

Rethinking Gender Liberation in Alex la Guma's *A Walk in the Night* and Tsitsi Danbgarembga's *Nervous Conditions*

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Abstract

*This study depicts a lapse within the female liberation project in Africa. It observes that for over half a century, female empowerment has been over-emphasized and enacted to the detriment of the male child who is now lacking in values, making him vulnerable to countless vices which make him even a greater threat to the woman or girl undergoing liberation. Amidst such a critical situation, one questions if the male sex is not vulnerable? The study's aim is to deconstruct the one-sided feminist liberation project in Africa. It aims portraying the effects of one-sided gender empowerment as enacted in Alex la Guma's *A Walk in the Night* and Tsitsi Danbgarembga's *Nervous Conditions* in order to reconstruct a balanced gender liberation project. The study focuses on Derridian and Saussurean deconstruction and binarism from a postcolonial perspective and thus, goes on to argue that empowering the woman and leaving out the man paradoxically disempowers the woman in the long run. In this light, the paper concludes that a shift from girl-child empowerment to girl and boy child empowerment (though not at the same degree) can guarantee a safer future for both sexes in the African society.*

Key words: gender liberation, deconstruction, binary opposition, vulnerability

Introduction

Over the decades, discourses on gender in Africa have focused on the liberation of the woman and the girl child from patriarchal structures that work at her expense. (Coulibaly, 2018; Makuchi, 1997; Ogunyemi, 1996; Emecheta, 1988; Chioma, 1981). The African woman of the 1950s cannot be compared to

the one of today. Contemporary African women have attained a remarkable degree of liberation compared to their counterparts thirty to fifty years ago. In most African nations, women have been involved in nation building and policy-making within the past couple of decades. This does not imply that the woman has completely attained freedom from male oppression, but demonstrates that the liberation process has made much progress. However, it is unfortunate that a plurality of discourses on gender during the past few decades has dwelt mostly on the female gender – emancipating and liberating the female folk while little has been said about empowering the male sex. The approach towards female liberation over these decades has been one-sided and worked at the expense of the male sex which is now lacking in knowledge and vulnerable to drug abuse, terrorism, crime and countless vices, eventually becoming more of a threat to these empowered or liberated women. Nyangena Emily Moraa subscribes that ‘the consistent campaign for awareness of girl’s empowerment seems to be working but at the cost of the boy child.’ (2018:16). This paradoxical situation makes it difficult for the supposed equity to be rife among both sexes because one party (the male sex) is left in lack of values and eventually becomes a thorn to the flesh of the empowered women either through violence, crime, abuse or other forms of oppression.

Today, society comprises many educated women who have been empowered since teenagehood as opposed to dysfunctional men who have been tagged nuisances and vandals from birth, never or hardly empowered with sustainable values. Female authors like Ama Ata Aidoo, Chimamanda Ngozi, Tsitsi Danbgarembga, Buchi Emecheta, and others who advocate gender equality neglect male empowerment in their fictional or autobiographical representations of the subject and rather portray the male mostly as the threat to female liberation. Their solutions exclude the male folk thus creating a vacuum that makes complementarity between both sexes a farce.

Current research (Njume, 2018; Chege and Likoye, 2015; Unterhalter and Dorvard, 2013) supports the claim that the feminist liberation approach is biased and victimizes both the male and female sexes. However, this perspective of gender liberation has not received adequate critical attention. This work therefore adds to existing discourses to reemphasize the need for an objective approach to gender equality. It argues that boys and

men are also vulnerable and need most of the values which have been offered only to women for over fifty years in Africa. Only when this is done can we vouch for a sustainable equity of both sexes.

Other studies that support the void (Nambiri, 2016; Koskey 2012; Chowdhury and Manjari, 2010; World Bank, 2005) acknowledge the neglect of the male sex basically in the educational sector as statistics over decades show that many boys drop out of school. But this study goes beyond the educational domain as it investigates other spheres like family, culture and politics that have also excluded the male sex from the empowerment process and eventually made them bigger threats and torments to the female sex undergoing liberation.

Against this backdrop, this work seeks to deconstruct the one-sided female/female liberation approach in order to reconstruct a dual-faced, holistic and objective approach to gender equality. In doing so, the paper submits that if the girl child is empowered alongside the boy child, it will guarantee a safer future for both sexes and the African society. If men batter women, the way forward is not only to train the women to resist and challenge men, but to empower the men with positive sustainable values that will stop them from treating women as lesser beings or sex objects.

Theoretical Considerations

This study adopts a Saussurean and Derridan structuralist thought. The postcolonial concept of binarism was first used by Ferdinand de Saussure in his *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) to refer to a linguistic pair of signs. Saussure argues that signs have meaning not by a simple reference to real objects, but by their opposition to other signs. Signs produce meaning based on their difference from other signs, and the binary opposition is the most extreme form of difference possible. According to Saussure, 'meaning is generated through a system of structured differences in a language. (qtd in Ismail 2021:24).

The binary logic of imperialism is a development of that tendency of Western thought in general to see the world in terms of binary oppositions that establish a relation of dominance. A simple distinction between centre/margin; colonizer/colonized; metropolis/empire; civilized/primitive represents very efficiently

the violent hierarchy on which imperialism is based and which it actively perpetuates (Ashcroft et al. 2007:18). Binary oppositions are structurally related to one another and in colonial discourse; there may be a variation of the one underlying binary: colonizer/colonized – that becomes rearticulated in any particular text in a number of ways such as male/female, self/other, white/black, civilized/primitive, oppressor/oppressed, and so on.

Our concern in this study is the male/female binary vivid in *Nervous Conditions* as male chauvinists like Babamukuru, Jeremiah and his son Nhamo perpetually oppress female characters like Maiguru, Ma Shingayi and Tambu respectively as well as in La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* where men like Lorenzo, the white sailors and Willieboy's father suppress the female folk around them like Grace, Nancy and Willieboy's mother respectively. The female liberation approach proposed by Dangarembga is female/female as it keeps the man aside in the process while La Guma's text has traces of male empowerment through characters like Andries and Joe who symbolize the voice of conscience and social justice.

Based on his discourse on Linguistics and Grammatology, Jacques Derrida's deconstruction is the tool which this paper evokes to rethink the female/female approach to liberation. Like poststructuralism, deconstruction gives us new ways of thinking. It holds that there is no one interpretation to a text because every person would think in a different way. The best for one may be suggested the worst for another person. Likewise, teaching the woman to resist male dominance may be best to subjective feminists while teaching the man to shun violence and oppression towards women could be a better approach to yet another objective feminist critic. This explains why most feminist texts like *Nervous Conditions* paradoxically deconstruct themselves as their representation of women and approach to female liberation destroys their intended goal as they neglect men in the process of rebuilding and focus on giving them a bad name.

Half a Century of One-sided Gender Liberation

For about half a century, gender studies, discourses and projects have focused on the female gender only. The approach to female liberation has been one-sided; it has been biased. Most African countries presently have established and well-funded institutions that focus on liberating the woman from chauvinistic

structures and practices that work at her expense. Cameroon for example, has a Ministry of Women Empowerment and the Family. Most Universities also have Departments of Women and Gender Studies all aimed at empowering and liberating the women from the shackles of patriarchy and male dominance.

Globally, there are many scholarships offered exclusively to the female sex alongside countless privileges. Again, there have been countless conferences across Africa and the globe restricted to women and the girl child with the aim of giving them values, economic stability and education needed to bridge the void created by patriarchy. In addition, international laws on Human Rights, UN sustainable development goals for 2030 and several state constitutions specifically emphasize the rights of the girl child; they place the woman at an advantage and do not even mention the man. The man only appears in these documents as a potential suspect and threat who will be punished severely by the law if caught perpetuating any sort of violence or abuse against the woman, the girl child and the community.

These goals, activities and strategies towards female liberation for the past fifty years is worthy of recognition. It has helped to a greater extent to improve the conditions of female subalterns as many women and girls are presently educated. In *Nervous Conditions* for example, Maiguru obtains a Master's Degree from England despite her patriarchal background. She has the same degree as her husband, Babamukuru. Also, Tambu fights her way through to be educated at the mission despite her chauvinistic background that prefers she stays home to assist her mother while her brother (Nhamo) gets educated. Her struggles show that the woman can have her way through education and liberation if she is zealous. Again, Tambu ends up in a convent. It is important to note girls' secondary schools and the convent were some structures intentionally established in post-independent Africa to empower the woman/girl child vocationally, economically and academically, and facilitate their liberation process besides other religious objectives. Tambu's college, Sacred Heart, is symbolic of most [mission] girl schools in African countries whose purpose was gender-oriented. Another case of a female type character who represents female liberation over the past fifty years is Aunt Lucia. In spite of her economic prowess, Aunt Lucia still finds a need to acquire education. Like the

protagonist, Tambu, Aunt Lucia believes education is pivotal to female emancipation from the chauvinistic entrapment she goes through at the Homestead. She therefore migrates to the city, and decides to attend an evening school at the mission while cooking and selling food at the same school during the day.

These educational experiences of Maiguru, Tambu, and Aunt Lucia echo the progressive nature of female liberation in Africa since independence. The purpose of these liberation programs for women was and is still necessary. It came to bridge the prolonged gap that had been created by patriarchal norms that affected the woman's welfare and socio-economic progress. This female liberation programs over the decades have contributed immensely to the woman's liberation over the decades as the number of educated and influential women keeps increasing. However, more still needs to be done but the approach, strategies and target group towards female liberation need to be reviewed and rethought.

The times have changed and the woman's plight is no longer as it used to be fifty years ago. Using the same method used over the past fifty years has not yielded much fruit in contemporary times. We cannot have unchanging laws and strategies when the problem's sources keep evolving. One of the key problems that slows down the woman's acquisition of freedom in contemporary times is the neglect and exclusion of the boys and men in the female liberation strategy whereas these are the main oppressors of the female folk.

It would be unwise therefore, if the African community keeps walking on the assumption that boys and men "know it all" and do not need to be empowered. Such a one-sided perspective held for the past fifty years has left far-reaching consequences as most crimes and social vices like drug abuse, rape, sexual assault, kidnappings, corruption, terrorism, and so on are perpetrated by the male sex – by men or boys who were never empowered with African cultural and ethical values that protect or demonstrate respect and value for the women. It would be important therefore to examine the paradoxical condition that is rife due to the neglect of the male gender in the female liberation process.

Empowering the woman is good but empowering the man alongside the woman is better. A society that spends decades to empower one sex and despises the other, assuming they are

already naturally or culturally empowered is good for failure. In fact, the existing one-sided approach to female liberation defeats the very objective of sustainability in UNSDG 5. Adding values to just one sex demonstrates that the future will be crowded with unvalued, disempowered and neglected men who will be the very first threat to the empowered future women. Thus, empowering the woman alone is paradoxically disempowering the woman.

A handfull of critics lament that boy child and men are becoming victims of militarism, political hooliganism, jails, violence, among others. Dr Paul Bundi Karau also believes girl child empowerment is killing the boy child. He states that globally, boys are more likely to drop out of school. They are more likely to abuse drugs. A boy child in some countries is 20 times more likely to be imprisoned. He submits that empowering one gender must never be synonymous with stifling the other. We must realize that we need a functional man and woman for a functional society. In her article titled, 'Fifty Years of Boy Child Education in Kenya' Jane Nambiri Ouma admits to challenges facing boy child education particularly in Kenya as the boy child is beginning to lack behind the way the girl child was lacking about fifty years ago (2016:1). She suggests an equitable approach to the provision of education for both girls and boys. Like Koskey (2012:181), she focuses on formal education given in schools. However, such formal curriculum would not be sufficient for the gender liberation process. Education for boys and girls that eases female liberation should rather be holistic, encompassing morals, values, economic empowerment, basic peacebuilding techniques, and even spiritual emphases that connotes mutual respect for both sexes, solidarity, communalism and moral values that construct a healthy society. Such education is not necessarily acquired within the confines of the classroom but in the family, in the church or mosques, in village traditional communities, at vocational training centers, amongst other sectors.

In *A Walk in the Night*, Andries, the police officer, makes several efforts to sensitize his colleague, Constable Raalt so that he changes from a violent bully to one who respects human life. Similarly, Joe advises and warns Micheal Adonis to avoid gangsters like Sockies and Foxy and remain hardworking. The young man prefers hardwork to theft especially in their racial

South African context where criminals are killed regularly. These two instances show that some boys and men are not as bad as many female writers represent them. They understand their vulnerability so make efforts to add value to their fellow men. If the feminists could incorporate such male empowerment to their approach, it will ensure a more balanced future.

In *Nervous Conditions* for example, Babamukuru is better placed to transform Jeremiah, Nhamo, Chido, Takesure and other males to become valuable men who respect their Shona women. As head of family, he is very influential. Unfortunately, he lacks these expected values and ironically joins the other men to maltreat their women. Empowering such a man there ensures the transformation of the family for a better society. His lack of values thus necessitates the need for such values among men from a Sausurean thought.

These perpetual hurdles encountered by the male sex are as a result of his neglect all along. This neglect has contributed immensely to halting or slowing down the woman's liberation process as she cannot move further than her husband, father or brothers who lack vital values to ease her societal progression. Men are the head of the family, the home and other vital institutions with the vital support and help of the women. When the man is handicapped therefore in his acquisition of skills and knowledge offered solely to his wife like Jeremiah, Takesure and Babamukuru, it automatically handicaps not just the woman and the family but the community at large.

The paradox of female liberation liaises with Jacques Derrida's poststructuralist thought. The latter argues that language is inherently unreliable because it operates on the basis of differentiation. In other words, what enables words to refer to whatever they refer to is their difference from other words, not a direct link to their so-called referents. From a Derridian perspective therefore, to empower just the woman means to disempower the 'other' (the man), and this disempowerment of the 'other' eventually disempowers the empowered woman who is expected by custom, culture and societal structures to submit to the man. This paradoxical quagmire and female/male binary approach to the African woman's freedom requires reconstruction.

The Vulnerability of the Male Gender in *Nervous Conditions* and *A Walk in the Night*

The vulnerability of the boy and man has been neglected in countless texts that address gender issues. Men and women are bound to live in the same society so, empowering the girl child and the women in established institutions while the man acquires just ordinary knowledge without values creates a future vacuum in society that will affect social cohesion between both sexes. The male sex has developed a superiority complex because of social and cultural constructs. They have grown up to think that they can handle most situations even without the help of a woman. This cultural construction has rather been destructive to them and to the women in the long run because society can only be better when they work together.

Against this backdrop therefore, there is need to deconstruct the female/female approach to liberation and establish a Female/Male binary approach to female liberation and gender equality. The tool of deconstruction embodies reconstruction. Based on Derridian thought, deconstruction accounts for how a text's explicit formulations undermine its implicit or nonexplicit aspects. It is "the belief that things cannot be understood in isolation they have to be seen in the context of the larger structures they are part of." (Barry, 2002:39). Deconstruction brings out what the text excludes by showing what it includes. It highlights what remains indecidable and what operates as an undecidable in the text itself. This necessitates the extraction of new approaches to female liberation from textual representations –approaches that involves both sexes.

As earlier mentioned, most texts that advocate gender equality represent the man as a nuisance and a hindrance to female liberation. They focus on how the entrapped and oppressed female characters like Tambu, Maiguru and Nyasha in *Nervous Conditions* get conscientized and fight for their rights and liberation but have little record of men partaking in this liberation process. What is absent from the text (men being conscientized and partaking in liberating women) is what makes more meaning in the text because a Derridian reading entails the search for the 'other' and the 'other of language' (Winqvist 2003:263). Let us examine a few traits of such 'otherness' that is absent from both texts under study.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Tsitsi Dangbarembga could have presented ways of empowering Nhamo and changing his mindset, rather than leaving him die in that chauvinistic attitude. Even Jeremiah and Takesure are not empowered either by their fellow men nor conscientized women like Lucia. They are rather seen as liabilities who cannot be reformed to partake in the goal towards female liberation. Such a misrepresentation ought to be reconstructed. In *A Walk in the Night*, Constable Raalt's vandalism and lack of self-control show the effects of having a man without values handling a leadership position. It is important to note that as a white, even his so called 'modern' society has failed to empower him to respect and treat humans with fairness. This is why he transfers his grudges with his wife, Faith, to an innocent black, Willieboy, whom he shoots to death without investigating the [false] allegation against him. This is how insecure society can be when men and boys are excluded from the empowerment project.

Arthur Njume holds that boys are vulnerable and swayed into crime and other vices like drug abuse, terrorism, child soldier recruitments, violence and other juvenile acts. (2018:1). He adds that it is not girls but often boys who are always caught smoking marijuana in uncompleted buildings, taking tramadol behind the classroom, carrying arms during violent political revolutions and arrested in most armed robbery scenes including cyber criminology. The condition of most male characters at District Six in *A Walk in the Night* like Willie Boy, Foxy and his gang among several other blacks in South Africa illustrates this claim. They are said to walk the night like ghosts committing armed robbery attacks for survival in the apartheid system. Michael Adonis is also lured to join their gang after he loses his job in a white factory due to racial discrimination. It is therefore dangerous for society to assume that the man or boy is brave and can take care of himself unlike the woman because the man also faces depression due to state apparatuses and systems that affect his progress; in the course of restoring his condition, he may either transfer aggression or hurt a woman in the process. This in fact, is a form of cultural deceit that has emanated from patriarchy that rather endorses male oppression of the woman.

The vulnerability of the male gender is also reflected in the way men treat women, with a sense of superiority. Such is the case in *Nervous Conditions* and *A Walk in the Night* where

chauvinistic characters like Jeremiah, Takesure, Babamukuru, Nhamo, Chido and Lorenzo respectively are a thorn to women's flesh and are lacking in many values necessary for fair treatment of women. In *Nervous Conditions*, one does not see obvious efforts proposed by Danbgarembga to add value to the male sex. Through the first person point of view and her autobiographical voice in Tambu, she ends the story saying her narration was about 'four women whom I loved, and our men' (208). Considering Derrida's deconstruction which holds that meaning is understood based on difference or what is not said, one may imply that she hates men on the contrary. Her seeming hostility towards men only makes the pursuit of female liberation a potential failure.

One may educate and empower the girl child but if she unfortunately works under a chauvinistic boss or marries a violent neglected and disempowered drug addict, she may easily lose these values due to the male dominance that surrounds her. So empowerment should also be redirected towards the source or cause of the woman's problem –men, and not just the victim.

Besides the violent, impulsive and aggressive Constable Raalt, one realizes that most of the masculine characters in *A Walk in the Night* are either drug addicts, drunks, or thugs like Sockies, Foxy, Willieboy and Micheal Adonis. Even the white foreign male characters like Uncle Doughty and the sailors are respectively drunk and see the woman as a sex object as they sexually exploit Nancy and her mates under Miss Gipsy's pimpood. This implies that the limited or lack of values among the male sex is a gap that needs urgent attention.

The African male and female have always functioned in peaceful co-existence until the colonial project set them at daggers drawn. Unless the male African mind is decolonized, he would take the place of the 'Self' and place the woman at the periphery but such a binary must be deconstructed to permit fluidity.

When girls are given free empowerment in vocational training centers and boys compelled to pay or roam the streets idly, it won't be surprising if these unempowered boys turn into armed bandits and break into the shops of these empowered ladies. In *A Walk in the Night* for example, Foxy and his gang walk the night roam the streets of District Six, seeking opportunities to

commit robbery attacks. Michael Adonis loses his job at the white racist factory and ends up joining these gangsters at the end of the novel.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Doris, the old white woman who sees Tambu selling mealies pities and helps her because she is a girl. If she were a boy, little attention would be paid to her plight because of the societal misconception that the man has been in control already and has to give way for the woman. Such a mindset is reflected in Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* where Joe and Willieboy are allowed to themselves due to their parents' inability to cater for them, meanwhile their siblings (probably girls) stay at home because they are 'vulnerable.' The texts however, prove the contrary – boys are vulnerable too as most of them get involved in criminal activities. Willieboy even gets killed when roaming the nights aimlessly.

Strategies for Objective Gender Liberation

Social structures like family, career, church, mosque, tradition councils, amongst others could serve as brooding platforms for male empowerment. Unfortunately, some of these structures like Tambu's in *Nervous Conditions* are affected by patriarchal stereotypes. Tambu laments, 'the needs and sensibilities of the women in my family were not considered a priority or even legitimate.' (12).

Chowdhury and Manjari hold that it is impossible to promote gender equality within a patriarchal social order without the consent, mindset, and involvement of the male population. (2010:457). They emphasize the need to empower the boys and men in terms of their understanding, information, and capacity building with regard to equal opportunity for both sexes without which any amount of women reservation and welfare programs will not be able to enhance the status of women folk. Their Indian experience is not too different from the African scenario where a majority of the policy makers are men but lack the values which have been entrusted to women over the decades.

The fifth of the *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals* (UNSDGs) for 2030 is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. (UN, 2018). This goal, unfortunately paints the gloomy picture the world has been into for the past decades. The goal shows that whenever the subject of gender equality comes up, what stakeholders have in mind is the

woman and girl child whom they consider are the only ones vulnerable. For over fifty years, this has been the approach and it has not yielded much fruit. It is ironical to target only the oppressed in a liberation battle or conflict resolution process – they should target the ‘oppressor’ too. As earlier mentioned, the man is one of the key threats to the woman’s liberation, so the best way to liberate the woman is not to give her a shield to defend the blows or bullets from the man’s rifle but to disarm him strategically teaching him core values that will deter him from maltreating the woman. African folklore is a formidable storehouse of such values that can help the man see the woman as a reliable partner, helper and assistant who deserves his respect, care, protection and solidarity, not violence, battering, abuse and brutality as has been the case.

This paper therefore deconstructs the fifth goal’s implementation approach of the UN 2030 Agenda. This vacuum is discovered from a Derridian reading of the document which focuses on what is left out – the linguistic ‘other’ in order to bring out meaning. The paper proposes a consideration and inclusion of male sex empowerment alongside the female in a bid to attain effective liberation of both sexes. It is important to note however, that the male and female sexes cannot have the same degree of empowerment. They have different experiences and women remain more vulnerable.

The school curriculum is not what the male sex need in this liberation process. If it were so, educated men will not be beating up their wives, assaulting female students nor violating girls. What the male folk (and even the female folk) mostly need are African cultural values that are objective – values that valorize and celebrate womanhood, motherhood and recognize the woman’s strength as a formidable partner to the man. The men have to prioritize the woman’s sexual pleasure and prioritize her orgasm over their rapid ejaculation.

Furthermore, Koskey Chang’ach sees mentorship as a formable way of empowering the male sex in pursuit of female liberation when he asserts that, ‘There is need to identify and recognize successful professional men within the District who can act as role models or mentors to the boys.’ (2012:187). Reading through both texts under study, one struggles to see which male characters are worth emulating. In *Nervous Conditions*, Jeremiah

drinks with his friends all day while his wife, Ma'Shingayi works in the farm all day with a baby on her back and cooks for him every evening. Nhamo, Jeremiah's son claims to study all day and boycotts farm work while his sisters, Tambu and Netsai spend all day in the farm feeding cattle and watering vegetables. Takesure also lazes around on the pretext that his hardworking wife, Lucia, will provide for the home. Babamukuru, the head of the family, restricts his wife from visiting her family, uses all of her salary every month as he pleases and uses cruel methods to discipline his daughter, Nyasha which make her end up in a neurotic disorder. Tete has 'two pregnant daughters who have no husbands and the eldest son beating his wife so badly.' (148).

In *A Walk in the Night*, the case is not dissimilar. Men of valour are hard to trace in the text. Lorenzo keeps impregnating his wife, Grace and refuses to yield to her family planning appeal. They have five children who barely have a mattress to lay their head yet she is pregnant with the sixth. Due to excessive oppression from Lorenzo, 'her body had become worn and thickened with regular childbirth. Her face had the boniness and grandeur of an ascetic saint, and her eyes were dark wells of sadness mixed with joy.' (36). Lorenzo cannot even provide the family with two meals a day but sees his wife as a sex object baby-making machine. Likewise, we learn from a flashback that Willieboy's father beat up his mother regularly while he was a kid and the mother would sometimes transfer aggression to the innocent child. She beat him up until her ran away and chose the streets. Michael Adonis ends up joining armed bandits like Foxy while Constable Raalt fails to solve his dispute with his wife, Faith and transfers aggression to innocent blacks like Willieboy whom he shoots to death without evidence of his crime but mere hearsay. From a deconstructionist point of view, where the opposite of the present implies a greater meaning, we realize that the lack of men of substance and values worth emulating in both texts shows the dire need for men of value and cultural integrity to be included in the gender liberation project. We need to strive for a society where both sexes are empowered simultaneously.

It is ironical that some disempowered boys like Willieboy, still make an effort to protect their girls. Such is case with Willieboy. He expresses profound hatred for white sailors who exploit black South African girls sexually as he says 'I don't like them messing our girls. To hell with them...they got no right

messing with our girls.' (54). Willieboy even challenges one of them physically but 'Miss Gipsy hit him expertly behind an ear. He fell on his face over the table.' (55). If empowered, Willieboy could do much better in protecting the woman from disempowered men.

Also, counseling needs to be reinforced in the incarceration system. In an online article, medical doctor and motivational speaker, Paul Bundi Karau, observes that 'boys are easily imprisoned while girls are forgiven.' (2016 :1). In *A Walk in the Night*, we learn through a flashback that Willieboy has 'served in a reformatory and once in prison for assault' (3). The case is similar with Foxy and his fellow gangsters. We may expect a pimp like Miss Gipsy to be arrested for selling out black girls to her white clients as sex objects but such is not the case, probably because she is a woman. Willieboy's continuous crimes may further imply that there is some degree of ineffectiveness in the therapy or counseling of prisoners, most of whom are of the male sex. This causes recidivism as Michel Foucault admits in his elaborate discourse titled, *Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison*. (1975). The prison therefore is a good platform where men can be reformed, rehabilitated with spiritual emphasis, moral values and basic ethics that will positively affect their perception and treatment of women. If this is done, the woman will easily obtain qualitative liberation.

Again, the family unit has a great role to play. Nyangena Emily Moraa posits:

A parent with two teenagers of both sexes will be more protective over the girl and completely ignore the boy to take care of himself. This forces boys to engage in criminal activities such as drug abuse and terrorism. Consumption of illicit brews by young men is common.' (2018:19).

Willieboy goes through this experiences and ends up being a street gangster who is ironically killed on the day he commits no crime.

Lastly, state structures should accommodate programs aimed at empowering both sexes. Ministries of Social Affairs, Ministries of Women Affairs, and Departments of Gender Studies

in universities should intentionally incorporate the male sex alongside the female sex with the purpose of entrusting lasting values in men that will positively affect their treatment of women. Seminars, conferences, radio and TV programs should be organized for boys and men as has been the case with women and girls conferences across the globe. Churches, mosques, cultural groups, local community leaders and family heads are not left out of this collective effort towards female liberation. Joe and Andries in *A Walk in the Night* are symbolic of morality and male conscientisation. They use friendship and career as platforms for male empowerment respectively. They both advice their friends, Michael Adonis and Constable Raalt against crime and violence respectively. The deaf ears they receive show that male empowerment is a process that entails persistence and repetition before we attain the expected result. If family heads like Babamukuru in *Nervous Conditions* see this institution as a platform for building fellow men, the female/male approach to female liberation will yield better fruits.

Conclusion

This study identified lapses in the one-sided approach towards female emancipation for over half a century in Africa. Its objective was to use Derridan and Saussurean thought to deconstruct this lapse by portraying the effects of one-sided gender empowerment as enacted in Alex la Guma's *A Walk in the Night* and Tsitsi Danbgarembga's *Nervous Conditions* in order to reconstruct a balanced gender liberation project. The study submits that empowering the male sex is good, empowering the female sex is better, but empowering the female and male sex is best. If the girl child is empowered alongside the boy child, it will guarantee a safer future for both sexes and the African society. Empowering the woman and leaving out the man is paradoxically disempowering the woman because the unempowered man may remain a threat to the 'liberated' woman. Female and male empowerment is a remedy to female marginalisation, not solely female empowerment which has been more of a weapon for resistance. The male sex is also vulnerable and has the right to socio-economic empowerment and should not be neglected. Synergy therefore, ought to be established between the empowerment of both sexes although the female sex needs more

attention because they are more vulnerable than their male counterparts.

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