



Literary Horizon

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal

Vol. 2, Issue 4

www.literaryhorizon.com

February, 2023

ISSN: 2583-0201

Preserving Cultural Identity in the Modern Woman-Self: A Reading of Selected Post-Colonial African Texts

Njouonap Gbetnkou Assiatou¹

Department of Applied Foreign Languages,
Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences,
University of Dschang, Cameroon.

Muluh Carlous Nkwetisama²

Department of English,
Faculty of Arts,
University of Bamenda, Cameroon.

Ngetcham Ngetcham³

Department of Applied Foreign Languages,
Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences,
University of Dschang, Cameroon.

Abstract: *The arrival of Europeans in many African countries had an enormous impact on the institutions and practices of African people. This was mainly caused by the new religion of Christianity and the instauration of Western Educational system. Since women are still considered as those whose place remain in the home and precisely in the kitchen, their quest for western education remains a threat in the traditional societies. This paper examines how the traditional woman preserves her cultural identity in her modern-self in a strictly traditional environment. It questions the real identity of woman from the olden perspectives and how she strikes to get integrated into the new world. The African Feminism as discussed by Stuhlhofer is used to analyse the selected texts; it pursues equity; seeks inclusion of women in nation-building and social participation, and, it considers the cultural aspects and values of the African milieu in the resolution of their daily worries. On the postcolonial perspectives Glissant (1997) condemns the rooted identity in favour of the rhizome mindset for all those aiming to live in an environment in absolute progression. Equally,*



Literary Horizon

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal

Vol. 2, Issue 4

www.literaryhorizon.com

February, 2023

ISSN: 2583-0201

Ngecham (2022) identifies the immaterial traces encoding the different mentalities on female affairs in the distinguished communities. The result indicates that, educated women in traditional societies are often accused of intellectual feminism which is viewed as foreign and hostile to African values. Western education, therefore, is looked upon as harmful to girls' traditional education. The conclusion is that educated women can maintain their cultural identities even though they undergo changes due to the contact with the other's culture.

Keywords: *Modern and traditional women, African feminism, culture, traditional custodians.*

1. Introduction

The arrival of Europeans in some African countries during colonialism had an enormous impact on the institutions and practices of the people. This was mainly caused by the new religion of Christianity and the instauration of Western Education that were considered as threats to the people's cultural values. Skinner [1957] defines culture as a "totality of how people live and behave". Obiajulu posits that culture is "the complex part of living that directs human social life. The things each generation must learn and to which they eventually may add" (2018 p. 86). The fear to lose the roots, the ancestral beliefs, all about the traditions and customs, renders some individuals' ethnocentric, thereby regarding others as inferior and thus, tend to reject new cultures. To them, their culture is fixed and unbroken. They hold valuable ancient practices and expect to hang them over to the next generation in order to maintain their norms and values. Due to monolithic mental scheme, female education becomes a problem because, the die-heart traditionalists see it as risk for the females' cultural integrity.

It is important to start by putting light on the meaning of the terms traditional woman and the modern woman. The traditional woman is one who possesses cultural principles linked with her origins and has received traditional education from her mother; the one whose place is in the kitchen and one whose main tasks on earth are to marry, make children and take care of them and of their fathers. Thus, she has no right to Western education for fear, she might develop



Literary Horizon

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal

Vol. 2, Issue 4

www.literaryhorizon.com

February, 2023

ISSN: 2583-0201

European mentalities and start questioning what is expected from her in the traditional environment. Therefore, the modern woman is one who has acquired Western education and tend to adopt the ideologies of the European; she starts questioning her place in the society; if she is meant for marriage only or, if she can offer more to the world through her intellectual performances.

2. Problematic, Research Questions and Hypotheses

In the communities identified in the corpus, parents who have low occupational aspirations for their daughters see education as “risky” for women because it “spoils” them. Some of the elderly believe that education does not make women good mothers because educated women tend not to work as hard for their families as they “should” and the education they receive is not related to the tasks of being a wife and a mother. It is also believed that such women tend not to ‘respect’ their traditions, parents or husbands. Thus, many parents do not pay attention to the educational needs of their daughter. This therefore, leads to conflict between the females who seek for their rights to western education and those seeing it a risk.

The objective of this study is to show how the cultural identity of a traditional woman is preserved in her modern-self. This aim at proving that, female’s education does not impact on their cultures totally; their main aim is to seek for their right to integrate the educational milieu. This will be done using some selected African post-colonial texts; *Disgrace* by JM Coetzee, (1999), *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga, (1988), *Verdict of the gods*¹ by Janet Ekaney (2007), *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa, (1966). It will be guided by the following research questions;

-How is the fear to lose a traditional woman into a modern one manifested by the die-heart traditionalists in the corpus?

-How does the traditional woman strike to keep her cultural identity in her modern-self?

These research questions rely on the hypothesis that in traditional societies, woman is

¹The Acronyms VOG and NC will be used for Verdict of the Gods and Nervous Conditions respectively throughout the research.



Literary Horizon

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal

Vol. 2, Issue 4

www.literaryhorizon.com

February, 2023

ISSN: 2583-0201

seen as one who has no right to Western Education because as it is believed, she might develop unsubmitive attitudes towards the men and societal norms. Though, the quest for the right to be educated does not go smoothly in purely traditional spheres, women strike for their right even though they safeguard their cultural identities.

3. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Literature Review

Following independence in many African countries, large sums of money were spent on education because governments believed education was the key to modernization and development. Individuals desired education for personal advancement and the societies needed educated citizens to cope in an increasingly competitive global political economy. Girls and boys were equally represented at the primary level. However, female enrollment at the secondary and tertiary levels was less than that of males (Robertson, 1984). Despite the efforts of most African governments to expand, schools inequities still exist. The UNESCO 1998 education report asserts that women in Africa remain one of the “least educated” groups in the world. Current data on women’s education in Africa continue to show a persistent pattern of female gender disparity in education. For example, in the Ivory Coast, Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, and Cameroon among others, female illiteracy is about seventy percent (UNESCO, 1998). Education of African women is an important key for improving health, nutrition and the cultural level of families and for enabling women to participate in decision making in society (Kurz and Prather, 1995).

Yet some scholars have argued that women’s access to education, by itself has not changed their status in society. Hollos (1998), for example, argues that even with education, some women still depend on their husbands and are not fully independent, as one would expect. Such a dependent position for women is because African societies, like many others, are patriarchal and thereby devalue and discriminate against women (Hollos, 1989). Girls and women have always been at a disadvantage when it comes to education. Feminists observe that in most societies, while women are present in most social situations, they are hardly visible in state arenas (Acker, 1984; Megamy, 1984). Even where women are present and active, most



Literary Horizon

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal

Vol. 2, Issue 4

www.literaryhorizon.com

February, 2023

ISSN: 2583-0201

social actors fail to acknowledge women's presence. Deliberate efforts have also been made to exclude women from certain areas such as politics, the science professions and executive administrative duties despite their attempts to enter such domains, especially in African countries. In general, the role of women is that of less privileged members of society and has always been subordinate to the role of men. Since, the males see female education as a threat to their traditional values, this research especially aims at showing that western education is not a threat to the indigenous women's values. Their new vision of the world probably leads to revolts but, that of social integration.

Theoretical Framework

The African Feminism will be used in this work. This perspective emerges to explain African gender relation. For the African feminism, it considers the history and diversity of Africa including colonialism. It concerns with the realities of the challenges that African women encounter in their daily lives. To this effect, it pursues equity; it seeks inclusion of women in nation-building and social participation. Stuhhofer points that, "culture is an important element in understanding feminism...A pursuit of feminism in Africa needs to be tailored to the specific needs and realities of society." (Stuhhofer, p.2). Therefore, equality of opportunity here does not mean merely enriching programs to help girls catch-up with boys. The aim is to increase the respect and the material rewards associated with what women do, as well as encourages access for women to areas that traditionally have been dominated by men (Agyepong, 2001, p3). Each gender constitutes a critical half that makes humanity whole; neither gender is totally complete in itself. Each has and needs a complement, despite the possession of unique features of its own. Both male and female principles encompass life and operate jointly to maintain a cosmological balance (ibid, 18). This study will equally be justified by the postcolonial theory as opined by Glissant on the notions of being rooted of the die-heart traditionalists and recommendation of the rhizome identity for all. Likewise, Ngetcham's archeology of literary texts will identify immaterial traces that widen the reader's scope on the evolution of mentalities in the African Traditional societies as far as women issues are concerned.



Literary Horizon

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal

Vol. 2, Issue 4

www.literaryhorizon.com

February, 2023

ISSN: 2583-0201

2. Image of Woman and Restriction to her Western Education

Every society has a set of systems to censure and control the normative concepts of masculine and feminine behaviors. The African gender ideology shapes different lives for men and women by placing them in different social positions and patterns of expectations. Therefore, Gender refers to relations of power between men and women; to relations of inequality and to matters of identity and social relations that structure the lives of men and women. Gender relations are socially organized relations that differentiate males and females. (Elson, 1991). In this regard, the restriction of the female western education relies largely on her gender status. In the traditional societies, woman has been attributed particular tasks different from that of men. This can be justified in Wirngo's (2016, p.199):

Referring to women's role in the old society, what came to mind was 'home'. Women in general were inferior to men...They were to remain ignorant and to obey first, their fathers, after marriage their husbands and during widowhood, their sons. The major role of women considered as private properties of men was to please their husbands and bear children by them.

In the corpus, factors determining these rooted mentalities are seen through the characteristics that define a girl child's traditional education. In *VOG* it is narrated that, after Elome II has accepted the establishment of a school in Mbade village, "there were waves and waves of protests from die-heart traditionalists that the school should be closed and the teachers sent away... they said the school was destroying their traditional way of life-the girls no longer going in for early marriages, refusing to marry the wealthy elders." (*VOG*,p114). Through this extract, one sees a community whereby, providing schooling for females is seen as of secondary importance to marriage. To them, the establishment of a school destabilises values already implanted by their customs and traditions. The will for teachers to be sent away and the closing of the school is their way of protecting their cultural values, thus, preferring the traditional system of education for their daughters on how to take care of a home because "those who go to school do not marry early." (*Efuru*,128).



Literary Horizon

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal

Vol. 2, Issue 4

www.literaryhorizon.com

February, 2023

ISSN: 2583-0201

The reaction of the elders above clearly justifies that, in traditional milieus, the decision to send a girl to school is influenced by a number of social, cultural and ideological factors. The fact that marriage comes before female education also appears in *Efuru*. When *Efuru* wants a second wife for her husband, on her strolling around with *Ajanupu*, they come across a young girl who captures their interest. Their discussion about the girl goes thus:

Efuru: 'Who knows whether she is engaged to be married?'

Ajanupu: 'It easy to find out....She will make a good wife for *Eneberi*.'

Efuru: 'But she looks like she is going to school, that will be a hindrance.'

Ajanupu: 'That is no hindrance. She will have to leave school if we decide to have her as *Eneberi*'s wife' (*Efuru*, 180)

Ajanupu belongs to the traditional perspective that believes that, a girl child is made for marriage and no other thing comes before, even her education. To argue the belief that a woman's place is at home is equally identified in the discussion between *Eneberi* and his friend *Sunday* about the latter's sister:

Eneberi: 'It is a good thing you are sending her to school. But it is a waste sending them to school'

Sunday: 'I don't understand,' *Sunday* said in surprise.

Eneberi: 'Well, I mean really that boys should be given the preferences if it comes to that. If you had a little brother for instance and there is just enough money for the training of one, you wouldn't train *Nkoyeni* and leave the boy.'

Sunday: 'You are right'

Eneberi: 'Sometimes these girls disappoint one you know?'

Sunday: 'We should allow them to finish their schooling.'

Eneberi: 'And where does it all end? In the kitchen'. (*Efuru*, 191-192)

From their discussion is identified two people with two different visions of the world; the traditional and modern ideologies about a girl child education principally based on gender issues. In this situation, the young girl simply has the chance to be educated because she has no brother on whom, the money can be spent. *Eneberi* conclusion about the ending of female education is



Literary Horizon

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal

Vol. 2, Issue 4

www.literaryhorizon.com

February, 2023

ISSN: 2583-0201

because, they believe that to say 'woman' is to say 'pot' which means that women are associated with the kitchen and not the school. This is equally seen in *NC*: When Tambu insists on going to school to the restriction of her parents, her mother reminds her of what her real task as a woman is:

This business of womanhood is a heavy burden...Aren't we the ones who bear children? When it is like that you can't just decide today I want to do this, tomorrow I want to do that, the next day I want to be educated! When there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one who has to make them. And these things are not easy; you have to start learning them early, from a very early age. The earlier the better so that it is easy later on. (*NC*, 16)

From her mother's speech is depicted the image of a fully traditional woman not ready to go against the norms of womanhood in their community. Her attitude makes reference to a community whereby a woman's lot is obedience and respect. This ideology moves in term with Ghandi's (1998, p43) impression that in patriarchal environments, the disempowerment of women has been facilitated, in part, through their exclusion from the space where knowledge proper is constituted and disseminated. She is therefore accustomed to raise her daughter to learn and do things she learned from her mother, thereby continuing the vicious circle. She believes woman is meant for bearing children as they are all defined as mothers. Cross culturally, a woman's status as a child bearer has been the test of her womanhood. Relating her stance with De Beauvoir's ideologies, "Nature has told woman: Be a woman. Child care, household tasks, sundry motherhood cares, they are your tasks" (De Beauvoir, 2010, p.849). From her tone is identified a woman who affirms the demands and expectations of traditional culture and patriarchy.

When Tambu's father sees her striking to read a journal paper, the former narrates: "He did not like to see me over-absorbed in intellectual pursuits. He became very agitated after he had found me several times reading the sheet of newspaper...He thought I was emulating my brother, that the things I read would fill my head with unpractical ideas making me quite useless



Literary Horizon

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal

Vol. 2, Issue 4

www.literaryhorizon.com

February, 2023

ISSN: 2583-0201

for the real tasks of feminine living” (NC, 34). The fear of the patriarchy is that her quest for education makes her to portray a threat for male authority. Her father therefore still claims that woman’s place is in the home as her emancipation becomes a real threat to their patriarchal spheres.

His ideology about female education justifies his reaction when Tambu receives the money of her school fees from a white couple. He convinces her teacher to give him the money for his drinks. When the teacher tries to convince him to allow Tambu to go to school, he mocks: “Have you ever heard of a woman who remains in her father’s house? ... She will meet a man and will have lost everything” (30). These reactions from the males results from the ideology that, a woman’s respect is tied to her marriage and not to her educational performance. This is why when her brother Nhamo dies and she is sent to the Mission to study, her brother even in his grave sees it as being headstrong and for this reason, appears in her dream recalling she will come to a bad end because she has deserted her husband, children, garden and chickens for Western Education.

Since gender issues position men as superior as compared to the female, in a discussion with his sister, Nhamo nags Tambu, “Did you ever hear of a girl taken away to school?...With me it is different. I was meant to be educated” (NC, 46). He considers himself superior and thus, deserves certain privileges. He does not want his sister to go to school because he is pleased to remain, the sovereign subject and the absolute superior. When Nhamo is chosen to pursue his education with his uncle, Tambu finds no problem with the situation because as she says: “I understood that Nhamo was older than I and much more advanced academically. I understood that that made him the logical choice for Babamukuru’s project. If he had not insisted that there were other criteria that disqualified me at the outset, I might have been happy for him. But he did insist, and I was very angry indeed. (NC, 50). The evocation of her brother’s age and level of education are normal aspects that are rightly considered instead of making choices according to maleness and femaleness. Therefore, “all the conflicts came back to this question of femaleness as compared to maleness” (118). Since, all conflicts are caused by the question of gender



Literary Horizon

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal

Vol. 2, Issue 4

www.literaryhorizon.com

February, 2023

ISSN: 2583-0201

inequality, her ideology goes in line with Dorothy Parker's view that a woman or a man should be given similar considerations because they are all human beings, she writes: "I cannot be fair about books that treat women as women. My idea is that all of us, men as well as women, whoever we are, should be considered as human beings." (De Beauvoir, 2010, p24).

The belief that a girl does apart from being a wife is vowed to failure is seen through the behaviour of Tambu's mother when Tambu insists on finding money for her school fees as her parents claim they do not have enough money to pay but only for her brother. She requests for seeds to cultivate maize so she can afford to pay her fees. When the father refuses claiming the mother should do same, she speaks:

And why should I tell her such things? The girl must have a chance to do something for herself, to fail for herself. Do you think I have not told her her efforts will come to nothing? You know your daughter. She is wilful and headstrong. She won't listen to me...She must see things for herself. If you forbid her to go, she will always think you prevented her from helping herself.(NC, 25).

From this extract is developed a collective mindset women are not equal to men. They have no demands to make. If they force it, all they will do will lead to their failure. Her mother's reaction portrays that women in this community are trained to accept 'female' occupation and rarely suppose that anything can be done to change their lifestyles. This is why when the young girl insists, her father reminds her: "Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables."(15). The mindset identified here portrays that mothers have as duty to prepare their daughters to be good housewives. In *VOG*, Sita and other women have as daily duties, farming. In *SOT*, they are seen tilling and preparing the farms for the planting season, Lucy who is a white is seen in *Disgrace* engaged in farming life in the suburbs. All these mindsets about a woman's place in society match with a similar North American saying that says: "a woman should be kept barefoot, pregnant and in the kitchen" (Kwatshal, 2009, p.30). Thus, the rural women come to engage primarily in production of food and they continue to perform the bulk of agricultural labor without concomitant



Literary Horizon

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal

Vol. 2, Issue 4

www.literaryhorizon.com

February, 2023

ISSN: 2583-0201

remuneration or recognition.

For the traditionalists, this ‘foreignness’, ‘mixedness’ the whites bring in their community aiming at civilizing them is not only considered as ‘impurity’ but likewise, transgressive and corrupting their cultural values. Following the mindsets of the cultural monolithic characters, indigenous educated women are therefore, accused of intellectual feminism which is viewed as foreign and hostile to African values. Relating their attitudes to Ngetcham (2022, p50), woman is an individual and a product of a culture. Thus, her relation with the world has to be dictated by traditions imposed by myths, legends, or behavioral codes approved by their environment.

4. Cultural Identity of a Traditional Woman in Her Modern Self

Culture is an important element in understanding feminism in the African context. Culture is synonymous with the people’s way of life, transmitted from age to age, generation to generation. This part aims to justify the idea that, even though the modern woman may undergo some changes as a result of her contact with the others’ culture, she can still preserve her traditional convictions. An educated female can therefore, continue to be a good mother, a good wife, daughter as well as a good sister because educated or not, they are viewed as “life-givers, life-preservers, and have concern for the future generation.”(Stuhlhofer, p.3). Woman as described in this analysis develop intelligent strategies to get themselves educated with no fear for the patriarchal society but, they still safeguard their traditional image. They remain exemplary ladies in their marriages for the married ones, in their homes for the children and in the environment for the single ones. In the communities the corpus depicts, the girl children are educated traditionally in order to have as duty tomorrow, taking care of their husbands and children. This suggests that they are not supposed to take part in certain social activities like the men. Even with traditionalists’ views, women must be given possibilities to acquire western education because the society evolves and the result is that the roles of women are undergoing great changes. This necessity is serious such that, if the women are not given the opportunity as is the case in the corpus, they seize it. The women in this study even after striking for their rights



Literary Horizon

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal

Vol. 2, Issue 4

www.literaryhorizon.com

February, 2023

ISSN: 2583-0201

for western education still preserve the traditional identity.

There is a woman in *Efuru* whose reputation is described as ‘responsible’ due to her educational career: “The doctor’s mother who was now dead was a very respectable woman. She was among a handful of girls who went to school. She was the only one who had insisted on obtaining her standard six certificate known in her day as ‘As amended’” (*Efuru*, 96). The precision that she ‘had insisted’ to acquire her certificate portrays an environment where girls are not encouraged to go school if not on their individual insistence. Her educational background has permitted that she sends her son to school and who in turn has become a doctor and assures the physical wellness of his people throughout the village.

Similarly, she takes care of *Efuru* who has no blood link with her: The latter “learned cooking, baking and sewing from the doctor’s mother”. (96). As an orphan of mother from her tender age, she is given to this educated woman with whom she stays till maturity. *Efuru* is loved by everyone in her entourage due to her good behavior. Therefore, the fact that the mother of the doctor has gone to school does not make her lose her motherly aptitudes and the traditional mentality that every woman is a mother to all the children. This is underlined because *Efuru* is not part of her family. Their encounter goes thus: “She was going to the little Church one Sunday when she saw a little girl run to her and embrace her. The little girl called her her friend and told her that she would like to live with her... So one day the doctor’s mother inquired about her and her parents were approached. ... Thus, *Efuru* came to live with the doctor’s mother” (96). She welcomes the girl and plays her motherly role by giving her a good education that permits her to be a good wife in her husband’s homes and loved by all. *Efuru* from her stay with this woman decides not to do farming like other women and engage in other economic activities most performed by men. Education therefore does not destroy a person’s value unless the person at its peak possesses no worth at all.

In *NC*, *Tambu*, *Maiguru* and *Lucia* are female characters who portray the importance of female education and the preservation of her African cultural identity. Starting with *Tambu*, when her family’s financial situation becomes critical to a point that they can no longer pay fees



Literary Horizon

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal

Vol. 2, Issue 4

www.literaryhorizon.com

February, 2023

ISSN: 2583-0201

for the children, they prefer to invest the little on Chidoh, the male child. During this moment, their mother boil eggs to sell, she equally sells vegetables, onions and tomatoes, the business through which she scraped together enough money to keep the boy in school. This is because the male child is expected to take care of his junior ones as compared to Tambu who may get married without finishing her training. Tambu laments: "I understood that there was not enough money for my fees. Yes I did understand why I could not go back to school. But I loved going to school and I was good at it. Therefore, my circumstances affected me badly." (15). As a result of this, she announces to her parents one early morning unexpectedly that she shall go back to school and will earn the fees. She says: "If you will give me some seed, I will clear my own field and grow my own maize. Not much. Just enough for the fees." (17). Her courage to stand and take decisions before her parents portrays her emancipating character traits; she is unstoppable and also portrays engagement and wish to enjoy the opportunities education can bring in her life. When her parents give her maize, she narrates:

That year I grew older, stronger and studier than any eight year old can usefully grow. More often than not I woke up before dawn, the first lifting of the darkness occurring while I was sweeping the yard. Before it was fully light I would be on my way to the river and then returning... While the cocks were crowing, I made the fire, swept the kitchen and boiled for washing and for tea. By the time the sun rose I was in my field, in the first days hoeing and clearing... At about ten o'clock, which I judged by the height and heat of the sun, I would go to the family fields to work with my mother, sometimes my father, in the afternoons and after school, my brother. (22)

According to Agyepong (2001, p54), the national and international education initiatives have dramatically increased educational opportunities for girls, but there is still the need for their labor at home. The above extract justifies the idea that, in certain families where the parents are uneducated and of low economic status as seen in this case, they see it normal and acceptable to withdraw girls from school in order to rely upon their labour at home or on the farm. Considering the point of view of Agyepong (2001, p55) about girls who are in the same situation with Tambu, a large number of females drop out of school because they find it difficult to combine



Literary Horizon

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal

Vol. 2, Issue 4

www.literaryhorizon.com

February, 2023

ISSN: 2583-0201

school attendance with major domestic responsibilities. Hard work and courage are tools she uses to get rid of the traditional mentality. When her maize is ready for sale, she goes to Umtali to sell with the help of one of her teachers and luckily, a white lady seeing her tender age for her fees.

Comparing her with her brother Nhamo, her cousins Nyasha and Chido who become cultural alienated due to Western Education, Tambu's mother let her know that, "The problem is the Englishness, so you just be careful" (207). Through her words is identified a 'warning', a 'threat' that will end up having disastrous effect on Tambu if she continues going to school. Tambu speaks: "Mother knew a lot of things and I had regard for her knowledge. Be careful, she had said, and I thought about Nyasha and Chido and Nhamo, who had all succumbed, and of my own creeping feelings of doom". On the cases of the three persons who have succumbed to the Englishness, they reject their home and prefer the city way of life, they neglect their home language Shona to the advantage of the English language. Though Tambu is afraid, she does not give up saying, "I told myself I was a much more sensible person than Nyasha, because I knew what could or couldn't be done. In this way I banished the suspicion, buried it in the depths of my subconscious, and happily went back to Sacred Heart. (208). She describes herself as a 'more sensible' person than her cousin because she does not give up her traditional values even if no one can stop her from going to school; This is portrayed when, even after she has gone to the mission and goes back to visit her parents in the village, when time to go back reaches, she does not go claiming: "There was much work to be done in the fields, in the garden, in the home.. And, of course, I could not leave my mother, who was not well" (NC, 157). This suggests that she is conscious of the values she has to continue offering to her origins as compared to the others. She does not dislike her homestead, she continues respecting her parents, she keeps to her language and gastronomic cultural values and equally, she keeps doing her house chores with no complaints.

In *VOG*, there is equally a young girl just like Tambu, going to school does not make her neglect her house chores' responsibility. She is called Nzelle and she explains: "When we



Literary Horizon

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal

Vol. 2, Issue 4

www.literaryhorizon.com

February, 2023

ISSN: 2583-0201

returned from school, I gave food as usual to Nsume and the rest. When they finished eating, I sent them outside to play while I stayed behind to do the dishes. Later, I opened the clay pot to get drinking water but realized that it was almost empty..."(VOG, 9). Through her own description, it is seen that, to reduce the chances of female education in these communities, some female are made responsible for their younger siblings at a very tender age so that their parents can work for their feeding. What she has to do have to do with cleaning, cooking, assuring the wellness of her junior ones. She describes it as what she does 'as usual'. This is a justification that going to school does not make her to be stubborn and is of no risk to her cultural values. She is called to do both and prepare herself for numerous tasks of being a wife, mother and equally a worker who will participate in the financial responsibilities in her home.

Maiguru is Babamukuru's wife who is a holder of a Masters Degree from Britain and is a teacher. She does not take her educational background into her marital home and keeps up being a good wife. When they go to the village for vacation and numerous members of the family have come:

Maiguru worked harder than anybody else, she was expected to oversee all the culinary operations. ... She had to make sure that the food lasted until the end of the vacation. ... She took to cooking, twice a day, a special pot of refrigerated meat for the patriarchy to eat as they planned and constructed the family's future" (NC, 137-138).

Her behavior makes her earn the description of a "good woman and a good wife". She is an exemplary woman to young girls. This is seen when Tambu is refused to go to school because her father believes she will be corrupt by the alien culture, she tells her mother: "Baba says I do not need to be educated. ... He says I must be a good wife. Look at Maiguru. ... She is better wife than you"(16). According to her, with her education, Maiguru remains a good wife, has gotten a job, drives in a 'car', looks 'well-kempt', 'fresh' and 'clean' all the time. She continues: "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). This



Literary Horizon

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal

Vol. 2, Issue 4

www.literaryhorizon.com

February, 2023

ISSN: 2583-0201

assurance for a better future after one must have gone to school goes in line with the ideology about western education that positive outcomes for individuals, families, and society have been attributed to female education hailed as a “ticket” out of poverty.” (Stuhlhofer, p5). It can be seen from these female gendered characters’ emancipative attitudes that, woman has become conscious of self and can emancipate herself from marriage through work, a woman no longer accepts her subjection docilely. What she would hope for is to reconcile family life and profession, something that does not require exhausting acrobatics. (De Beauvoir, 2010, p189). When Babamukuru intends not to allow Tambu go to school in the Sacred Heart, a multiracial school because his children who have been in touch with whites tend to possess an African attitudes, Maiguru convinces him to allow the child to go to school. She gives her reasons:

I don't think... That Tambudzai will be corrupted by going to that school. Don't you remember, when we went to South Africa everybody was saying that we, the women, were loose... It wasn't the question of associating with this race or that race at the time. People were prejudiced against educated women. Prejudiced. That's why they said we were not decent. That was in the fifties. Now we are into the seventies. I am disappointed that people still believe that same things... I don't know what people mean by a loose woman-sometimes she is someone who walks the streets, sometimes she is an educated woman, sometimes she is a successful man's daughter or she is simply beautiful. Loose of decent, I don't know. All I know is that if our daughter Tambudzai is not a decent person now, she never will be, no matter where she goes to school. And if she is decent, then this convent should not change her. As for money, you have said yourself that she has a full scholarship. It is possible that you have other reasons why she should not go there. (184)

‘Loose’ according to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary is defined as; something not firmly fixed where it should be; able to become separated from something; not tight together; free to move around without control: not strictly organized or controlled. (*Oxford University Press*, p880). All these definitions suggest loose women do not live their lives according to the societal norms. A supposed loose woman ‘who walks the street’ in this context goes with the



Literary Horizon

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal

Vol. 2, Issue 4

www.literaryhorizon.com

February, 2023

ISSN: 2583-0201

immoral's definition of a loose person that says it is one involved in sexual relationships that people consider to be immoral. The 'educated' and successful 'women' according to the traditional ideology, is in accordance with a break, a cut, a tear; to separate yourself from a group of people or their influence (Oxford University Press *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 2010, p880). Accordingly, loose women are women who free themselves from the traditions that hold them and take complete freedom to do what they want in all places and situations. This therefore justifies the fact that they are believed to be indecent, thus, they are dishonest, unfair and lack good manners. They are 'prejudiced' and this portrays an unreasonable dislike based on their educational career by their entourage. All these prejudices on the side of educated women aim at isolating and belittling their knowledge as believed by African feminists.

Therefore, according to Maiguru, a decent behaviour is received from the traditional education. Thus, once a girl child has been well educated, she preserves significant aspects of her cultural identity even though, considerable changes can occur in her way of thinking, feeling and seeing things due to her contact with the new culture. This evolution according to Stuhlhofer (p6) makes that these educated indigenous women are believed to be "too educated, too successful, too stubborn, and too hard to control".

Similarly, Lucia also serves as a source of motivation to encouraging girl's education. Though she is uneducated when she is first seen, she is a type of a woman who aims at seizing her liberty from her patriarchal environment. She starts this by asking Babamukuru to find her a job so that she should not more stay in the village doing nothing. When she is asked which kind of job she will like to do, she replies, "Don't you see how strong my body is? I can't do things that need education, but anything else I can do"(159). She implies an educated person's job needs more brain than for a person who only has physical aptitudes. As a result, Lucia has found a job to help cooking at a hostel by Babamukuru. Not complaining about her state of pregnancy, she starts the work. Gaining this financial independence gives her the opportunity to finance her education and even though she is said never to have been to school, she starts going:



Literary Horizon

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal

Vol. 2, Issue 4

www.literaryhorizon.com

February, 2023

ISSN: 2583-0201

Contentedly folding her arms over her six-month pregnancy, she told us that she was going to school to Grade One classes in the evenings. She was so proud, she had not been to school before. She showed us her books, declared she could already feel her mind beginning to think more efficiently. So Lucia stirred the great drums of *sadza* at the girls' hostel and went to her Grade One classes in the evenings."(162-3)

Going to school at her level and state symbolises hope and expectation of a better future. Through her, the author discourages every other woman who has been brainwashed to think that her place is only in the kitchen or the home. From her strong female personality, Babamukuru says about her: "That one... She is like a man herself"(174). Her circumstance is a clear proof that, today's period invites, even obliges women to work. When she is closed to the exams, she studies hard such that when the results are out, "she had passed her Grade One so well that they were moving her into Grade Three"(200). According to Said (1994, pxxvi), narratives of emancipation and enlightenment in their strongest form were also narratives of integration not separation. These women in different societies where Western Education for girls is restricted feel excluded in the new world and as such, they strive to get integrated. Their efforts without waiting for any male to push them portray them as those women who believe that, "If woman discovers herself as the inessential and never turns into the essential, it is because she does not bring about this transformation herself" (De Beauvoir, 2010, p28). The ability of these educated women in preserving their cultural identity portrays that, one can love the other, exchange with him, collaborate with no risk of disappearing (Ngetcham, 2022, 48).

5. Conclusion

In this study, educated women who engage in feminism face dilemma because they are often accused of intellectual feminism which is viewed as foreign and hostile to their values. Western education therefore is looked upon as harmful to girls' traditional education. Therefore, since in these societies as opined by the African feminists and as demonstrated in the male gender, marriage is the foundation of family and society and since the main task of the female child in the identified spheres is to get married, bear children and take care of the home, the



Literary Horizon

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal

Vol. 2, Issue 4

www.literaryhorizon.com

February, 2023

ISSN: 2583-0201

family values superseded women's quest for equity quest for education. Nevertheless, educated women can stay original to their cultural identities even though they undergo changes due to the contact with the other's culture. They can continue to be good wives, daughters, mothers and sisters thereby assuming their roles of the female genre after they have been educated and integrated the new society. In this regard, educating women and girls contributes to social and economic evolutions as exemplified by Maiguru's, Nyasha's, Lucis's, the doctor's mother and Nzelle's lives. This possibility of women being educated creates an environment with the rhizome identity as proposed by Glissant in an environment with its unlimited evolution in culture due to the contact with the others. It therefore, goes against the rooted identity as seen in the case of the traditional custodians who are of the opinion that, the place of the woman in their communities should remain where it has always been; in the home. The rhizome ideology is encouraged because, due to the evolution of the world, none can live again while preserving only the self. The traditionalists in this regard are bound to understand that with the changes the world undergoes, nothing can be done to completely control girls' education. They also need to realise that, from the females' description above, western education is not a risk to the female traditional education but, it allows them to integrate their society on educational aspects with hope of integrating humble professions.

Bibliography

- Agyepong, Rosina, (2001), *Gender and African Education: A Critical Analysis of the Literature*, Canada, University of Toronto.
- Bhabha, Homi, K, (2004) *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, New York.
- Coetzee, John M, (1999), *Disgrace*, Vintage, Random House.
- Dangarembga Tsitsi, (1988), *Nervous Conditions*, UK, The Women's Press Ltd.
- De Beauvoir, Simone, (2010) *The Second Sex*, (Trans. Borde, C and Chevalier, S.M), New York, Vintage Books.
- Ekaney Janet, (2007), *Verdict of the gods*, BumaKor Publishers Ltd, Cameroon.



Literary Horizon

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal

Vol. 2, Issue 4

www.literaryhorizon.com

February, 2023

ISSN: 2583-0201

- Gandhi, Leela,(1998), *Postcolonial Theory: A critical introduction*, Australia, Allen & Unwin.
- Glissant, Edouard.,(1997) *Poetics of Relation* (trans; Betsy Wing), The University of Michigan Press, USA.
- Hollos, M., (1989). “The Status of Women in Southern Nigeria: Is Education a Help or a Hindrance?” In M-Bloch, J. Beoku-Betts and B. Tabachnick. (Eds.), *Women and Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Power. Opportunities and Constraints*, Boulder, CO. USA: Lynne Rienner.
- Kwatsha, O.L.L, (2009) Some aspects of gender inequality in selected African literary texts, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, *Literator*, PORT ELIZABETH.
- Kurz, M., & Prather, C. J. (1995), *Improving the Quality of Life of Girls*, New York: UNICEF
- Ngetcham, (2022) *Pour une Critique Archéologique des Arts et des Lettres*, Finlande/ Tampere, *Atramenta*.
- Nwapa Flora, (1966), *Efuru*, Ibadan, African Writer’s Series.
- Oxford University Press (2010) *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, 8th edition, Oxford, New York.
- Said, Edward, (1994) *CULTURE AND IMPERIALISM*, 1st Vintage Book ed, USA.
- Sibani Cliffort Meesua, (2018) “IMPACT OF WESTERN CULTURE ON TRADITIONAL AFRICAN SOCIETY: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS”,*International Journal of Religion and Human Relations*, Benin, University of Benin.
- Stuhlhofer, Eunice, Wangui, “Navigating African Feminisms: Wangari Maathai as a Portrait”, Draft paper for the Africa Knows! Conference; panel G42, Accessed from <https://nomadit.co.uk/conference/africaknows/paper/58023> on 10th February, 2023.
- UNESCO, (1988). *Compendium of Statistics on Literacy*. No 30. Paris: UNESCO, Office of Statistics.