goods, the services they provide when young, the contributions they make to family or community activities, the care they provide for the elderly, and the education they provide for their younger siblings. Children thus participate in generating an immediate form of wealth for the family and contribute towards the accumulation of intergenerational wealth, further increasing their value to the family.

The value of children, however, extends beyond economic security to emotional and religious security. In a sense, children bring a type of emotional security to the home that a husband cannot provide. For religious societies, children are considered gifts from God, introducing a moral imperative, whereas childless couples are deemed unworthy or sinful. The consequences faced by childless women thus convolutedly integrate emotional, religious, and economic imperatives. Consequently, the intimate ties between human reproduction and socialisation within communities create a relationship between achieving womanhood and attaining high social status through childbearing and rearing. Dyer once again notes:

The symbolism of social security, social power, and social permanence represented by children perpetuates complex

experiences of maltreatment, stigma, and their consequences for women who are infertile or childless (16).

The causes and experiences of infertility, according to Greil and McQuillan, should not only be understood from a medical standpoint but also from socio-cultural contexts, as health and illness are socially constructed categories. In most Sub-Saharan African cultures, infertility discourse has tended to adopt a framework of blame, wherein women are held solely responsible. This ideology is what this study seeks to question. According to Dyer et al.: "Many women have reported experiences of stigmatisation that have, in turn, triggered psychological suffering, loneliness, desperation, deep sadness, and bitterness. They have endured abuse within their families or communities, where they were shouted at, cursed, or ostracised" (17).

The two texts under study examine the differing experiences of childless women in two African communities, Nigeria and Ghana. Women in Ghana, according to Asare Konadu's *A Woman in Her Prime*, faced less severe consequences for infertility than their Nigerian counterparts, as demonstrated in Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the Clouds*, owing to the matrilineal structure of Ghanaian society.

According to Inhorn, African women who cannot bear children due to infertility are doomed to a failed identity. He argues that: "This infertile identity creates a complex experience of stigma, particularly in poorer communities, where women face disempowerment or stigmatisation due to their 'barrenness, femaleness, and poverty' (35).

For many women in African societies, barrenness further complicates their position, as the husband's family can claim back the bride price previously paid with the expectation that she would bear children. Hollos et al. state that:

Reclaiming the bride price not only induces feelings of shame for the woman and her family but also places them in a precarious economic position if the money has already been spent. Having failed to bear a child, the woman often encounters social stigma from her family or wider community, where she is denied higher social status or subjected to divorce, banishment, economic isolation, or accusations of witchcraft. (68)

A significant challenge for women in several African countries is what Dyer et al. call a "culture of silence" surrounding infertility. This silence renders infertility a taboo subject, isolating infertile women and placing a triple burden of secrecy, fear, and stigma upon them (Dyer et al. 67). In these communities, infertility discourse often manifests through gossip, jokes and rumours, with infertile women frequently accused of witchcraft or "eating their own children" (67).

### **Womanhood and the Agony of Childlessness in Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the Clouds***

Ije Apia is a young and beautiful Nigerian woman whose path crossed with Dozie, a young outstanding Nigerian man of Igbo descent, who received support from Ije as a student of Architecture while they both studied in a tertiary institutions in London. They soon got married and returned to Nigeria. She worked in an insurance company, while he worked as a government surveyor. Dozie is fairly indecisive but is persuaded by his wife to go freelance and he sets up his own architectural

practice. At the start of the novel, he is just beginning to make a success of it. The couple are very happy except for one thing. They do not seem to be able to have a child. Ije has numerous tests and operations. She has visited herbalists and other doctors. At the start of the novel, she is going to a conventional Western doctor who specialises in infertility. She spends a lot of money and follows the course of action he recommends but it does not work out. Meanwhile, we learn of various alternatives for the couple. We learn of a man who has taken a second wife, nominally because his position in the tribe does not allow him to have a British wife, though this seems not to be the case. The British wife leaves and returns to Britain. Ije is concerned that Dozie will be unfaithful to her and may even take a second wife. But she also meets friends who have several children (and learns the problems that that entails.) Other courses of action are suggested to her, including herbalism and faith healing.

Her mother-in-law, with whom she does not get on, not least because the mother-in-law does not consider Ije good enough for her son, wants her to go a herbalist and Dozie's uncles encourage him to take a second wife. Meanwhile, Dozie's practice is doing well and he has to travel frequently. Ije is persuaded to go to a faith healer by a friend who did get pregnant after visiting him and she goes to Apostle Joseph who suggests various remedies but she does not think it will work. Apostle Joseph will later suggest that the fault may not be her own but her husband's – the first time this has been suggested – and suggests that he father a child with her. She declines, even though she learns that that is how her friend got pregnant. But everything else seems to be going well. Dozie is getting more and more business and they build a magnificent new house. And then, one day, Ije comes home to find a woman sitting in the house with her suitcases, announcing that she is carrying Dozie's child and that she is planning on staying.

The rest of the novel is about how both Ije and Dozie deal with the situation which, naturally, is not in the same way. Of course, we have already had something of a clue as to what the problem is and how it can be resolved but Okoye lets the story run its course. It is not great literature but is still a fascinating account of a subject that is not often found in literature and clearly shows the woman's perspective while not painting the man as an irredeemable blackguard.

Ije Apia is childless after about six years of marriage. Made to believe through patriarchal constructs that she is culpable, she makes a round of herbalist and medical treatments to no avail:

She remembered vividly all the doctors who had treated her – the tests, the minor operations, and the major one that almost killed her. She remembered also the herbalists she had approached for help. The first herbalist she had consulted had said she was an ogbanje from the river and her Ogbanje mates were responsible for her problem. (1-2)

Ije approaches the end of every month with expectation and becomes miserable as she watches her dreams dissolve into nothingness as the months come and go (8).

She becomes “a pessimist, not by design, but because each ray of hope had been dashed by the events that followed it” (13). Judging her childlessness through the lens of patriarchy, she tells her husband with tears in her voice:

“How I have failed you. Nonsense! Dozie said. “who said you have failed me? “I know I have.” “you have not failed me Ije” Dozie said tenderly. “I have not lost hope of your ever bearing my children. We are not the only ones who are or who have been in this position. If others have succeeded in the end, why can't we?” (15)

Accordingly, Ije's whole being is consumed by the desire to have a child: “Her only obsession was to have a child and nothing else meant much to her...” (21). She confesses to Ugo Ushie, her friend: “I can't help worrying...it is not easy for me to take my mind off my misfortune” (p.30). In spite of “her fruitless visits to so many doctors” (2), Ije musters courage to consult Dr. Melie upon hearing that he performs miracles on childless women. With tears in her voice, she says: “I want a baby, doctor” (7).

She runs some tests with Dr. Melie hoping that the results will show the cause of her childlessness so she can be treated. But to her dismay,

The reports indicated that her fallopian tubes and uterus were normal. Her heart sank. She had hoped the X-rays would show that something was wrong with her so that when this was corrected she would be able to have her babies. When she collected the reports of the urine and blood test she tried to read them but could not make head nor tail of them. She hoped that these reports would be the ones to show the doctor what was wrong with her. (32)

Her heart sank even though the test result is good because she accepts the definition of motherhood imposed on her as a stereotype.

However, Dr. Melie places her on some medication which she takes with great expectation. Again, her hope was dashed: “This month of all months she had thought that her wish for a child of her own would be granted her...Crestfallen, she confined herself to her bedroom...” (46-47). The absence of children, indeed, brings emptiness and suffering. Compounding Ije's predicament is Mama, her mother-in-law. She abuses and curses her because she sees her as one who has deprived her of grandchildren. She tells Ije to her face that her “childlessness was a punishment for her unchaste life as a spinster” (42). She swears:

Whoever denies me the opportunity to have a grand-child will meet with misfortune all her life. Mama's temper was rising. Dozie tries to quieten her but his attempts were like pouring kerosene into an already blazing fire. She call her daughter in-law all kinds of derogatory names... Ije did not say a word. It grieved her to see that Dozie was so helpless that he could not restrain his mother from casting such aspersions upon her integrity. Nothing was worse in her position than the consciousness of her innocence. It undermine her morale. (42)

Mama's attitude confirms Ezeigbo's argument that “the inability to produce children on the part of a woman provokes physical assault, verbal assault, repression and contempt in her husband and even his relations” (151). In another development, Mama tells Ije that she would not visit them again until Dozie

“takes his time and behaves like a man” (59). What Mama means here is until Dozie affirms his machismo by taking another wife who would give her grandchildren. Ije is so frustrated that she begins to question God: “What have I done to make God deny me even one child?” (60). Ije’s devastation confirms Nwapa’s assertion that “...women are what they are because they can give life, they can procreate. So in African societies, when this unique function is denied a woman, she is devastated

Beatrice, another victim of childlessness but now pregnant visits Ije and shares with her how a “faith healer succeeded where the doctors had failed” (49) and suggests to Ije to give him a try.

It’s a long story,” Beatrice replied. Ije introduced Beatrice to Dozie as her clinic friend and offered her some of the tapioca... Ije left to get the stout. She was itching to ask Beatrice who had performed the miracle on her. Presently she was back with a small bottle of stout. She served Beatrice and asked Dozie if he wanted a beer... she was a happy woman nature and her present condition had made her even happier. (49)

Ije does not think much of faith-healers,

but her desire for a child was so great that it had always made nonsense of both her religious faith and her reason. Later that same day she told Dozie about Beatrice’s suggestion that she should give the faith-healer, who had treated her successfully, a trial. Dozie was sceptical. “what will this afit-healer do for you?” he asked. Beatrice says “he will pray for me and will tell me what to do in order to propitiate God. (50).

She eventually meets the faith-healer, Apostle Joseph, who among other things tells her to take a fast for one week. She follows Joseph’s instructions strictly. In their next meeting, the so-called Apostle reveals his identity. He says to Ije:

Some men for some reason, are unable to father children. Wise women who are married to such men tactfully find other men to give them what they desire. This is not adultery in the eyes of men. It is not adultery in the eyes of God. Think about this Mrs. Apia. I have gladly done it for some women. I can do it for you too. (55)

Ije retorts: “To hell with you and your church!” (56). Ije’s misery intensifies with the intrusion of Virginia into Dozie’s life. She introduces herself rudely to Ije in their first meeting:

I’m Mrs. Apia too. I’m carrying Mr. Apia’s baby and I’ve come to take my rightful place in this house. Ije was stunned. The room seemed to be spinning round, or was it her head? She wanted to scream, to call the visitor an impostor, a liar. But she braced herself and said as calmly as she could, “there must be a mistake. Maybe you mean another Mr. Apia... You are his childless wife, aren’t you? I can’t live outside with his baby while you, who have given him no child all these years, stay in and enjoy everything. (75)

Mama excited at Virginia’s pregnancy congratulates her son on his machismo in Ije’s presence saying “now you have acted like a man, my son. At last you have done what has been expected of you...” (93). She welcomes Virginia with joy saying “welcome, my new wife...God bless you my new wife. So it is true You’re

pregnant already” (92). Fondling Virginia’s belly, she says: “I’m sure it is going to be a carbon copy of my son, Dozie. So these my eyes will see a grandchild, eh?” (92). Upon Virginia’s complaint that Ije is not making her feel at home, Mama rejoins: “Don’t mind her...You have more claim to this house than she does. Don’t let her upset you” (95).

In the course of time, Dozie’s heart is gradually won over by Virginia.

For some time now, Dozie had virtually transferred his belongings to Virginia’s room. For all her faults, Virginia knew how to win people, and gradually she had won Dozie over. Sometimes it seems as if she had got him in her pocket. Ije found it disheartening to note that although Virginia often inveighed against Dozie and treated him with disrespect, a thing she never did herself. He had become closer to Virginia and further away from Ije (99).

Dozie and Virginia heighten Ije’s agony by talking about the baby in her presence. She laments: “Neither he or Virginia had experienced the agony of a childless woman listening to other people discuss what she was pining for but could not get, otherwise they might have spared her the heart break. Virginia in a bid to discredit Ije, accused her of sprinkling some poison into their food and to her utter dismay, Dozie believed the story. For he asks: “Why did you do such a thing, Ije” (106). Ije disappointed retorts: “Does that mean you’re condemning me without hearing from me? Has it come to the stage where you doubt my integrity? Do you now see me as a diabolical woman...You are no longer the man I married” (106). To prove her innocence “she went to the dining room, turned the soup vigorously with a spoon, put some soup in her plate, and scooped into her mouth” (106).

Consequent upon Dozie’s betrayal, Ije gets a job and moves out of the house and out of his life with the resolve: “One thing I am sure of, I am not going to marry again. A barren woman is useless as a wife, at least in our country” (114).

The desperation of childless women confirms Nwapa’s remark that “the desire to be pregnant, to procreate is an overpowering one in the life of the woman. She is ready to do anything to have a child. The readiness of these women to do anything to achieve motherhood places an urgent call on the need to dispel the myth surrounding motherhood

### **Womanhood and Infertility as Praxis in Asare Konads’ *A Woman in Her Prime***

Konadus demonstrates, through Adoa Pokuwaa, the inner conflict and social stigma associated with barrenness in African socio-cultural context and how women are victimized as a consequence. In many African societies, a lady’s barrenness or childlessness is often alleged to be the result of adolescent illegal herbal abortion attempts. According to some opinions captured in the text,

“Most of the people, it’s not like God created them to be barren,” said another mother, “But at times, when they are young they do abortions and other things. That is why when they are old they can’t give birth to children.” (4)

Thus, since abortions are considered wicked and barrenness is caused by abortions, barren women are generally viewed by the

public as being wicked and therefore are easily blamed as being the witches who are jealous of pregnant family members. The belief in supernatural intervention is a major point of relief and hope for the barren in Africa. For instance, Pokuwaa and members of her community believe that when she makes sacrifices to the god – Tano she might have her prayers answered.

Very soon the house of Tano will begin to be filled with people, and she had to hurry to get there in time for her turn at the consultation and sacrifice. She could feel the drums that would sound for the gathering of sacrifice in all the neighbourhood (6)

When it was all over, they bowed and left the shrine. Outside, other people were waiting their turns at consultation and sacrifice. (16)

Even in the Yoruba's traditional belief system, barrenness is regarded to as a non-natural state of affairs. A traditional healer said: "All women and men who have come to this world are able to conceive. Even if the doctors have given up, God can still make you conceive. And a diviner also said: "There are no women who God created who cannot have children". They also believe that abortions, witchcraft and evil spirits, curses by ancestors or deities, juju etc., are the major causes of barrenness and that its consequences is also of high scale (unhappiness and lack of insurance for the future, abuse by in-laws, husband marrying a second wife, divorce, accusations of being a witch e.t.c). Emmanuel Donkor in "Socio-cultural perception of infertility in Ghana" asserts that:

Childless women usually encounter unfavourable treatment from their society. A woman might be expelled from her husband's house either by the husband himself or by his family. In fact, the husband could be encouraged to take other wives if a wife is suspected of barrenness.

There is this suggestion that infertility is a valid reason for the husband to seek another wife receives full support from some scholars. They agree that the blame for childlessness rests with the wife. Apparently, it is visible that a man is not suspected at all.

Yes, she thought. 'without a child I am a person who needs your company. When you're away, I'm alone. But if the high god is there, who comforts people, someday I shall have my own child to comfort and keep me company. A matter of time (22)

Pokuwaa's friends knew how depressed she was with her misfortune and they came in to comfort her, sitting round and doing jobs in the house. (30)

In Pokuwaa's community, childlessness or barrenness is considered a grave misfortune because a barren woman is doomed to loneliness in her old age. She will have no child to care for her, no grandchild(ren) to enliven the compound, as well as no child of her blood to mourn her death.

This is the fate Pokuwaa does not want to suffer. Being barren in Brenhoma is: "the worst that could happen to a woman" (34). She is a hard-working woman who has acquired wealth through her farms, but struggles to have a child of her own. As tradition demands, Pokuwaa resorts to consulting herbalists for guidance. She believes in the powers of the great Tano who is the

giver of children. In her lamentation, she calls on the god: "assist me in my plight" "you are powerful and nobody can thwart your will" (12).

She struggles to meet the demands made on her at Tanofie; the domain of Tano when she is told that she will have a child after three months of the sacrifices. After six months, Pokuwaa did not see any positive result and decides to try the second time as she did not observe the conditions given to her not to look back. She looked back when she was not supposed to do in the first time. However, there is loss of confidence and disenchantment when she discovers that in spite of this religious devotion through sacrifices to the gods, her ambition is far from being realized. The belief in the herbalists, gods, e.t.c is seen to be a common cultural concept. Coupled with the wave of anxiety that Pokuwaa is entangled in, is the bickerings here and there from people. In Africa, when a woman is barren, she automatically becomes a social pariah, and if she is not being maltreated or driven away by her husband, she is alleged to be an enchantress:

When he was not with her he was at his father's house. They went to work on the farm together. People said that she was using charms on him, but Kofi knew better. In her company he always radiated happiness, and she knew this meant he was happy with her. (33)

Pokuwaa had earlier divorced two husbands Kofi Daafu and Kwaku Fosu on the advice or counsel of her mother. Her mother complains of the inability of these men to impregnate Pokuwaa. She got married to her third husband; Kwado Fordwuo cares for her and helps her in obeying the directive of the priest to carry out the sacrifices. All these were fruitless thus frustration set in. In her frustration, Pokuwaa confides in her friend Koramoa of her intention to discontinue her sacrifices that would get the gods to bless her with a child. Koramoa is rational in her approach and reveals this in her pleas with Pokuwaa not to give up hope. Pokuwaa also tells her husband and her mother about her decisions to quit the sacrifices and purifications as directed by the priest. Her husband and her mother were not happy about her decision but could not help the matter. Shortly after her decision, she notices some signs of pregnancy. Her loved ones are happy to hear that she is pregnant. They all prepare for the arrival of the child.

Asare wisely uses the character of Pokuwaa to reveal how female struggles in the society and how their struggles is not appreciated in most cases. Pokuwaa really struggles to meet the need of the society as far as child bearing is concerned. She offers countless sacrifices to the great Tano and consults priests for futile rituals to the extent that she has to wake up early in the morning before the day shows forth its light for her to bath with. Animal (represented well as a black hen) even contributes to the predicament as it escapes from the cage where Pokuwaa puts it prior to its usage for sacrifices. Pokuwaa moves from one village to another in rigorous search of just a hen. This shows how society has made women so desperate to meet societal standard. She eats numerous concoctions which almost take her life. All her effort is futile. Upon all countless effort of female in the society, it is only few that recognize their struggles. This is well represented in the character of Kwado Fordwuo, the third husband who stands by her all through her heats of predicaments.

Yes, she thought. 'without a child I am a person who needs your company. When you're away, I'm alone. But

if the high god is there, who comforts people, someday I shall have my own child to comfort and keep me company. A matter of time (22)

Females in the society face psychological war from both within (in the mind) and without (in the society). It is the psychological war within that makes woman to behave abruptly or sometimes withdrawn from the society. Pokuwaa is forced to divorce two husbands, Kofi Dafo and Kwasu Fosu respectively because their marriage failed to produce children. She tries to retreat from this psychological war within by giving up on all sacrifices and efforts or child bearing as she believes it is being predestined for her to be barren and face hurdle in her prime. She is withdrawn from the society and she mostly stays indoor with no children to keep her company, except her friend Koramoa and her mother who she confines in. Although, she loves to see and take care of little children but the society withdraws their children from her which is like a salt to her open wound.

Asare reveals how hard-working females are, their importance in the society in which she (the society) is blind at. Pokuwaa has a farm land of her own and the description of her renovated, depict how females are important positive contributor to the society.

## Conclusion

In the words of Akachi Ezeigbo, “in African societies, barrenness is a sign of failure, and no matter how capable or successful a woman is in other spheres, she is never recognized or valued if she is childless” (151). Thus, despite a woman’s high economic profile in her husband’s family and society, she is still regarded as nothing if she fails the test of motherhood. This is to say, a childless woman’s feeling of being a ‘failure’ is derived from the constructs of society and the level of comprehension on the meaning and role of women in society. It is obvious from the foregoing that that the African woman’s humanness is subsumed in motherhood. The two texts – Okoye’s *Behind the Clouds* and Konadus’ *A Woman in Her Prime*, have successfully exposed the ills and vices of African society. A society where females are at the detriment of traditional demands and where evils are done under the wide canopy of custom. Females suffer in silence and learn to blend to the rhythmic tune of the society plays for them. Okoye in *Behind the Clouds* created living people; not just characters, and showed her appreciation for matrimonial affiliations as observed in Africa, but condemned the subjugation and dehumanization of women owing to the fact that they are not able to have a child. Okoye captures the various pain that women go through when they are not able to have children for their husbands and how their husbands and their families use it as a yardstick to indulge in polygamy. Apart from the many woes that come with this experience, *Behind the Clouds* also celebrates the beauty, industry, talent and resilience of the African women. The challenges, agonies and disappointments of barrenness are matched with possible ways of resistance and triumph, especially for those women who dare to be courageous..

Konadu’s *A Woman in Her Prime* has succeeded in exposing some of the cultural practices in Brenhoma community as a microcosm to African cultural heritage. Brenhoma society emphasizes having children as it ensures the continuity of a family lineage; thus the protagonist, Pokuwaa is worried because without a child of her own, her old age will be a very lonely one. Some events unite the people of Brenhoma. One of such events is burial, festivals, worship of gods among other. Odiwira festival is rich cultural heritage of the community during which they sing songs and dance, pray, worship gods and also unite the people. Both texts are very fantastic as it exposes real life matters and concept in the African society and traditions. Virtually all that is depicted in both novels are existing occurrences of this present time and age.

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