

Education for Sustainable Development: Feminist Literary Texts Transforming African Societies

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Abstract: - This study analyses the importance of studying feminist literature at university level. It was carried out with ten university students, six males and four females. The study analysed students' views on the importance of studying feminist literary texts for sustainable development in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular. Historically, the writing canon was a preserve for men. It was very difficult for women writers to publish their works. Their works were considered not suitable to be read by the public. However, some daring women authors had to publish their works using male pseudonyms. As a result, the twenty first century saw feminist writers emerging from different countries and the Sub-Saharan region has also produced its fair share of feminist writers. Since the emerging of these feminist writers in Africa, many academics have taken a keen interest in female writers' works of art. Many scholars have critically analysed these works and invariably found that these authors deal with issues that can transform African societies in as far as the condition of women and girls in society is concerned. The readings of such books will sensitise young adults who are future policy makers, on the need to formulate policies that put women and men on an equal footing. The students revealed that women and girls should be educated in order to sustain the development of African countries. They also indicated that women have the same capability as men; and as a result, they should be accorded equal opportunities. Therefore, the objective of this study was to find out what university young adults say about the themes that are explored by these feminist authors. The authors explore themes on women oppression, marriages as institutions that oppress women among many others. This paper is viewed through the liberal feminist theory, and therefore recommends that feminist books be studied in high schools and tertiary institutions in order for these young adults to transform traditional societies to modern societies that advocate for equality between men and women.

Key words:- Sustainable Development, Feminist literary texts, Transforming

I. INTRODUCTION

Feminist authors advocate for gender equality in their texts. Therefore, through reading these texts, societies are conscientised on the need for equality between men and women. The United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goal 5 advocates for gender equality. It states that providing girls and women equal access to education and representation in economic decision processes will fuel sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large. SDG 5 cannot be a stand-alone, this study advocates for the reading of feminist literary texts in order for society to understand better how it can benefit through empowering women and

girls. The feminist books should be read by young adults in schools and tertiary institutions for a sustainable tomorrow. These young adults should be agents of social change, so there is need for them to read books by feminist writers who tackle gender issues that are topical. The feminist books discuss issues that have made women and girls to be looked down upon by society. Issues unique to women and girls include traditional practices that have confined women and girls to the walls of the kitchen.

Before we delve into the core of the study, we will define what feminist writing is for a better understanding of the reader.

II. FEMINIST WRITINGS

Literary texts in the feminist mode are those novels that look at women's situations and give alternatives. In these texts, the authors do not just describe the women's plight and leave the situation like that, rather they give alternatives. Their heroines and some female characters are strong women who defy societal norms and values to liberate themselves from patriarchal bondage (Chindedza, 2012). The texts are protestant in that they voice out the voice of the voiceless woman.

Moyana (2006) reads feminist literary texts from a feminist perspective. She sees Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) as falling within the feminist tradition. She maintains that in *Nervous Conditions*, Tsitsi Dangarembga has portrayed women from a different standpoint from that portrayed in earlier Zimbabwean literature in English. The woman's voice here is significantly feminist, she argues, and the confirmation for this is found at the end of the novel where Tambudzai, the protagonist asserts herself with neither fear nor apology.

Moyana further adds that, by the same token, many feminists have considered the word 'feminine' as representative of social constructs, that is, 'patterns of sexuality and behaviour executed by cultural and social norms.' Hence, 'feminine' represents nurture and 'female' nature in this usage. She further explains that Dangarembga's novel falls within the feminist tradition. Moyana (2006) adds that the author does not simply describe women's experiences and leave them there; neither does she simply describe the socialisation of women into their roles. Rather, the feminist writer portrays some women who try to protest against their usual socially accepted roles while others engage in a debate on how they are being used or misused by the men-folk. Chief among the

women who protest against their feminine roles are Tambudzai, the imaginary narrator and protagonist of the novel *Nervous Conditions*, Nyasha, her cousin, and Lucia, her aunt. Moyana discusses the gender issues in the novel and tries to show why she says its woman's voice is significantly feminist:

It is my contention that Tambudzai, the fictive narrator of *Nervous Conditions*, and Nyasha protest and rebel against their gender or feminine roles, which their society normally accords female children. Lucia, on the other hand, simply acts and behaves in the way that pleases her, comments on issues that affect women and female children and knows how to use and manipulate the men in her life, namely Takesure, Jeremiah and Babamukuru, to get what she wants. In the end she escapes from poverty and illiteracy to become an emancipated woman in her own way. Right from the beginning of the story, Tambudzai categorises the women in her story: a story which is not 'about death, but about my escape and Lucia's; about my mother's and Maiguru's entrapment; and about Nyasha's rebellion — Nyasha, far-minded and isolated, my uncle's daughter, whose rebellion may not in the end have been successful (p. 1).

Feminist writers represent voices of the voiceless women in society. In their literary texts, they just do not present women's problems but they go on to give alternatives.

It is imperative for me at this juncture to also give a bird's eye view of the theory that guides this study.

III. THE LIBERAL FEMINIST THEORY

The liberal feminist theoretical framework this study adopted focuses on equal opportunities of women and men in everything that has to do with their lives. The liberal feminist theory wants to see women being integrated into the mainstream. They are worried about the marginalisation of women in different discourses. They want the race to be fair. In other words, "first, to make sure the rules of the game are fair, and second, to make certain that none of the runners in the race for society's goods and services is systematically disadvantaged" (Tong, 2009, p. 2). The critical and feminist paradigms which guided this study advocate for equality in all spheres of life.

Despite the advocacy for equality by liberal feminists, Odhiambo (2011) laments that in Kenya women continue to be marginalised in many areas of society. Odhiambo further argues that another major constraint to women's enrolment and participation in higher education and directly related to gender stereotype has been the socio-cultural values, beliefs and practices that militate against the education of girls. These include lesser valuing of the education of daughters and the higher value placed on marriage and motherhood and their

accompanying gender-specific roles. That is the reason why there seems to be marginalisation of women in leadership positions.

IV. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

This chapter presents and discusses data that was elicited from ten research participants from a selected university in Zimbabwe. Individual interviews were used to elicit data from participants.

The study revolves around the reflection on how I made sense of the data from the voices recorded during the interviews. I attempted to keep data in the participants' own language. In my presentation, I cited verbatim quotes from participants with the intention to produce coherent arguments that strengthened my presentation as well as to give the participants a voice. I tried to elicit the normal experiences of the participants through their interpretations, since the study is situated within the qualitative approach. The participants' views were viewed through the lens of the liberal feminist theory. Therefore, diverse interpretations were accepted in this study. Derrida's deconstruction theory postulates that all texts exhibit 'difference' in that they allow multiple interpretations. He argues that we cannot reach an end point of interpretation, a truth. He further explains that textuality always gives us a surplus of possibilities. He postulates that all texts have ambiguity and because of this possibility, a final complete interpretation is impossible (Moi, 1985). Therefore, the interpretations made in this study were not an end but a means to ascertain how participants construct meaning from feminist literature.

Education as a tool to emancipate women

According to participants, education can be used by women to empower themselves economically. Some argued that the reason why most women suffer is because they are not educated. Others believed that an educated woman does not suffer like an uneducated woman. There were arguments that women can still be oppressed no matter how educated they are but others argued that, an educated woman is better positioned than an uneducated one. However, the patriarchal nature of the Zimbabwean society expects a woman to behave like a 'woman' no matter how educated she is.

Most students presented education as one of the ways in which women can lift themselves from the bog of tradition. They gave examples of educated women in the literary texts who liberate themselves through education. Some of them are denied access to education but at the end, are fortunate to get educated. One example given was Tambu in *Nervous Conditions*. Her parents decide to send her brother Nhamo to school because he is a boy, denying Tambu, a girl, the privilege to fulfil her educational ambition. As a girl, she is supposed to learn to cook for her future husband. This is what her father said when she insisted that she wanted to go to school;

Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables (Dangarembga, p.15).

On this issue, Brickhill (1996), in his study found that the mother is the housewife and supporter of the father. No other roles are ever acknowledged. Tambu's role was to become a good wife and nothing else. Her father is an epitome of traditional practice that places women within the confinements of her matrimonial home and nothing beyond that. To Tambu, marriage is not the first option in her life. She needs education. Egejuru and Katrak (1997) commented that Tambu is denied the opportunity of early education because the family resources must be devoted to educating her brother. Only her brother's death opens for her a door that would otherwise have remained closed. This shows the second class status that is accorded the girl-child by society. It is only after Nhamo's death that Tambu becomes the last choice because there was no other male child who could replace Nhamo. What Tsitsi Dangarembga portrayed about the situation of the girl-child is true. One male student confirmed that Dangarembga's story is true because he said he knew the family that she portrayed in her novel.

Another example is Adah in *Second Class Citizen* whose parents were disappointed by her birth because they expected a boy instead of a girl. Thus her birth was never recognised and her education was never considered. "When she was eight, there was still a debate on whether it would be wise to send her to school" (Emecheta, p.9).

Literature reviewed showed that in Zimbabwe the education of girls was not very important. Kwinjeh (2007) explains that Zimbabwean girls were educated for domesticity whilst boys were channelled for employment in the public sphere. The number of female students at the only university, which was in Zimbabwe at independence, has always been very low (Kwinjeh, 2007). This was not because women were less intelligent than men but was a result of the patriarchal nature of the Zimbabwean society which glorified male dominance and kept women subordinated (Moyana, 2006). Although the education of the girl-child is now considered important in Zimbabwe, the students felt that, there is need to respect the educated women in society. On the issue of education, they felt that society is too harsh on women. They cited an example of Adah, in *Second Class Citizen*, whose birth was a disappointment to her parents, to the immediate family and to her tribe. Nobody thought of recording her birth because everyone in the family was expecting a boy. Thus the boy's education is put ahead of Adah's. At the age of eight, they were still discussing whether it was wise to send her to school or not. The students observed that this is indicative of the unsympathetic situation many African women and girls find themselves in. They also observed that through education, these women can liberate themselves. However, they felt that because of patriarchy, educated women find themselves entrapped. They gave an example of Ramatoulaye who is

entrapped in tradition despite her education. Ramatoulaye in *So Long A Letter* confesses:

I am one of those who can realise themselves fully and bloom only when they form part of a couple. Even though I understand your stand, I respect the choice of liberated women. I have never conceived of happiness outside marriage (Bâ, p.56).

Although educated, Ramatoulaye still believes it is necessary to suffer in marriage than to leave her matrimonial home. To her, what matters most is her marriage and not her education. However, she is better positioned because she can support herself and children because she has a profession. Although she is in an abusive marriage, Ramatoulaye's education helps her to live a better life than the uneducated Mai Tambu in *Nervous Conditions*.

The participants also gave examples of female characters like Tambu in *Nervous Conditions* and Adah in *Second Class Citizen* that defy societal values, norms and beliefs to get the education that is very important to them. The girls have discovered that education is the only tool that can empower them; so, they fight until they get the education that can emancipate them from the bondage of traditional practices. They wish to help their 'kind' once they are educated and get employment. Through their mothers, they discover that their sex is inferior and both are determined to get the education they yearn for.

Male student A had this to say:

The feminist authors are saying women are just as good as men and education makes them even better. Bamukuru spoils the extended family because Maiguru is educated. Women's education is important; Maiguru contributes a lot though Babamukuru does not appreciate what she does. There are educated women who bring food to the table in society. Adah in *Second class citizen* sends her husband to school, and fends for the family. She is able to do that because she is educated. Ramatoulaye in *So Long A Letter* looks after the children because she has a job and she is educated. Aissotou is able to buy a car for her friend because she is educated. The woman's education is very important.

Male student A supported the idea that the education of women is very important in families. He observed that the male characters in the literary texts enjoy the privileges of their positions as men because their wives are educated and contribute economically to the development of their families. All the male characters he cited above are in better positions in society because their wives are educated and can help in the caring of the families. As he has observed, some of these men spend their money on other women because they know that their educated wives are capable of taking care of their families.

It seems therefore that, when women are educated, they use their education to develop others. Aissotou buys a car for her friend and Adah goes to the extent of sending her husband to

school. Although Francis fails all his examinations, his wife is eager to educate her husband. This therefore means that from the male students' observation, a woman's education should be seriously considered.

Yes, societies are changing because of these feminist ideologies. Education programmes are creeping into African societies. The way women were treated by their husbands, is different now, it has to do with education of the new generation. Educating women today is very important because they will impart onto their children these important values, this can be powerful in trying to change the negative attitudes that the society has towards women. Aissotou in *So Long A Letter* is educated and when her marriage does not work, she moves out of her matrimonial home. She can look after herself and children because she is educated and has a good job, so does Adah in *Second Class Citizen* (Male studentI).

Male student I acknowledged that through education, women can take care of themselves without depending on men. The example of Adah and Aissotou he cited above is a testimony that he believes in the power of education in liberating women from abusive relationships. He also believes that the education programmes which are creeping into society will go a long way in helping women realise their full potential. He acknowledged that educated women today are liberated because they take full responsibility of their salaries unlike women in the literary texts. He seemed to say most men now appreciate that women should take full responsibility of their salaries. He thought this new perspective had to do with the new generation of feminism.

However, some women participants confessed that no matter how educated they might be and helpful in society, some men still do not believe in a woman's education. This is contrary to what male student M said above. The reason for the difference might be the perspectives of individual males.

This is what Male student J said about a woman's education:

If you educate a girl, you do it for the benefit of the other family where she is going to marry. I think Jeremiah and Babamukuru were right to send Nhamo (boy) to school instead of Tambudzai (girl). However, things have changed now because of feminist activism, and the girl child should be educated as well.

Male student J does not support the education of the girl-child because he supported Tambu's father's decision to send Nhamo to school instead of Tambu although Tambu is more intelligent than her brother. His reason for supporting this is because he believes that if one educates a girl, it is done for the benefit of the family where the girl is going to marry into. The student seemed to be indirectly saying if you educate a girl-child you will be wasting resources. However, he acknowledged that with feminist activism, there was need to educate the girl-child. This indicates that, if it was not for the advent of feminism, the girl-child would not have been given the opportunity to go to school. In Zimbabwe, women agent

pressure groups have made the situation of women and girls better than before. (Their roles were discussed in chapter one of this thesis). Male student J has shown that feminism has influenced him somehow, because to him the education of the girl child is not important.

This shows how some males still view the education of women as unimportant. Thus Bâ (1980, p.6) reaffirms "When will education be decided for children on the basis not of sex but of talent?" Bâ laments the situation of the girl-child in society. In different families, resources are channelled to the boy-child's education. Although in the literary texts under study, the education of the girl-child has proved not to be important, the girls have shown that once they are educated, they help to develop others.

Male student A agreed with what Dangarembga wrote about the education situation of the girl-child. He said it is a true story:

This is a true story, I actually know the family, (referring to the characters in *Nervous Conditions*) the characters are real, and this is reflective of the society that we belong to. She has articulated the real problems that happened during those times. However, the situation has changed now, girls are being sent to school, except in places which are still very backward and still cling to the old beliefs that sending a girl child is wasting resources but these places are very few, otherwise the Zimbabwean society is now conscious that if you educate a man, you educate an individual but if you educate a woman, you educate a society.

Male student A supported Dangarembga on the situation of the girl-child's education during the period that Dangarembga wrote her story. He confirmed male student J's belief that sending a girl-child to school is a wastage of resources. However, male student A said, it was an old belief. The society is now aware of the importance of educating the girl-child. Most students condemned males who are perpetrators of patriarchy. Tambu's situation was given as a reference point. Nhamo as young as he is, already has been influenced by patriarchy. Nhamo talks to Tambu rudely in support of the family's decision to send him to school instead of Tambu. This is what Nhamo said to Tambu, "Why are you jealous anyway? Did you even hear of a girl being taken away to school?" (Bâ, p.16). Chitando(2011) in her study, found that the socialisation process in the family which instils patriarchal practices into the young does not end within the family but infiltrates into the other social institutions like marriage, religion, education, politics and the economy. Nhamo is socialised into looking at women as being inferior to men.

Tambu does not listen to Nhamo's rude words because she is determined to go to school; she decides to grow maize and sell it so that she can raise her own fees. She knew that education was the only weapon that was going to set herself, her mother and sisters free from the patriarchal oppressive system. As a result, when Nhamo stole her maize cobs, she had to fight

him. A female student had this to say on Tambu's ambition of going to school and fighting against Nhamo:

Tambu is justified to fight Nhamo; she had worked very hard to raise her fees, because Nhamo is depriving her of the opportunity to go to school. She does not fight for the sake of fighting; she fought for a purpose because she knew that education was a tool that was going to emancipate her from male dominance. Nhamo listens to his father telling Tambu that she cannot feed books to her husband and he also believes that a girl-child should not be educated. When Tambu fights Nhamo, she fights patriarchy, because Nhamo, like Babamukuru and Jeremiah epitomise patriarchy (Female student D).

Female student H further elaborated on the unfair treatment that was accorded women in the texts:

Adah in *Second Class Citizen* had to fight for recognition in the society she was born until she got the education that she wanted. It is through her assertiveness that she finally achieved her ambition. At eight, she still had no birth certificate because when she was born, nobody bothered about her just because she was a girl, her birth brought disappointment. They never considered her for education; it's an unfair system.

Female student H and D sympathised with the girl-child's condition in society. Tambu has to work hard to fulfil her ambitions to get educated but to Nhamo, it is automatic because he is a boy. The same applies to Adah; she also has to fight to get the education that she so much wants. The female student sympathised with the girls that is why they support Tambu's fight with Nhamo. On the issue of unfairness on the treatment of girls and boys in relation to Tambu and Nhamo's situation, liberal feminist theorists advocate for fairness in the treatment of men and women by society. They posit that; "first, to make sure the rules of the game are fair, and second, to make certain that none of the runners in the race for society's goods and services is systematically disadvantaged" (Tong, 2009, p. 2). The critical and feminist paradigms also advocate for equality in all spheres of life. Girls in the texts are disadvantaged in as far as education is concerned. There should be equal distribution of society's goods and service despite one's gender.

However, Female student F showed how education at times might not help women:

The feminist writer is talking about the traditionally uneducated and educated woman. To show how patriarchy can impact on an educated woman, Dangarembga presents Maiguru who is educated but suffer in matrimony just like the uneducated Mai Tambu, Jeremiah's wife. Maiguru is entrapped; she goes to a brother for protection but comes back to her oppressive husband. With her master's degree, she suffers in the hands of patriarchy, and her education does not give her freedom. Although she is as educated as her husband, she has no say in the decisions of the family. Many educated

women today in Zimbabwe and beyond suffer in the hands of patriarchy. Something must be done.

She further explained that:

Maiguru though educated, she has no say, she has to be humble if she does not humble herself, and maybe their marriage was going to break. As educated as she is, we see her being forced to take part in all the house hold chores at the homestead. Education here does not liberate Maiguru in choosing what she wants to do. She is deprived of her freedom. To make matters worse, she has no control over her salary. Even in our society today, people do not value a woman's education much, they are worried about one being a good daughter-in-law, working for the in-law.

Most students registered sentiments on the unfair treatment of women in the literary texts, in Africa and Zimbabwe in particular. They blamed patriarchy for the suffering of women in the literary texts and the societies they come from. Kambarami (2006) for example, argues that patriarchal practices within the Zimbabwean Shona culture perpetuate gender inequality and strip women of who they are because custom in Africa is stronger than domination, law and religion. The feminist theory affirms women's equality with men and rejects patriarchy (Hannam, 2007).

Most students believe that the unfair treatment of women in society can be changed, echoing Simone de Beauvoir's sentiments that 'a woman is not born but made'(Beauvoir,1990).They argued that it is society that gives meaning to women and for that reason there is need to change the status quo. The students registered sentiments that women should defy all odds and climb the social ladder. They gave an example of Adah, who, despite the fact that she was denied access to education, forced her way to school without the consent of her parents. In the literary text, the author writes:

She got tired of running, and started to trot like a lame horse, tired of trotting, she walked. She was soon at the school rooms(Bâ, p.20).

This highlights the fact that Adah fought against all odds to go to school. With determination, she did, contrary to the expectations of the society where the boy child was the only one to be educated. The fact that Adah was running to school shows how desperate she was for education. She ran because she did not want anyone to stop her from going to school. She at last reached school and she said to Mr Cole, the school principal "I came to school... My parents would not send me!"(Emecheta, p.11). This shows that Adah's society did not believe in sending a girl-child to school, hence she goes there on her own. She is determined to fulfil her ambition despite her being looked down upon by her family and society. Radical feminists believe in this determinism that is shown by Adah. They believe that women need to stand up and fight patriarchy that is what Tambu and Adah do in the literary texts. In the end, they succeed. Their worry is not about marriage but education. Adah in *Second Class Citizen* and

Aissotou in *So Long A Letter* leave their husbands because they are being abused. Equipped with education, they are economically independent and are not dependent on men.

Female student D however, expressed the feeling that education alone does not make a woman complete; she needs a man by her side:

There is need to be with a man, I do agree with the liberal feminists and not the radicals. I think education is not enough but there is need for support from men. A man's presence is necessary for a woman. Usually, if a woman does not have a man beside her, she feels empty.

She further explained, contradicting herself in the process:

While the authors liberate their female characters through education but you will find them relying on men and this gives them weak characters. We want to run away from this bondage but we can't. Some female characters have financial stamina but they can't control their incomes. These women work very hard but they are so much into patriarchy and can't pull themselves from patriarchal bondage. Culture and patriarchy will continue to harm women; but the women themselves are strong and can fend for their families. They pretend to be liberated but then go back to men. Maiguru in *Nervous Conditions* runs away but with her master's degree, she comes back to her husband because she cannot run away from tradition. Education can sometimes make women look stupid.

The female student showed that she had mixed feelings towards women's education. The reader response theory explains that a reader can have different interpretations of the same text depending on the emotional condition of the reader at that time. This female student was very emotional, that is why she used the word 'stupid' here. The reader response theory allows for any interpretation because a text can have different interpretations, hence the need to take into consideration what the female student said on this issue of women's education.

The female student showed that education alone does not make a woman complete. Female student D has the view that if a woman is educated and does not have a man by her side, life for that woman will be void. The female student said she agrees with liberal feminists' views that men and women need each other in life. She said she does not agree with the radical feminists' stance that advocates for a total separation from men. Therefore, she supported the idea that women need men in their lives no matter how educated they are. The student even used the word 'stupid' to show that education does not make a woman complete. She gave an example of Maiguru who has a master's degree who, after deciding to run away, comes back to her husband. According to the female student, education becomes useless if a woman is not married.

Female student D's argument on marriage and education is echoed by Ramatoulaye in *So Long A Letter*, who tells her

childhood friend that although she is educated and can look after herself well, she does not find happiness outside marriage implying that she could not imagine a life without a man. She says; I am one of those who can realise themselves fully and bloom only when they form part of a couple ... I have never conceived of happiness outside marriage (Bâ, p.56).

Female student A's argument is further manifested in Aunty Nabou in *So Long A Letter*, who expresses distaste for women's education. This is how Aunty Nabou feels about a woman's education:

To tell the truth, a woman does not need too much education. In fact, I wonder how a woman can earn her living talking from morning to night...The first quality of a woman is her docility (Bâ, pp.29-30).

According to Aunty Nabou, a woman should show respect to men, which is the first quality she should possess among other things. She also supports the view that a woman should not be educated. She indirectly seems to suggest that a woman should be married and become docile to her husband just like Maiguru in *Nervous Conditions*.

This therefore means that women's emancipation is an uphill struggle. From the above quotation, it shows that women themselves are not aware of how much they are oppressed in society and that education can be the only tool that can emancipate them. The likes of Aunty Nabou encourages women to be docile thereby letting men oppress and exploit them in the name of tradition. When she talks about a woman spending the whole day talking, she is referring to women who are teachers by profession. According to her, education does not befit a woman. Like what the other students have observed, women are also entrapped by tradition, so is Aunty Nabou. The students in earlier discussions indicated that there is need for women and men to be re-educated and re-socialised, a re-socialisation which is what liberal feminists are advocating. Men and women can change the status quo.

This is what male student J said about a re-education and the education of the girl-child:

If all people are educated they become aware of the evil practices of the society and change the behaviour of confining themselves to traditional practices. And once people are enlightened, they will change their behaviours for the betterment of their families. People like Jeremiah need a re-education. They should be educated so that they know the importance of educating the girl-child. He thinks Tambu was born for marriage, it was proper for Jeremiah to send Tambu to school because she would be an educated woman rather than subjecting her to her mother's situation. Tambu yearned for education so much because she has discovered that marriage is an institution that trains women to suffer silently. Through her education, she wanted to help her mother out of poverty and oppression.

Male student J asserted that Tambu's quest for education was not to fulfil her selfish ambitions, but she has seen the suffering of her mother and sisters at the hands of patriarchy. He believed that she wants to help them out of poverty and oppression. Her mother looks far older than her age because of the family burdens. So, through education, Tambu wishes to help her family. Therefore, most students believed that the female characters in the novels do not use their education for selfish ambitions but to help other women. For example, Aissotou buys a car for her friend because her education has made her to become economically independent.

In *So Long A Letter*, the female characters defy societal norms as they climb the educational ladder. The students gave an example of Ramatoulaye who accepts the plight of her pregnant daughter, instead of sending her away to her prospective husband as tradition demands; she encourages her to go on with her education, overriding all taboos. They also showed how Ramatoulaye devised a strategy to keep her daughter at school. The student explained that, the reason for Ramatoulaye to do that is because she knows that equipped with education, her daughter would be able to look after her unborn child. She is ready to face the consequences of her decisions. Feminist literary texts portray female characters who are ready to suffer the consequences of their decisions (Moyana, 2006). This is what Ramatoulaye does because she knows that education will economically empower her girl-child. Ramatoulaye confesses this to her friend:

You had the surprising courage to take your life into your own hands...books saved you. Having become your refuge, they sustained you. The power of books (Bâ, p.32).

By showing Ramatoulaye's assertiveness in her quest to let her child continue with her education, Snodgrass (2014) explains that women in literature do not really accept the traditional role of women as decided by society. They are ready to make their own decision, to express this choice of personal decision making and are ready to deal with consequences of these choices, actions and decisions. They want to change the status quo and the only way to do it, is to show their assertiveness. By so doing, change becomes inevitable. This is in agreement with the liberal feminist thoughts. Remaining docile and submissive does not help Ramatoulaye's situation, she had to break tradition to set her free from the bond of tradition.

According to De Beauvoir, a woman must break the bonds of patriarchal society and define herself if she wishes to become a significant human being in her own right and to defy male classification as the 'Other' (Beauvoir, 1990). This is what Ramatoulaye in *So Long A Letter* does as well as other female characters in other literary texts. Feminists believe that there is need for society to see the importance of educating women because it empowers them in all aspects of life.

In the literature reviewed, Chitando (2011) explains that patriarchal attitudes view educating girls as a waste of money

since they will marry out and benefit other families. This was presented by male student J above. In the feminist literary texts under study, the education of the girl-child is not given due attention because the parents think it is a waste of resources since she will marry and benefit her in-laws. Tambu in *Nervous Conditions* was told by her father that she was not going to cook books for her husband. The feminist literary texts contest this ideology. Deep down in her heart Tambu needed education to emancipate her mother and sisters from poverty and women oppression. Education has been shown by participants as a tool which women can use to liberate themselves from male-domination as has been shown by the feminist writers through their female characters.

However, some few students showed that it might not be true that education can be used as a tool by women to liberate them in a patriarchal society like Zimbabwe. Many educated women in Zimbabwe, like Maiguru in *Nervous Conditions* and Adah in *Second Class Citizen*, suffer though they are educated. Whether educated or not, a woman should play a subservient role in society, be it at church, family or societal level. In reviewed related literature, Chirimuuta (2006) argues that this is due to the fact that even those women who are educated have to succumb to culture, otherwise they get labeled as 'Unmarriageable' and will be shunned by society. These educated women find themselves in difficult situations; they are entrapped in tradition as is the case with Maiguru in *Nervous Conditions*, Adah in *Second Class Citizen* and Ramatoulaye in *So Long A Letter*, who all suffer in their marriages. However, Adah defies societal norms, values and beliefs and walk out of her matrimonial home just like Aissotou in *So Long A Letter*. In *She No Longer Weeps*, Martha refuses to marry because she does not believe in being made a sex object by men. With her education she is able to take care of her material needs.

V. CONCLUSION

Many educated women in Africa find themselves in the same situation as has been shown by participants. The situation of Maiguru in *Nervous Conditions* shows that modern education by itself is no assurance against patriarchal domination. Therefore, educated women endure in their abusive marriages and society expects them to do so. Perhaps through reading this feminist literature, the society will understand who women are in society. It should start with students who are directly involved in this type of literature and then to societies in Africa and beyond. The students, both male and female registered concerns that women should defy all odds by educating themselves and climbing the social ladder to come out of the bog of oppression and dependence on men. The only tool to a sustainable development in Africa is to educate women. Example of Adah in *Second Class Citizen* shows that women are capable of sustaining families.

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