

Research Article

Some Impediments to African Women's Emancipation and Potential Outcomes as seen in Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions

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ABSTRACT

Whatever you are is never enough. You must find a way to accept something, however small, from the other to make you whole and to save you from the mortal sin of righteousness and extremism. Chinua Achebe. This article analyzes African women's overexploitation by men. The key concepts such as patriarchy, patriarchy, poverty, gender construction and cultural alienation emancipation show an impediment of African women in terms of education since Tambu one of African women is prevented from education by her parents.

Keywords: Impediment according to Oxford Student's Dictionary is something that makes it difficult for a person or thing to move or progress; Emancipation means to give somebody the same legal, social and political rights as other people; Outcomes is defined in the Oxford Student's Dictionary as the result or effect of an action or an event.

INTRODUCTION

Women's emancipation has been an outspoken issue, which started in England in 1949, about women's rights. Since then, it has spread all over the world in different forms: feminism, ecofeminism, womanism, gender etc. More and more today, feminists acknowledge that despite much progress realized concerning the liberation of women from men's chauvinist and patriarchal considerations, there is still a long way to conquer women's total liberation. (<https://www.jstor.org>. Accessed on 7/Jan/2020). This quest of equality by female characters is apparent in Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions, "a novel about education and female oppression". Our study, entitled "Some Impediments to African Women's Emancipation and Potential Outcomes in Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions", explores how Tsitsi Dangarembga addresses the impact of African traditions on women's emancipation. The interest of the topic remains in the fact that it concerns both women and men contrary to some people's belief that feminism or gender studies only focus on women issues. On the one hand, it will analyze how patriarchy, which is the law of men, governs all the spheres of human life, and on the other hand, it will show how women are trying to challenge patriarchy by trying to find out a space in society where life is livable for both men and women. Concretely speaking, this paper aims at demonstrating that African traditions which are mainly based on patriarchal constructions constitute the serious impediment to African women's emancipation, education and welfare. Thanks to patriarchy, men have the privilege not only of being educated, but also have the power of doing essential things in society, such as working in offices, occupying important positions in the government, etc. Women, on the contrary, are prevented from not being educated and they are devoted to household tasks as well as farm works. They are then exposed to poverty, illiteracy, and colonialism that really deepen inequalities between them and their counterpart men. Through New Criticism as addressed by Edward Arnold (1989), we will examine some textual traces from the novel under study in order to get an insight into how Dangarembga deals with gender issues in today's Africa. Definitely, we will use feminist and gender approaches since patriarchy, poverty and traditions impede African women from being educated so as to occupy good positions in life.

Some impediments to African women's emancipation and potential outcomes

This chapter will examine factors that impede African women's emancipation. Some of them are patriarchal traditions, gender constructions, and poverty. It will also demonstrate how such factors as lack of education, colonization, and cultural alienation have contributed to the dehumanization of African women. Besides, this chapter will discuss equality of chance, and potential outcomes by encouraging African women so that they can be totally free in terms of education and occupying the essential posts in the government of each country.

Cultural Factors

In this section, we should look at elements which prevent Tambu to feel as free as her brother Nhamo. That is to say, we will discuss, with regard to the text, how a set of patriarchal traditions, gender construction, poverty, hinder her emancipation.

Patriarchal Traditions

Patriarchy describes a political system in which women have inferior social and political status, including basic human rights. (<http://www.rhmagazine.com/!abla-pokou-ou-le-cri-mre-baouli/ctxa>. Accessed on 11.August 2014).

Characters, both male and female, in Nervous Conditions are raised in a patriarchal society which is not likely to be changed. Nhamo, Tambu's brother, tortures her to such an extent that he overtly attacks her regarding school. He tells her: "and you had better stop jealous. Why are you jealous anyway? Did you ever hear of a girl being taken a way to school?" (p49). This attitude makes Tambu feel unhappy and angry with her brother who thinks that she does not deserve education. Tambu's anger and jealousy are justified by the fact that she feels discriminated against by men. While she is also able to perform all that men do, instead of doing all that a human being is doing, but in the name of patriarchy that grants more privilege to men than to women, her field of action is restricted to household tasks.

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Tambu does not enjoy the way Nhamo behaves, nor all her family's her paternal uncle's behavior especially Babamukuru, who should normally be moved by western Western attitudes, as he himself happened to study and stay longer in England, that offer same opportunities to men and women. On the contrary, he falls into the trap of patriarchy and decides to send only Nhamo to school. She Tambu has a grudge towards him as it reads in the following passage:

You couldn't ignore the fact she had no respect for Babamukuru when she ought to have had lost of it. But what I didn't like was the way all conflicts came back to this question of femaleness. Femaleness as opposed and inferior to maleness. The patriarchy put its heads together and conferred in low voices because now they knew we were listening (p116). Disrespect towards her uncle is a normal reaction vis-à-vis injustice and inequity. But, according to the African culture, Tambu has no right to show such attitude. Her disrespectful reaction towards her uncle shows to some extent the beginning of her awareness concerning discrimination. In fact, Tambu dislikes talking about femaleness because patriarchal traditions consider women as inferior to men and favor much more men than women. They impede women's emancipation regarding education because of the Nigerian society's gender constructions.

Gender Constructions

It must be known that gender construction is more focused on the domination of male characters over female ones. For instance Babamukuru does not want to send Tambu to school because she is a woman. Men decide on her behalf because the patriarchal tradition does not allow equality between men and women. Man is highly educated and is supposed to be the chief at work place. Thus, different roles ahead assigned to sexes by patriarchal traditions, obstructed female characters devoted to change. Both Tambu and Nyasha fight against traditional gender roles in Shona society. As a child, Tambu feels resentment towards her brother Nhamo when Nhamo when Babamukuru offers to pay his schooling. Then Tambu says "The needs and sensibilities of the women in my family were not considered a priority, or even legitimate" (p12). Tambu does not have the opportunity of being supported by her family in terms of education. She is neglected. When Tambu moves to mission, however, she feels conflicted between her duty to Babamukuru and her burgeoning independence as it can be read in the following passage: "I'll tell you why, Tambu, she explained. Sometimes I feel I'm trapped by that man, just like she is" (p174). Nyasha, who has been educated in England, does not hold back, or is not impeded even though all of the women in Nervous Conditions try to rebel against the male patriarchal with various levels of success.

Poverty

Cultural tradition as an impediment to women's emancipation. Poverty is one of the factors which impede women from being educated in the novel. After she begins school at the mission, Nhamo feels embarrassed by the poverty of his immediate family. Meanwhile, the family members respect Babamukuru, who does not accept poverty in his family. Tambu and Nhamo are both eager to get out of their family home and settle into the comfortable life at the mission, as we read in the following passage:

My mother said being black was a burden because it made you poor, but Babamukuru was not poor. My mother said being a woman was a burden because you had to bear children and look after them and the husband (p16). It means, poverty impedes Tambu from being educated. She grows maize in order to pay her school fees. In other terms, because Babamukuru, her uncle decides to take care only of

Nhamo's education. This creates an uncomfortable distance between Tambu and Nhamo who pretends that he no longer to speaks Shona, because he associates the language with poverty. For him, speaking English is a sign of education. He forces his sister to carry his bags and lashes all the bags when they don't obey (p53). INhamo speaks English better than Shona as he associates his native language with poverty. His parents are unable to support his studies because they are poor.

Other Factors

Other factors that impede women's emancipation include lack of education, colonization as well as cultural alienation. In other terms, they are Tambu's opponents to the her object of quest, that is, education.

Lack of education: Illiteracy is a serious barrier to human development. An illiterate person is to be compared to someone living in very far island where s/he does not have any project and from where s/he cannot leave because water circles her/him from all sides. Briefly speaking, an illiterate is like a prisoner who cannot benefit many opportunities that the world offers: freedom, job, education, etc. The lack of education is the fact that someone is prevented not only from being educated, but also from doing whatever a human being is expecting to do such working in different companies. The relationship with the main theme is that Tambu does not expect to be educated by her parents, only Nhamo who is sent to school. At the beginning of the novel, That is the reason why Tambu sees education as a pathway to financial success. Babamukuru is a living example for her. She describes her uncle's offer to pay for Nhamo's education as oceanic since it would lift our their branch of the family out of the squalor in which we they were living, as it can be read in the following passage:

My uncle was not staying long that. There was no time to discuss the question of my education. My father, who was always enthusiastic in Babamukuru's presence Babamukuru's presence, congratulated Babamukuru on having moulded my moulded my mind so skillfully that even while people were impressed by the result, but Babamukuru refused to be down (p181). Evidently, Babamukuru is quite aware that paying Nhamo's studies will lift his family to a certain standing of life. But Tambu does not appreciate her uncle's discriminating decision to take care of Nhamo's education only. She considers both Babamukuru and her father as patriarchs who do not leave chance to women to do better in life. In the following excerpt, she really regrets her father's point of view regarding women's education: From the above quotation, I notice that Tambu is not considered as somebody who must be also educated by her parents. Unless her brother Nhamo dies, then she can benefit the education from her parents. Otherwise, she is not expected to be educated as it be found in the following passage:

Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Lean to cook and clean. Grow vegetables he didn't need to be bold anymore because he had made himself plenty of power. There was not time to discuss the question of my education (p15). This shows that for her father, education is not allowed to women, but it is a male's preserve. Women have to take care of their children and their husbands, cultivating to cultivate vegetables, etc. This discriminating position makes Tambu upset and furious to the extent that she becomes jealous of her brother Nhamo and wishes his death. Here when speaking of lack of education which hinders women's emancipation, it means that women are not totally educated like men and the fact of not educating African women hinders women's emancipation, That is why Tambu dislikes Nhamo who is supposed to educated. While women's rights and education's rights

allow Tambu's parents to support studies of all children without any discrimination.

Cultural alienation

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines the term alienation as the fact of making somebody less friendly or feeling that they do not belong in a particular group, society or a country; foreign. According to Conrad Phillip Kottak, Culture is learned, and passed from one generation to the next, through the process of enculturation. Richard D. Lewis also says that culture is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one category of people from another. From Conrad's this definition, I notice that cultural alienation is the fact of changing, learning another culture which is a foreign culture. A person who changes and learns a foreign culture, considers it as the most important, higher culture than others. The persons implicate in cultural alienation are Nyasha and Nhamo. Here cultural alienation is a hindrance to African women's emancipation when Nyasha acquires a new culture which pushes Nhamo's parents to prevent Nyasha from not being educated. Nyasha is so alienated that she has no other model than other than the Western one where she has lived for a period of time. Her landmark is England. When she comes back to Africa, she starts imitating Western's lifestyle: Smoking cigarettes and undergoing a special diet in order to lose her weight:

I expect you to do as I say. Now sit down and eat your food. Sulkily Nyasha sat down and took a couple of mouthfuls. Excuse; she said. She rose from the table, her food unfinished; I thanked my aunt for the meal and retreated. Will you come with me? Asked Nyasha as I walked into the bedroom. Where to? To smoke a cigarette. You smoke cigarette! I aghast.

Babamukuru was Babamukuru was right! His daughter was beyond redemption. A good child doesn't behave like that (pp83,84, 84).

Nyasha acquires a new culture which pushes her not to respect her parents and other adults. The observation she receives from her aunt clearly shows that Nyasha is uprooted. She needs redemption. Her lifestyle makes her classmates to shun her because they think that she considers herself white woman. So, in requiring a new culture, Nyasha wants to emancipate herself of education as well as working in different public services.

Another person who is implicated in this cultural alienation is Nhamo who is brought to missionary school by his uncle Babamukuru for his studies. Most of the time, when Nhamo wants to talk with his family, he speaks English while his sister Tambu and parents speak in Shona as Shona as it can be read in the following passage:

Father was pleased with Nhamo's command of the English language. He said it was the first step in the family's emancipation since we could all improve our language by practicing on Nhamo. The rest of us spoke to Nhamo in Shona to which when he did answer, he answered in English, making a point of speaking slowly, enunciating each syllable clearly so that we could understand (p53) The language of colonization is one of the main alienating cultural elements. According to Michel Folklere "a language it is a science of power". Generally, when colonized acquire and master that Nhamo does not want to speak his own native language and he considers his sister Tambu as inferior to him. This leads me to assert that cultural alienation is the fact of learning a foreign culture and considering one's own culture backward. The clash of cultures makes Nyashahamo as have a split personality. She clashes with her parents for the same reason, even though they took her to England and enrolled her in a missionary school. The dichotomy or the division into two parts, of Nyasha's

identity leads her to become internally divided and drives a wedge between her and parents.

Towards equality of chance

This section demonstrates how women move from oppression under which which the patriarchal system has put them and struggle for equality which with men for a fair society. And it is education that favors incentive to equality of chance and offers. That is to say, women have given same opportunities like their counterpart men. Shaw and Lee claim that the objectives of women's studies were as a discipline. These objectives include, first, an understanding of the social construction of gender and the instruction of gender with other systems live; second, a family with women's status, contributions, and individual and collective actions for change. The above quotation says that any movement for justice based on equality of chance must have a strong moral foundation based on love and human dignity in the community. In other terms, equality must be the foundation of man-woman relationships in society.

Susanne Pharr quoted by Shaw and Lee continues to say:

Violence, bigotry, and hatred are related in important ways to the alienation and disconnection left by some people in contemporary society. She encourages us to address the rage, cynicism, and mean-spiritedness of this historical moment and come up with a transformational politics that encourages a consciousness shift and extends generosity and compassion toward others. This part consists of equality between women and men, while both of them are human beings created by God to exercise some functions at the same level without any exception.

Conclusion

This article dissertation talks about has been an investigation on how some impediments to African women's emancipation and potential outcomes in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. But as education favors that emancipation, the endeavor was not done at random, but it was triggered by women's emancipation about how and why a patriarchal tradition impeded tradition impeded women's education. We Besides, Susan and Lee have pointed out some wildness behavior that existed in a contemporary society such as violence, bigotry and hatred, we. Susan and Lee encourage encourage the transformation of consciousness and extension of generosity to all people without discrimination of sexes, races and nationalities. Apart from the introduction, the conclusion, the choice and interest of the topic, purpose of publishing this; method and approaches as well as the subdivision of the work, this paper has dealt with only one section. This section was devoted to provide some impediments to African women's emancipation and potential outcomes: such as patriarchy, gender constructions, and poverty. It had will also demonstrated, lack of education, colonization, cultural alienation and other. In this paper, we have discussed not only about this paper can be useful to African men who want to dominate, discriminate women, simply because of patriarchal tradition which prevents women from not being educated, from not occupying occupying the important posts in the government and others. But also African women also have to take all their responsibilities by fighting against the violation of women's rights. African women have to show to African men that they are capable to do all activities that men are doing. *Nervous Conditions* is one of the most important novel which talks about culture, feminism and gender. Actually, The I suggest that patriarchal tradition and other factors which impeded women from not being educated was the good conception during the former time so that women in society can fight against slavery as well as human

rights which protect not only women, children, but also every human being from education. Today, women are free from going to school from being educated, women cannot be mistreated, impeded from being educated, writing, and being voted or elected since things are changing every day. I chose this work with the hope that it will remain a good reference document for anyone who would like to undertake a study of this topic in Tsitsi Dangarembga. As to imperfect lively to be found in this work, the readers should consider them as a starting point for further investigation.

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