The Redifined roles of Modern African Women as Envisaged in Nervous Conditions by Tsitsi Dangarembga

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5.1 Abstract

Being an African woman writer from Zimbabwe and a voice for African women, Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions (1988) highlights a desire to improve the conditions of African women. The purpose of this paper is to find out how the novel has redefined the roles of women in the society. Therefore, it targets African women. The specific objective is to examine the role of modern African women as envisaged in Tsitsi Dangarembga. The research methodology is qualitative, where it adopts the use of descriptive statements. Descriptive and analytical research designs are used in conducting this paper and data is collected through intensive reading of the novel while making notes. This paper attempts to analyze the author's work within the views of third wave of feminism and deconstructive theor. It uses feminism since it is concerned with issues of women in the society, like unfairness, oppression, discrimination, gender equality and freedom which the proposed study looks into. Deconstruction theory is used as this paper involves creating new roles for women. This paper is greatly influenced with views from African feminism which emerge as a variant of the broader feminism movement. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's ideas concerning the space occupied by subaltern, especially women are very helpful too. The findings in this paper are presented thematically. The paper reveals that women in this novel are not controlled by patriarchy. They are modern in thinking and empowered professionally to work away from home. It is hoped that this paper will significantly add value on literary scholars who may want to use these findings to analyze the roles of modern women in the changing Africa. The paper psyches the need to break away from the blanket of generalization of African feminist writings.

Key Words: *Redefined Roles, Moderm African Women, Envisaged*

5.2 Introduction

A woman has always had a desire to change and acquire new identity in life. This has made her to continue growing with changing times. This change has encouraged African female writers to attempt to redefine the roles of women in the society. The main aim of this paper is to examine the new roles for modern African women.

Redefining the role of women in the World and in African countries has been captured in various literary works. Looking at the history of how these women have grown in terms of their roles, we learn their changes in different periods of time. First, authors in early writings depicted women performing domestic roles. Abraham Lynn (2001) defines these women as traditional women, whose place in the society is at home, as domesticity and motherhood are considered to be emotional fulfillment for them. Any woman who went out of this domestic sphere was the other. As the society believed no true woman could be a public persuader.

With the changing time and society, women refused these domestic roles. Coming of education has opened new environment for them and Omeh (2015) advertises Igbo and Yoruba women on Website dated 31.2015 as very learned, enterprising and occupying positions in professional fields. Uchendu Victor (1965) also identifies women taking roles in advanced churches through the society and this study also discusses the role of women outside a home sphere.

Uwakweh (1995:75) in her analysis *of Nervous Conditions* identifies an escaped woman who is cut from patriarchy. This woman is selective on what to learn, creative, intelligent and very keen to ensure that she

acquires what she needs. The above highlight women which this paper examines. Margaret Ogola (1995) projects Kenyan women as capable with voices. The present paper also identifies women with voices and argues that women are able to reclaim their rightful position in the society. When looking at Grace Ogot's work, Achufusu (2005) identifies womanhood and the female role as her themes in her stories. Her women have strength, integrity, dutiful and conservative. This idea of consevartism is supported by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. When presenting a talk to a local audience at TEDX Euston, an independent event in 2012, Chimamanda says "We teach girls that they can have ambition, but not too much, to be successful, but not too successful, or they'll threaten men." As a feminist, she encourages the need to dream about and plan for a different, fairer world of happier men and women who are truer to themselves. Therefore, they helped this paper to observe that the appropriate way this process of growing up should be, is neither women being too much radical nor too much conservative. The paper therefore, provides rich information on the new roles for modern African women.

Theoretical Framework
This paper adopts an eclectic model where feministic and Deconstruction theoretical perspectives are.

Feministic Theory
This paper is influenced by ideas from feminism to understand the new roles of women. It utilizes the strands of radicalism and conservatism feminism as the characters involve fighting radically and accept patriarchy's involvement in their growth. Many studies across African continent have been done on African feminism. According to Givendolyn (1997), feminism is heterosexual, prenatal and concerned with bread, butter and power. Nkealah (2016:133) adds by saying, that it addresses cultural issues that pertain to the complex experiences faced by all women of all culture on African continent. Kalowole (2011) highlights that this feminism addressed women's needs, empowerment and male chauvinism. As Mama (1995: 37) puts it, this feminist thinking is a scholarly output in the field of gender studies and has increased in universities.

To bring about equality in gender, Mama Amina observes that literature should be free from biases because of race, class or gender. This paper looks at women as subalterns and the issue of need of equality is part of what this study discusses. To understand the new role calls for understanding what the third wave of feminism entails. This wave seeks to question, reclaim, explore, redefine ideas and address inclusiveness. Women in this wave see themselves as capable, strong and assertive social agents. They seek to overcome the theoretical question of equity or differences and the political questions of evolution and revolution. These women do not only embrace ambiguity, diversity and multiplicity but also confront stereotype of women particularly proper female talk and behavior. Women have confidence of having more opportunities and less sexism (Baumgardner & Richards 2000:83). The process of this redefinition calls for understanding what feminists in third wave say. Shugart et.al, (2001) capture an empowered woman who feels good about herself and has power to make choices regardless of what those choices are. He adds that 'in- your-face' confrontation attitude is the hallmark of this woman. Shugart's ideas define modern women who are independent in making radical decisions and do not care about others feelings but their own identities. They stubbornly venture into male dominated space to claim position of power and Natasha (1998) says, 'we - the new feminists embrace power.' These are selfish and aggressive women who are ready to venture in males sphere. However, Katherine (1991) feels that although women are entitled to economic equality to men, there is need for conservatism for them to grow without creating conflict with men. Her ideas call for involvement of men for women to grow and this paper also looks into it.

The choice of this topic is motivated by the need to redefine the roles of women. For them to acquire the new roles, Foucault Michel (1980) observes that they must adopt Western ways of knowing, of thought, reasoning and language for them to be heard by the oppressors. The paper observes that through this language and reasoning, women can do what men can. This wave, therefore, gives the paper rich materials

when handling the objective of this study. It points out that these women have acquired new role. Therefore, its ideas provide an insight in investigating the ideal roles for modern women using the novel.

Deconstruction theory

Derrida (1982) proposes that deconstruction needs to create new terms for pure analysis in literature. The choice of this theory is influenced by the fact that women's roles redefined. Some studies from Africa support this deconstruction of women. Nkealah (2016:37) identifies nego-feminism and snail-sense feminism which argue that the inclusion of men is necessary to freedom of women. Women need to involve negotiation to utilize and deconstruct the patriarchy. Ezemwa (2015) supports Nkealah Naomi by adding that these women learn survival tactics to be able to overcome the impediments placed before them to live a good life. From the above, the paper argues that women acquire the new roles through negotiating with men. Spivak (1985) is very influential this theory.

As "Practical-Marxist-Feminist-deconstructionist", Spivak advocates for women to venture in writing as a profession as this is a strategy for inclusion and exploration. Her idea helps this paper to discuss the need of women having voices through writing. Mack- Canty (2004) focuses on gender equality and resistance to popular pronouncements. Mack-Canty's idea on the new discourse is inspired by the need to deconstruct the earlier thinking on women. The paper notes that Mack-Canty's views are concerned with equality and need to look at women differently. This paper can observe that his vision is to have totally different women from the ones existed, women which this paper examines. Therefore, this study notes that deconstruction theory is motivated by the need to honor contradictory experiences and deconstruct some thinking on the roles of women.

5.3 Methodology

This section focuses on the research design and methodology that was used. In the subsequent sections, detailed description of research design, sampling, data collection and analysis are discussed. The paper adopts both qualitative and analytical research approach which involves close textual reading and analysis of the selected text as informed by the objective. The report is a narrative with rich descriptive words and is written at the same time data is being analyzed, so the choice of words and phrases are both analytical and interpretive act. The paper uses purposive sampling procedure to identify the text from which the new roles for modern African women are examined. The novel belongs to a new generation era thus making it to bring out new roles.

This paper relied on close reading, making notes of the text and reading of what constitutes third wave of feminism and deconstruction theory in order to arrive at the roles for modern women. Secondly, there was need to read and understand the novel as it was the informant.

The researcher read carefully the text to establish if it had any relationship with the two theories. This was done by making notes in note books in reference to the objective of the study. The researcher reread the text while criticizing them to come up with the findings and analysis that helps this paper to understand its topic and interpretation of the text. Whenever there was need for illustrations and clarification of any information, the novel was reread. The analysis was done simultaneously with data collection. Therefore, it involved personal interpretation of the novels and data collected.

The analysis and interpretation of this data started immediately once the theme redefining the role of women in the society was identified. The researcher also gave an analytical view citing the significance and implication of the findings and it showed different or similar findings which were compared to the researcher's expectation that had been derived from experience and readings. The report gave a vivid descriptive account of theme under study after being subjected to feminism and deconstruction theories to identify redefined roles of women in society in using the novel.

5.4 Findings

The new roles that are found in this novel describe the change from what was expected to be the roles for women in the society. They are considered as new as they come with western education which was earlier denied to women.

Women as Part of Leadership

Women have been identified as leaders in the society. Modern women are heads of various institutions in African society. They guide members of the society to achieve their desires as expected by the institution. In this novel, there is Sister Emmanuel in Sacred Heart "who was both a Mother Superior and principal" (197). She is the one Babamukuru pays the only expenditure, the cost of uniforms. The study observes that the Sacred Heart, led by a woman has beautiful infrastructures and well organized and Nyasha "perceives that all the affluence is dazzling" (198).

Tsitsi implies that women create conducive environment in their leadership since they have ability to, no wonder; this place is depicted with cars flowing in to bring their daughters to learn. The nuns also have qualities to lead, "At the door a nun, smiling beatifically made us welcome by shaking our hands."(199) Tsitsi points this out as etiquette and it is a quality of leadership which should be embraced.

Modern women are not only leaders outside but also in their families. This changed role is let known to Tambu when she is summoned to be told how lucky she is to be educated:

> "Babamukuru pointed out that the blessing I had received was not an individual blessing but one that extended to all members of my less unfortunate family, who would be able to depend on me in furture."89

Babamukuru says this to demonstrate that as an educated woman; she now has a chance and power to lead her family. This is an indication that women have acquired the role that was for men. Tsitsi's visionis is to inform women to embrace education for them to be empowered to lead their families and be the best women both at home and outside.

Women as Decision Makers

Kahneman (2000) defines decision makers as people who identify or chooce alternatives based on the values, preferances and beliefs. These are women who have been empowered to make decisions in the society. They may not be leaders but the decision they make allow others to grow. In modern World women have been given chance to make decisions both at home and in public sphere. Men consult them on various issues. Babamukuru allows her wife to decide on family issues: 'Ma'Chido,'Babamukuru insisted, his voice breaking ever so slightly, 'I have invited you to sit down and listen to this case."146. It is clear from this context that Babamukuru believes Maiguru will come up with the best alternative. With financial muscles, they make decisions on how their homes or houses look like. Maiguru's house and the contents in it like furniture, utensils and decorations are her choices. "The living room is elegant…''68 Therefore, Ttitsi encourages women to be assertive in a male society and participate in discussions that involve decision making as it is a role that can equally be done by women.

Women as Role Models

Role models are people whose behavior, examples and success can be emulated by others, especially young people. Some train to be the best in the society so that they become role models to be copied. Maiguru's way of life is an admiration to Tambu. It turns out that Maiguru becomes a role model for Tambu. "She was altogether a different kind of woman from my mother. I decided it was better to be like Maiguru, who was not poor and had not been crushed by the weight of womanhood. (16) From this, it is clear as Mama (1995) declares women are not completely inferior to men as Maiguru is better placed in the society. In this context, Tsitsi uses Maiguru to tell women to accommodate and accept men's help to succeed. Moreover, Nyasha wants to be the role model for other girls. It is her desire that other girls speak and dress like her. These are the best qualities in women who do modeling as a profession in African society.

From this, women help others achieve their goal in life. Therefore, it is an ideal role. Spivak (1985) is concerned with deconstructing views given to subalterns especially women and having voice in literature**.** Tsitsi adopts Spivak's ideas; she uses Tambu as a narrator and a role model for African women. Tambu is given a voice to tell her story for other women to learn:

> My story is not after all about death, but about my escape and Lucia's, about my mother's and Maiguru's entrapment, about Nyasha's rebellion- Nyasha, far- minded and isolated, my uncle's daughter, whose rebellion may not in the end have been successful.

This empowerment of women is a new model in literature and Showalter (1979) encourages this development in study of female experience for analysis of female literature as it highlights what is real. From this Tsitsi informs us that being authors is part of the new roles for women as they voice what should be emulated.

Women as Counselors

Webster New World College Dictionary (2014) defines counselors as people who counsel or advise students, clients regarding education and educational alternatives plus personal problems. In this novel women advice, warn and caution their daughters and the society so that they do not fall villain of modernity. When Nyasha is sick, Tambu is seen disturbed and her mother warns her of embracing Englishness she says. "It'll kill them all if they are not careful… "208 Tambu feels she has no explanation for Nyasha's sickness but her mother has. This makes her to be cautious in her education. From this, the author envisages what is likely to be an ideal role of mothers in continental Africa; Mothers should be sensible enough to be available to advice and counsel their children in their education and personal experiences. Women also advise their husbands on issues of families. They speak and their husbands listen. They are women whose Maria (1990) identifies as ones who help in governance and their words give back one's life. These women are like Maiguru in this novel, her husband seeks advice from her on Tambu's joining the Sacred Heart and her advice changes her husband's view and makes him acept Tambu join this institution, "Is there anything that you would like to say?"… 'I don't think,' she begun easily in her soft, soothing voice, 'that Tambudzai will be corrupted by going to that school'"(184) As a result of Maiguru's advice, Tambu gets another chance to a new life.

Women as Professionals

Gerald (1980) defines professionals as members of a profession or people who earn their living from specified professional activities. These are women who interact with different people and give their services to them in public sphere as Maria Rojas (1990) observes. Both Lucia and Maiguru represent African modern women who occupy space in professional fields and earn salary. This paper realizes that some are not only teachers but have trained to be nuns like the ones in Sacred Heart. These nuns are also responsible to nourish the society spiritually. Tsitsi wants African society to acknowledge these women and their roles as they do not only help girls to grow but the society as a whole.

5.5 Conclusion and Recommendations

Tsitsi as a later day writer focuses on the woman as an actor, controller of her own life, the one vocalizing her own ideas and responsible for change of roles to come. She does this by allowing Tambu as a role model to narrate her story and make her take charge of her own life.

There is a lot of growing and radicalism in this text. Tstitsi identifies women broken loose from patriarchy. They are modern in thinking and empowered professionally to lead and give services to people. They are allowed to make decisions and counsel others. They also participate in religious activities and help others to grow spiritually. Lastly, some are the role models who inform women on the expectations of the ideal woman. From these, Tsitsi asks modern women to grow and take up these new roles for they are likely to set themselves free. The findings of this paper reveal that, the new roles of modern women as envisaged by the author are what the author imagines to be the redefined roles for modern African women.

The present paper recommends more studies using the same text on the topic from another theoretical strand to find out if the findings are similar to the present study. There is little that has been done on the redefined roles of African women. Therefore, the paper suggests that further studies should be done on this topic in

different works of art to provide material for comparison and to find out if there are similarities with the present paper.

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