

EXAMINING THE (IN)SIGNIFICANCE OF THE AFRICAN BOYCHILD AS AN
UNHEARD VOICE IN FEMINIST CRITICAL DISCOURSES: A LITERARY
EXPLORATION OF BA, DANGAREMBGA AND ANDREAS' SELECTED WORKS

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ASHLEE BUTAU

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Supervisor: Dr N. Mlambo

ABSTRACT

This thesis examined how literature presents the (in)significance of the African boy child as an unheard voice in the selected feminist critical discourses of three literary works - Mariama Ba's (1979) *So Long a Letter*, Tsitsi Dangarembga's (1989) *Nervous Conditions* and Neshani Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshantuu* (2001). The presentation of the boy child in African feminist writing is an area which has not been given much attention in gender writing. The thrust in this research rests on the traditional African perspective, on who can be defined as the African boy child. This study incorporated young and grown up males, bearing in mind the fact that a grown up man in the African culture can be considered a boy child. This is so as to accommodate all males that are presented in the selected feminist critical discourse. Studies on the (re)presentation of the boy child in literary fiction is, as far as the research has established, an understudied area within the broader area of gender discourse. The three novels were selected using purposive sampling as they portray an array of masculinities. The researcher employed Masculinities and Nego-feminism as literary theories to underpin this study, from examining the various roles boy children and males in general play in the texts. Masculinities as a concept was used in order to magnify the construction of the boy child's identity as it has a lot of bearing on the character of men. Nego-feminism places both genders side by side as men and women try to negotiate their spaces in life and mirrors how the negotiated spaces between the boy children and the females bring about a transformed society in which negative patriarchal values melt away. The study analysed how the three selected female authors portray masculinities as they are experienced in daily life and where historical periods determine their different reactions to the social constructs that gender is. A qualitative research design was adopted to interpret the portrayal of masculinities in the two novels. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the three novels for the portrayal of the boy child characters. The study indicated that the boy child's identities are a product of a social construct which differs from

community to community, and are constantly subject to change. The study observed that the selected feminist discourses have seemingly muted the voice of the boy child who is represented in the three texts as having a privileged position in the society compared to the girl child. The study further noted that feminist writers employ a boy child inhibiting motif that is embraced in muted efforts of the African patriarch to improve gender issues by pedestalsing the female voice. The study evaluated the effectiveness of the boy children's silences in matters pertaining to human affairs and the erasure of hegemonic influences on the globe as one of the fundamental aspects of feminism. The three selected female authors seemingly represented the boy children in a society that exploits the patriarchal dividend of power and hold on to the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. However, the research also observed that, as portrayed by Ba, Dangarembga and Andreas, some of the boy children are virtuous, admirable and responsible. In discoursing about the boy child (re)presentations of the boy child adjunct inter-texting themes include brotherhood, boy child education as reflection of gender preferences and an instrument of oppression, fathers and son relationships and boy hood as a construct through socialisation, tradition, cultural practices, education and projections of gender.

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DEDICATION

To my loving and caring father Mr Grey Butau. Thank you so much for standing by me. May you live longer and may God continue to bless you for me.

DECLARATION

I, Ashlee Fungaishe Butau, hereby declare that this study is a true reflection of my own research, and that this work, or part thereof has not been submitted for a degree in any institution of higher education.

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Date

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

This chapter serves as an introduction to the study by providing the background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, significance of the study, limitations of the study and the organisation of the study.

1.2. Background of the study

This study critically examined how literature presents the (in)significance of the African boy child as an unheard voice in the selected feminist critical discourses focusing on Mariama Ba`s (1979) *So Long a Letter*, Tsitsi Dangarembga`s (1989) *Nervous Conditions* and Neshani Andreas`s *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001). There are some studies such as Muchemwa and Muponde (2007), Mutunda (2009) which have been conducted on gender issues as presented through literary works. These studies have explored how masculinities can be understood in relation to female figures. In other words, they have focused on the power at play between male and female relations (Zhuwarara, 2016).

According to Harageib (2018), “the discourse on gender parity, equality and patriarchy has put the boy child and males in a wilderness of identity” (p.1). This attempt has drawn a critical canvas of victimhood on the girl child, whilst the boy child is peripherally treated in most feminist literary discourses. Moreover, much has been written (Bulawayo, 2013; Emecheta, 2013; Walker, 1982) giving the girl child and females in general a voice especially in feminist critical discourses, to help the female child unshackle the chains that have been keeping her down, and yet in the process, the boy child and males in general have not been afforded adequate breadth. Thus, the boy child seems to be an unheard voice in African women writers` fiction and the literary criticism thereof

this study becomes crucial as it considered those aspects pertaining to the presentation of the boy child in the selected African texts. This is supported by Chang'ach (2012) who states that, "the negligence of issues affecting the boy child is apparent and evident in feminist critical discourse and academic literature" (p. 7). The voice in feminist critical discourses usually reflects the experiences of male dominated contexts in solving female problems; it also bespeaks of the inadequacy of the presentation of the girl child and justifies the death of male-centrism.

The stereotyped woman has been suffering under a polemical society wherein her contribution appears as a second class service as the society holds stereotypical generalisations, views or the boy child character (Chitando, 2015). In most societies which claimed tolerance, it was not bordered on decency as tacit barriers hindered the mobility of women, the history of Jane Austen and the Bronte sisters even faced such discriminations in the wake of 'The Age of Female Novelist' in the nineteenth century (Zhuwarara, 2016). Bell (2002) give form to writers themselves stigmatising women despite cultural shifts throughout the century. Azodo (2003) illuminates that women novelists enjoy keeping their focus narrow. V.S. Naipaul declared that, "no living or dead female author could be his equal" ... when it comes to writing with the sense of gender equity in mind because most females writers are bogged down by their limited, "sentimental sense of the world."

Culture industries have elicited much gender bias such that issues of gender inequality have been banal and calling for an equal address through protest and repressive resistance from concerned civil bodies. This advent wove a string of texts from feminists who championed for the recognition and respect of female species in both virtual and real time life contexts as juxtaposed to male existence (Zhuwarara, 2016). The issue of gender redress was not for comparisons' sake but as means of seeking parity. To this end, the majority of the feminist authors tend to focus mostly on

an attempt to rescue and defend the rights of the females in their literary discourse. They divert from generally accepted norms as a way of decentralising entrenched politics in writing through a unique discourse other than that of stereotypical maternal sentimentality into a far more surpassing powerhouse which threatens male patriarchal chauvinism.

Maudeni (2009) defines the boy as a male child, from birth to full growth. This is supported by the charters of UNICEF's Convention on the Right of the Child as stated by UNICEF (2010-2013, p. 120) which dub a child "as a minor in dire need of protection." Thus childhood is a hallmark of growing, learning and playing which determines development. The African Charter on the Rights of the Child defines a child as everyone below the age of 18 years. However, in this study, the boy child is defined as a male offspring below and above the age of eighteen years. The thrust in this research is on the traditional African perspective, on who can be defined as the African boy child.

Ngugi (2003) attests that "the traditional African world view of boy childhood holds that the child is delicate and needs protection and can only become a full recognised person through some processes of incorporation by ritualisation, training and socialisation." Bell (2002) remarks that "an African child is also viewed to some extent as a saviour child, noble responsible for others around him or her" (p. 13). The perceptions for an African male child in this case is that a child remains a child nomatter what age. This is supported by Boateng (2010) states that the African boy child remains "the unadulterated child nomatter what age" (p. 25). This study incorporated young and grown up males, bearing in mind the fact that a grown up man in the African culture can be considered a boy child. This is so as to accommodate all males that are presented in the selected feminist critical discourse. In the same way, though on slightly different dimensions, a child as a representation of cultural rituals of productivity and success essential for family expansion (Kimathi, 2009). This doing away with age range is highly perforated with the belief

that no one can live for one's self but need to be incorporated into a society or body politic to safeguard them; hence, this study accommodating all male characters in the texts with the mandate to scrutinise the representation of the boy child growth from boyhood to adulthood. According to Nyangaresi (2016, p. 41) "boyhood is the specific attempt to construct a particular manhood through repetition of a particular behaviour either by an individual or a group." Establishing the (in)significance of boy childhood in African texts can thus be ascertained after detailing the history of gender and how it has affected the society. Studies of gender gaps in representation do exist, they have privileged the exploration of female under-representation over that of male representation in African literature (Muchemwa & Muponde, 2007). Consequently, the study examined whether the boy child is being considered as worth or unimportant to be worth of consideration in feminist discourses.

Mutunda (2009) contends that the subject of masculinity in African women's writing has not been fully explored as little attention has been given to the analysis of women's writing when it comes to the issue of the boy child. Thus, the interplay of boy childhood by female writers connotes to the susceptibility of the patriarchal order to disaster and error (Zhuwarara, 2016). It also denotes the score of universality and later diverts to expose the miscellany of the boy child which usually disheartens the society by creating a social death and lack of gender equity. This shatters the probability of 'expanding the family tree' implying that male dominance, through boy child representation in female texts, has to die so as to afford the matriarchal society a room to grow and the bid to liberate the girl child. Studies on the representation of the boy child, and of males in general, are encapsulated within the discourse of masculinities. According to Muchemwa and Muponde (2007), "masculinity and fatherhood in the context of Zimbabwe is a field of academic

study that has suffered long and unnecessary neglect” (p. 28). This attests to the unwarranted focus on the short falls of women in negligence of other major social pertinent issues.

The world seems to be overwhelmed by the thought of being effeminised and seeks ways to purge it instead of checking the phenomenon of intolerance ushered in by masculinity. Mutunda (2009) contends that the subject of masculinity in African women’s writing has not been fully explored as little attention has been given to the analysis of women’s writing when it comes to the issue of the boy child.

Research has confirmed that studies of the boy child have been minimal compared to the girl child as nothing substantive has been done for the embattled boy child especially in feminists’ discourses (Akaki, 2013; Maundeni, 2009; Mutunda, 2009). Women empowerment and the fight for the girl child have so far been a great achievement following the vigorous feministic texts in African literature (Maundeni, 2009). The boy child therefore seems to be an unheard voice that is precluded by the ongoing endeavour to safeguard, uplift and empower the rights and status of the girl child through feminist literary discourses. The boy child thus appears to have been the ‘forgotten’ other, that is peripherally treated (Akaki, 2013).

It is vital to reveal that feminists have had an unforgiving history of the violence waged on them by the patriarch that they have employed counter violence. Males have been either suppressed or given a limited platform in feminist discourse for reasons which border on gender divides (Mutunda, 2009). Thus, literary texts have been a perpetuation of such thematic thrust that they have been measured in terms of how they treat males in their texts.

Literature from East Africa suggests that there is disproportionate emphasis on the rights of the girl child and that this disproportionality has been at the expense of the boy child especially in

feminist discourses (Akaki, 2013). This imbalance in favour of a particular gender, while seeking to engender greater gender parity, may have unintended consequences. Valid transformation of gender relations requires an equal representation and focus on the boy child and the girl child in feminist critical discourses. A critical examination of available literature demonstrates that the significance of the boy child is slowly fading out with focus shifting to the girl child in feminist critical discourses. This is exemplified by how Dangarembga's character Tambu who succeeds in earning income for her schooling as well as use the money on helping the family and Nhamo from the scourge of poverty. At the same time, these discourses have endeavoured to do away with male dispensation by 'planting' female characters in positions where male contribution is rendered sterile. Walker's *The Color Purple* enables the character Celie to do the industrious and productive work while Mr Albert dozes off to sleep in his rocking chair. He is obliterated from the social scene that he is often named Mr – in some instances in the text. This is illustrated by how much writing and oratory have been directed to the girl child.

Diverse scholarly views have been forwarded to the research desk regarding gender issues but most of them have paid more attention on the issues concerning the girl child (Akaki, 2013; Maundeni, 2004; Mutunda, 2009). For instance, Mutunda (2009) indicates that the focus and concentration in African feminists' literary discourses seem to concentrate in uplifting the livelihood and well-being of the female characters whilst downplaying and or rendering peripheral the males, especially the vulnerable boy child (Akaki, 2013). However, scholars such as Zhuwarara (2016) have endeavoured to interrogate masculinities in female authored texts as a way to unmask the uncertainties underlying the existence of male figures both in literary writing and in the real world. In addition, Maundeni (2009) investigates the issue of the boy child and HIV/AIDS in Botswana, whilst highlighting the issue of maleness as a disturbingly neglected issue in literary

research focusing on gender issues. Therefore, the present study sought to explore the (in)significance of the boy child in feminist literary discourses, which has been identified as a concern in the representation of males and gender issues in African literature.

1.3. Statement of the problem

The study investigated the absence of the boy child in feminist literary discourses, which is a current challenge as most African feminists seem to focus on the equity in relation to the girl child instead of creating an equitable society where males and females function in complementarity. The aim of this study was to critically explore how feminists present the boy child and other males in their feminist critical discourses. The lack of adequate attention towards the boy child is manifested by the scantiness of literary criticism on how men in general and boys in particular positively contribute to the well-being of society in the selected feminist novels Mariama Ba's (1979) *So Long a Letter*, Tsitsi Dangarembga's (1989) *Nervous Conditions* and Neshani Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001). In most cases, feminists and literary critics of feminist works write about the girl child and hardly about the boy child for example, Alice Walker's (1982) *The Colour Purple*, Chimamanda's (2013) *Americannah*, Emecheta's (2013) *Second Class Citizen*, No Violet Bulawayo's (2013) *We Need New Names* and Zukuwisa's (2013) *The Maid in SA*. Henceforth, a limited research has been focused on the images of men in female-authored texts and there is "the danger of a single story" (Chimamanda, as cited in Zhuwarara, 2016, p. 2). This is not to say that there is something debauched with talking for and seeking the wellbeing of females through literature, admittedly girls are more vulnerable, but consistently a question can be raised that; as a child, is the boy child not equally vulnerable and important in feminist discourses? It is easy to overlook the experiences of the African boy child since more concern has been focused on liberating girls and women. This cultural milieu has marooned the boy child to his own schemes,

Arguably, the representation of boy child has marred self-confidence and lost right decision making of males to some extent.

1.4. Objectives of the study

This study sought to:

1.3.1 Examine the literary presentation of the (in)significance of the African boy child in the selected feminist fictional works;

1.3.2 Analyse emerging themes from the discussion of the (in)significance of the boy child as an unheard voice in the three selected novels; and

1.3.3 Explore the literary presentation of the positive possibilities emanating from significant boy child contributions to gender concerns in the selected novels.

1.5. Significance of the study

This study would contribute to the existing narrow body of literature on masculinity and how it relates to gender, and it might help to inform other studies on gender in fiction about the availability of space for the complementarity of femininity and masculinity in literary works through the use of two theories, Masculinities and Nego-feminism. This could help to bring a better understanding of the complex interlinking of studies on gender issues and provides valuable information for scholars, researchers, policymakers and academics as well as those interested in the subject of the literary presentation of the African boy child in Africa.

1.6. Limitations of the study

This study explored the (in)significance of the African boy child as an unheard voice in feminist discourses as presented in the three novels, Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1989), Bà's *So Long a Letter* (1979) and Andreas' *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001). Thus, the study was

limited to the three novels which allowed for an in-depth analysis, yet the findings of the study cannot be generalised to the body African literature as a whole. Furthermore, the study as whole was theoretically limited to the use of Masculinities and Nego-feminism as theoretical lenses, even though there are many literary theories that can be used and this may consequently limit the breadth of the findings. The researcher relied on secondary texts which had to be analysed and contextualised towards the research needs (Akaki, 2013; Maundeni, 2004; Mutunda, 2009). Hence, information gathered was biased to the researcher's judgements and evaluation. More so, time constricted the researcher's flexibility in coming up with a clean and in depth research as there were other academic commitments to be tied along the research period.

1.7. Delimitations of the study

This study was confined to the examination of the (in)significance of the African boy child as represented in the selected feminist discourses from a number of novels to allow a specialised mode which zeros in on a manageable population sample. Additionally, the use of two theoretical lenses, Masculinities and Nego-feminism proved useful in coming up with an Afro-gender based literature research. The internet also provided the researcher with a wider range of information sieving to the ultimate acquisition of relevant data for the research.

1.8. Outline of the chapters

This study comprises of five chapters which were subdivided into subsections with subtitles. The first chapter provided the introductory background of the research, aims and objectives of the study, statement of the problem, significance and limitation of the study. Chapter Two reviews the literature on what is masculinity, how masculinities are presented in female writing, and the concept of Masculinities and Nego-feminism as theories are discussed. It projects on the gaps of study by reviewing scholarly attributes on the birth of a female voice and how it (re)addressed

gender inequalities through characterisation in literary texts. Thus, it acted as a preamble from which the researcher's assumptions and arguments were logged. Chapter Three presents the research methodology used for the study. Chapter Four discusses the presentation of the boy child in the novels *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga (1988), *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* by Neshani Andreas (2001) and *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba (1979), and discusses the characters' relationships, emerging themes and evaluates the balance in the female presentation of the male character. The final chapter presents the conclusion and offers recommendations as well.

1.9. Chapter summary

This chapter spelt out the background of study by outlining the objectives and aims of the research. It also gave the significance of study, limitations and delimitations to the study. Moreover, it explored on the research methodology and design employed in coming up with a theoretical framework. It then concluded by conceptual chapter layout that was followed by the research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

The study explores the (in)significance of the boy child in feminist critical discourses in female authored texts, namely Dangarembga's (1988) *Nervous Conditions*, Ba's (1979) *So Long a Letter* and Andreas' (2001) *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*. This literature review focuses on the position of the boy child in the 21st century by reviewing and assessing related works, the emerging themes from the discussion of the (in)significance of the boy child and males in general, the literary presentation of the positive possibilities emanating from significant boy child contributions, and feminism in general, so as to highlight on gender anomalies which the society has either normalised or naturalised. Subsequently, it discussed different perspectives on what it means to be a boy child and the treatment of male figures by feminists' writers.

The research further critiques the different views on how masculinities are socially and culturally constructed in different African societies and their reaction to their prescribed roles. It also reviewed the salient tenets of two theoretical frameworks as the magnifying lenses which position women and men on the stage of literary works. Theories are notions arising out of research which can be put to test to help feel the gaps that may have been omitted in previous studies of the same topic. Therefore, this chapter explores theories such as Nego-feminism and Masculinities. Finally, the literature review concludes by identifying the gaps in literature that analysed the novels: *Nervous Conditions*, *So Long a Letter* and *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*.

2.2. Review of literature

2.2.1 Who is the African boy child?

It is imperative for the study that it articulately define the boy child within an African context. The boy child is a term that assigns innocence and softens the image of the male sex despite the negative onslaught and generalisation of the male sex as oppressors and victimisers of the opposite sex (Kimathi, 2009). Butler (1990) argues that boyhood could be understood within the context of our research from both individual and social perspective. The meaning of the boy therefore changes with the change of the individual boy as well as the change of the society. Arguably, these cultural ideas that can be comparable to what the boys display but these ideas are not stagnant as they have come up as a product of change in time. In both cases, masculinity is compared and contrasted based on temporal criterion. This is viewed as an enactment of boy-like or man-like behaviour by either an individual or a group at a particular time due to specific influences then (Nyangaresi, 2016). In the Shona language, a boy child is called *mwanakomana*, basically the term *mwanakomana* is a constant reminder for a male to remember their roots and cultural roles in the family institution. The birth of a boy child in most African cultures across the globe signifies tons of benefits and meanings. Apart from being the pride of their family, African fathers believe that male children help to represent them well (Obadina, 2006). Africans believe that male children signify the strength of their fathers in any marriage (Gitau, 2008). This study therefore, examined the position of boy child in the selected texts. Boy childhood is a complex term that has evolved over time. It has also been adapted to the changes in our African society and to our conceptions of what a boy child should be. This study, briefly traced the position of the African boy child in

African literary studies that has evolved continually up to the 21st century. Culture plays a central role to these changes.

The society's positioning does not mean that the boys are passive or localised to claim a means of the redemption of their image (Nyangaresi, 2016). It is also important to note that the image given to the boy child would be relative. This implies that there is no homogeneous judgment in understanding the society's exploitation of the ideas held on the boy child character in its own view. Mutunda (2009) observes that it is difficult for the African male figures to understand their identity in the African context as the role attributed to them is a social construct which varies from society to society. These constructs are therefore treated as societal opinions and to that effect these representations are viewed as calling for the balance in how the boy child is represented by the narration voice, how this boy child represents himself. As laws and policies got developed in the 21st century, the female lens not only dominated the discourse but also crowded out the boy child's voice (Muponde, 2011). Consequently, the impact of such changes can find expression through the actions and characters of the male figures in literary works.

2.2.2 The position of the African boy child in the 21st century

It is imperative to look at the position of the boy child in the 21st century. Chang'ach (2012) opines that the boy child of the 21st century is faced with tremendous challenges which unless properly guarded, may result in the forfeiture of the boy child's life. Children are the future leaders and guardians of tomorrow. The first aim of every family and society should be to raise healthy and productive individuals thus the boy child and the girl child who are physically, psychologically and mentally well developed (Chang'ach, 2012). The process of becoming a man involves the orientation of the boy child's life towards a male world and identification with the "father" (Zhuwarara, 2016, p. 21). These can be achieved through guidance and education of the boy child

who is the father figure and a husband of tomorrow through academic literature. Chang'ach (2012) postulates that, "the negligence of issues affecting the boy child is apparent and evident in most feminist critical discourses and academic literature" (p. 13). To illustrate this, Chang'ach (2012), posits that persistent campaigns for awareness of girl's retention in school has started bearing fruits. In retrospect the society has ignored the plight of the boy child and further recommends more research must be done on the issues concerning the boy child especially in academic literature.

The issue of the African boy child of the 21st century has not been adequately addressed (World Bank, 2005). Africa is one of the harshest and most difficult places to live in, especially for men in most parts of the region, "it is marked by an unending struggle to see through diseases, ethnic cleansing, divorces, conflict, poverty, forced labour, sexual harassment and other quandaries from birth, through childhood, adulthood and even death" (Azodo, 2003). Wang'odu (2015) further remarks that the journey of the boy child born in the African soil starts from the day of conception and that the boy child in Africa has for many generations unwittingly benefited from a patriarchal society that has prized men over women and sons over daughters. It becomes vital, that such remarks be further explored through the critical literary analysis of the presentation of the boy child in the selected feminist critical discourses and find out whether the African boy child is treated significant or as the (in)significant other as employed by the various characters in the selected texts namely, Dangarembga's (1988) *Nervous Conditions*, Ba's (1979) *So Long a Letter* and Andreas (2001) *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*.

According to Gitau (2012), evidence on the concerns of the 21st century African boy child in Kenya suggests that the girl child empowerment in Kenyan literature has side-lined the boy child pushing him to the periphery and the boy child of today has been ignored for too long. Commenting on the

present situation of the African boy child, recent research by a critic Harageib (2018) laments on the state of the Namibian boy child, indicating that to better understand the issues plaguing the boy child there is need to begin interrogating the systems that surround the boy child in the society, contrary to popular belief, the nuclear family that we idealise so much, has been broken for decades and is not the silver bullet to deal with the societal ills.

Moreover, Harageib (2018) claims that it has been broken since pre-independence which is evident in the current landscape of Namibia. Harageib (2018) acknowledges that the paucity of publications on the presentation of the boy child in feminist critical discourse by observing that in Africa as a whole and Namibia in particular the presentation of the boy child in African literature is scarce. This approach has drawn a template of victimhood of the girl children characters and ignored the boy children figures who suffer the same fate under hegemonic masculinity (Zhuwarara, 2016).

Furthermore, Harageib (2018) argues that some of the African fathers that are present may not have had good role models in their families or in the communities they grew up in, broken families and the problem is further compounded by the layering of many other complex social issues such as poverty, education and employment. However, this possibly affects the boyhood of the boy child right through to adulthood. Many children are raised by single mothers who often must overcompensate for the absentee fathers emotionally and physically. Gitau (2012) has found out that the boy child seems to be suffering a life skills crisis and needs to be empowered. Life skills enable one to deal with day to day challenges.

According to Nyangaresi (2016), “Boys are associated with superiority in day to day representations” (p. 8). However, it should be noted that “there has been a departure from this

traditional claim that consider males superior and as favoured by the language used to represent them in the recent works” (Nyangaresi 2016, p. 8). In pre-colonial African society, which was largely patriarchal, certain behaviours and norms were culturally preserved specifically for either a male or a female which could also be referred to as gender stereotypes. This dichotomy meant that certain lines were not to be crossed in terms of division of labour (Wandati, 2017). Men occupied roles in politics and decision making while women were reduced to court entertainers and child bearers with no important role in matters of decision making in society.

Achebe (1988) asserts that the man was the head of the family while the women were subordinate to men. Young boys were socialised to be courageous and strong which was typically associated with masculinity as the stronger of the two sexes while female children were confined to the home as was typical to femininity as the weaker sex. In this case, the African boy child is expected to be tough and self-reliant for his future role as head of a household (Zhuwarara, 2016). For a long time, these roles were not contested as they were nurtured as being natural. This is evident and echoed in Giles Kuimba, a Zimbabwean writer’s book novel written in the Shona Language entitled “*Saraoga Mwanangu*” meaning “my child Saraoga” and the title of the book is allegorical. The boy child has always been treasured in the African culture. The novel is about a King who is enlightening his dearly beloved boy child that he should grow up and become a virile man who is able to face the gruelling challenges that might come his way since he is the heir apparent to his father’s throne. Saraoga, who is the first born of his father, a polygamous king, who has so many wives faces resentment from his uncles who face their eyes in his father’s throne is a typical character who exemplifies how important it was to have a male child in the African society.

Consequently, family values are in danger since the boy child is expected to head the family and to take over the chieftaincy or the kingship in the African context (Azodo, 2003). The issue of the

boy child becoming the head of the family or the heir apparently has caused many families today to be dysfunctional to date (Waweru, 2016). This is also seen in the famous of Shakespeare's drama *Hamlet* where the boy child of the King called "Hamlet" faces personal challenges and problems yet he has no one including his own mother "Queen Gertrude" to confide and rely on. Instead, he becomes a procrastinator and he is weak. Currently, it has become common for some fathers and mothers to neglect their boy child as they fail to contribute towards the upbringing of their children. Many children are being raised by single mothers who often, must overcompensate for absentee fathers (emotionally and physically). Most parents are absent physically or emotionally to act as role models to the boy child.

Wandati (2017) establishes that in Central Kenya for instance, alcoholism is a big problem and that most of those who drink are youth aged 17-28 years. Furthermore, Wandati (2017) contends that the men were enslaved by the bottle and they neglected their responsibilities as bread winners and as protectors of families whilst denying their women their conjugal rights. Young boys in Africa have also been subjected into conscripting to acts of ancient traditional rituals against their wills for instance the painful traditional circumcision, and ancient practices of facial and body scarification (Wandati, 2017).

Julie Masiga dubbed her blog 'Now the boy-child becomes an engendered species'. The blog states further that, "Die hard feminism is no longer as popular as it used to be" it is imperative to note that feminists who made their home on the fringe of the movement to re-inscribe women and liberate the girl child have gradually made their way to an area slightly left of centre. Boys now seem to be torn between civilisation and the global culture that they have been alienated from the society. UNESCO (2013) has attributed this to have led boys to drop out from school and or abuse drugs. Feelings of having been thrown from the centre of recognition has somewhat led to

negligence and associated psychological traumas. Battles waged by feminists have left fissures on the society (Sommers, 2000).

The 21st century has had its genres perpetrating (dis)continued debates on gender representation and devised avenues for possibly elevate one by denigrating the other just as the politics of imperialism operated. Thus, it feels noteworthy to explore how this is explored in literary texts as they are also considered as mirrors of the society. Eckert (1996, p. 10) posits that being a baby is a ‘taboo’ and leaving babyhood means very different things for boys than it does for girls, the fact that growing up involves gender differentiation is encoded in the words of assessment with which progress is monitored - kids do not behave as good or bad people, but as ‘good boys or girls’ and they develop into big boys and big girls. Nyangaresi (2016) interrogates the shift from the formerly claimed superiority in the boy child to the girl child and confirmed that there is a change in the thoughts on how a boy or girl should be viewed in the society.

It is in the light of the position of the boy child in the 21st century and treatment of the male figure in literary writing and criticism that Muponde and Muchemwa (as cited in Zhuwarara, 2016) consider masculinity and fatherhood in Zimbabwe as a field of academic study that has suffered long and unnecessary neglect. They argue that critical practices deny the existence of the marginalised and emerging masculinities hence the need to explore more on the (in)significance of the boy child in feminist critical discourses in female authored texts. This is supported by Musanga and Mutekwa (2013) who articulate that:

There were no fixed binarisation of masculinities and femininities but they were instead permeable categories as exemplified by Amadiume’s (1987) text *Male daughters, female husbands. Gender and sex in an African society* and Oyewumi’s (1997) text. The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses. (p. 80)

2.2.3. The voice of the boy child in feminist critical discourse

As much as feminist discourse in Africa deals with reconstruction of women identities and giving voice to women, it is important to uncover the in(insignificance) of the boy child as an unheard voice in feminist critical discourses by looking at the representation of male characters in feminists' critical discourse. Chitando (2011) states that:

Where previously the discipline was dominated by men's voices and visions, they have radically altered the face of the discipline, women's voices and experiences have become an integral part of African literature, women writers concentrate on women's struggles against suffocation by patriarchal dictates. (p. 42)

Chitando (2011) observes that African women writers, by articulating women's voices as their narrators they have managed to counter phallogocentric discourses, the boy child has not been given the ample space to voice out in most feminist critical discourses. Wandati (2017) highlights that the need to deconstruct and subvert patriarchy and phallogocentric tendency led to the creation of female characters that are vocal, assertive, independent, educated and submissive in most feminist critical discourses. This is evident in Ba and Dangarembga's texts use of female protagonists that are vocal, hardworking and educated. This is perceived in their texts, through their female protagonists' respectively, Ramatouyale and Tambudzai who take us through the novel. A lot has been done to give the girl child her voice, feminists writers, groups and activists come together with many projects that are all about helping the girl child unshackle the chains keeping her down and in the process the boy child has been left behind (Akaki, 2013). The girl child seems to be enjoying her freedom and coming out of her shell, whilst the boy is fighting to be treated better. The society is inclined to supporting the girl child more than the boy child (Maithya, 2016).

Foucault's (as cited in Nyangaresi, 2016)) argues that power can be constructed, reconstructed and conducted through discourse. Nyangaresi (2016) suggests that the alteration in the thoughts on how a boy child or girl child should be observed in the society is therefore a critical issue to be mapped along the "spatial and temporal spatialities because the values of the context of social representations remain dynamic and this is pegged on the shift of time and space" (p. 9).

Akaki (2013) posits that the female gender is considered to be the weaker sex especially in literary texts, in most fields a man is considered superior so that qualifying standards are lowered in which the girl child can fit in. Ba (2002) echoed the same sentiments in an interview where she mentioned the important function of the book as a weapon, she reiterates that women cannot empower themselves if their liberation quest is not informed by their culture.

Akaki (2013) suggests that issues of the girl child are given more prominence since it is assumed men can handle their issues. Thus, the suppressed voice of the boy child in feminist discourse is not a mere exclusion of the boy child. Muponde (2011) suggests that many feminists begin as responses to women's concerns about gender bias in their literary work and then end up by putting forward general epistemological claims about how a masculine bias must pervade the prevailing discourses. This is so as it becomes a social death of male narratives and the patriarch at large. The desire is to erase not only the mere boy child but the hegemonic masculinities and its ideologies from influencing the way societies operate.

Women have forever been requiring literal and figurative freedom from the patriarchal climate as expressed by Woolf (2014):

I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse perhaps to be locked in; and, thinking of the safety and prosperity of the one sex and of the poverty and

insecurity of the other and of the effect of tradition and of the lack of tradition upon the mind of a writer, I thought at last that it was time to roll up the crumpled skin of the day, with its arguments and its impressions and its anger and its laughter, and cast it into the hedge. (pp. 14-15)

The above quote may seem ancient but it is important to note that Woolf's (2014) essay sums up on how women have tried to lock themselves up in a world without man in their critical discourse since 19th century, the quotation persuades one to closely ponder about the words of Woolf. Thus, the representations of boy child seem to be inaudible in feminist literary discourses, it has been a curse to manhood and it has mainly targeted at disparaging masculine ideologies. For many years, African women were a muzzled group. The African traditional society gagged them terribly that they had no say about any issue that touched on their lives. It was a world ruled by men, and women were forced to put up with that harsh reality. Back then, gender equality was an unheard voice as there were no civil society groups to endorse it and women could not fight for it since they feared men and the consequences that would come with opposing male chauvinism (Musanga & Mutekwa, 2013).

Fast forward to the second half of the 20th century and preoccupations started changing. The African woman started seeing the light, thanks to the adoption of Western culture and formal education by African communities. Furusa (2006) suggests that most Zimbabwean women writers are too harsh in their portrayal of gender relations but does not go further to unveil the reasons behind such harsh tendencies as a possibly influenced by western feminist concepts. Shaba (2006) subverts the patriarchal notion that women are docile and rely on men for their well-being and clearly exposes that women have equal potential to leadership as that of men. Shaba (2006) makes

use of vulgar vocabulary to ridicule and satirise patriarchy and gives voice to the woman. However, Shaba's (2006) use of satire and strong profane language, does not offer ways in which both men and women can work together for equal human rights. Human rights groups and civil society groups emerged and started aggressive advocacy for gender equality and women rights. African men, albeit reluctantly, seemed to embrace the idea.

The African society has started realising that an educated woman who has equal rights as her male counterparts would be of more a benefit to the society (Chitando, 2011). This saw the enrolment of girls in schools and higher learning institutions go up in African countries and subsequently, women started infiltrating male - dominated careers such as politics, medicine, law and even engineering just to mention a few (Wang'undo, 2015). Women had just realised that what a boy child could do, they could surely do it better. Musanga and Mutekwa (2013) currently argue that the push for gender equality continues bearing fruit in abundance. All along, men did not see any threat to them arising from empowerment of women and they continued to support it tirelessly. The support continued up to a point where men and women were for sure equal and the gender equality objective was achieved. As at this date, rights of the girl child and girl child empowerment seem to have taken the centre stage in all aspects of life and have overshadowed boy child empowerment as the society seems to be more inclined to supporting girls more than boys. Boys are assumed to be tough and able to deal with the problems in their lives on their own (Waweru, 2016). They are assumed to be less vulnerable to social misdeeds such as sexual harassment, child labour, and violence among many others.

The African female finds herself inclined to the western culture and this phenomenon in itself hinders the quest of self-discovery in their feminist critical literary discourse such that the African

woman attempts to embark. According to Gapa (2014), African women's plights for emancipation have been accused of being muffled by white centred feminism tendencies such that their narrations have failed to promote lasting social change. The fact that colonialism attacks the culture of a people, the transformations that took place have a direct impact on culture and consequently on gender roles. The African woman, who, to borrow Said's (as cited by Gapa, 2014) concept of the 'Other' having been stripped off her identity, alienated, was forced to prematurely adopt the ideals of Western feminism. In the wake of a double identity and no complete access to western culture or her traditional culture, the African woman is in a violent postcolonial struggle of regaining identity.

Gapa (2014) argues that it is only after reconciling with the positive contribution of feminist consciousness and the engagement with African men, without any Western influence, that the African woman can have a chance at liberation. Felix Mnthali (as cited in Ashcroft et al., 2011) in his poem 'Letter to a feminist friend', highlights how the African woman and man must come together to fight the yoke of the legacy of cultural imperialism before they confront each other with false consciousness of their postcolonial situation. Mnthali (as cited in Gapa, 2014) therefore attacks the influence of feminist ideals on the African woman's movement for emancipation:

Why should they be allowed?

to come between us?

You and I were slaves together

Uprooted and humiliated together

Rapes and lynching's. (p. 252)

Moving on to matters of education, girls are getting admitted to universities and colleges at lower cluster points than boys (Wandati, 2017). According to Wandati (2017), this policy was adopted based on the argument that girls have been undermined by the society and they lose study time doing household chores not to mention that they miss school for at least one a week every month due to menses. Wandati (2017) implements that maybe it was assumed that boys do not face any challenges while schooling and they cannot lose study time for any reasons whatsoever. These reasons do not hold water anymore as the environment in which the boy child and the girl child grow up in today's world is more or less harmonised. Today, boys do household chores that used to be a preserve of girls. Wandati (2017) defends that, “the boy children in the society is not sure on whether they should cook and wash dishes or they should defend their title as head of the family” (p. 5). The society no longer undermines girls and they are seen as being equally good (or even better) as boys, thanks to modern civilisation.

The study, therefore sought to enlighten and elucidate further on the situation of the boy child since much research, statistics, writings, oratory and action has been dedicated to the girl child, yet nothing substantive has been done for the embattled boy child. The research issues in this study involved much of societal concerns; therefore it was substantive to pay utmost devotion in the consideration of the current treatment of the boy child in the society today. Women empowerment has so far been a great achievement following the vigorous campaigns and guidelines initiated globally, with a solitary endeavour to safeguard, uplift and empower the rights and status of the girl child. On the contrary, the boy child has been seemingly forgotten as a result, as he has been rendered or rather subjected to all kinds of inhumane societal mischief, and unending life struggles (Azodo, 2003). The societal gendering forces have left the boy child crippled in all manners that inform his representation (Nyangaresi, 2016). As a result, the boy child is in the move towards

reclaiming his lost position in the society. These forces combine economic and social components that articulate the experiences of the troubled boy. However, the society only picks “the boy child” to be vulnerable to the outdated practices. The boy child continues to portray most of his wrong behavioural patterns. The behaviours represent the boy child as a suffocated element in the society of the setting.

The male counterparts are left to fight on their own; they hustle and tussle to make it through without the equal opportunities, support, guidance and protection showered and instilled in favour of women. The boy child in Africa has for many generations unwittingly benefited from a patriarchal society that has prized men over women and sons over daughters. The African boy child has always been given priority and dominion over his female counterpart.

There were times in the African society when giving birth to a baby boy, meant prosperity and masculinity, while having a girl child was a sign of weakness. This is illustrated in the novel *Takadini*, by Ben Hanson - the story of a young woman, the king's favourite wife, who is expected to bear a son for the King, and she escapes her village after giving birth to an albino which was supposed to die as a custom of the time. She walked miles and miles and was searched for but not found and found refuge in a certain village away from her own. Immediately she was accepted after a long discussion and was given home to live in. As the young albino grows up in a world of non-albinos, much struggle and pain takes the boy child through the rudeness and the reaction of other children his age who did not like him for who he was, living him lonely. Takadini grows to be the best *mbira* player at the village and at the end of the text the unimportant boy child Takadini is celebrated.

However, Tagwirei (2012) researched on the folly of cultural representation of the African boy child with specific reference to the novel of Ben Hanson's *Takadini*. Tagwirei (2012) focused on the import that *Takadini* is an advocate for the acceptance of marginalised groups such as women and albinos. Tagwirei (2012) concludes that, the text indeed raises awareness to the problems women and albinos face in an African patriarchal societies and how much they struggle to ameliorate their problems but it does not quench the thirst of the emancipation of boy child in female authored texts it needs maximum caution. The researcher argues that *Takadini* fails dismally in what its author sets out to do: to represent the male child, re-inscribing the woman and the albino into society. Instead, the subtext is a reworking of alterity. It is a reworking of alterity in the sense that both, the woman Sekai and the albino *Takadini*, remain at the fringes of society. While it might be tempting to excuse such a representation on the basis that the author was attempting to recreate the sentiments of primitive societies whose belief systems were informed by patriarchy and superstition, it should not escape the reader that Hanson is complicit to the overall sentiments discernible in *Takadini*.

Much academic writing, oratory and activity has been directed to the girl child, this is a gender dilemma and it should be discouraged with the strongest terms possible. The sons of man are undergoing trauma in the hands of their very mothers who have turned to be feminists at the advantage of the girl child.

Akaki (2013) elucidates that intervention is crucial before our young male generation gets devoured, "a child is a child" (p. 5). It should be remembered that no gender is more superior or stronger as girls have been the weaker sex for ages, but as they get stronger we must remember to also care for the boy child. It is improper to empower one sex at the expense of another, the boy child succumbs to destitution. Society sees this but brushes it off as boys will be boys when girls

are found in such situations, activists come out advocating for the girl child. They defend the girls and seek help for them. The boys are left to go back to their old ways.

Harageib (2018) suggests that:

before we think about positive modelling for the boy child, we have to take into account our internal mixed messages and expectations we put on our men and boys and start seeing them as human beings, human beings who need to be seen, heard, loved and completely known first as individuals before the collective. (p. 3)

Finally, creating conducive environments for help seeking is paramount to seeing our boys and men, our communities and societies as a whole. The fact that society seems more focused on the girl child is rapidly suffocating the male child, yet the boy child is just as vulnerable as the girl child. Due to society's underestimation of the boy's needs, the boy child is now being subjected to various tormenting acts. He is prone to sexual assault and suffering as any other child. For solace, they are turning to vices. They need to find a way to fend for themselves or to deal with their issues. Narcotics and alcohol abuse as well as crime seem to be the way for them to do this. It is the place they can find consolation.

2.2.4. Gender representation

Gender is a prevalent subject in feminist critical discourse. The research analyses the symmetry in the representation of both genders in the selected feminist authored texts, thereof this forms a basis that helps to interrogate the presentation of the African boy child. It is essential to define gender so as to have a background on its development. According to Connell (1995), gender is a cultural construct that creates a distinct division of society in line with one's biological mechanism. The World Health Organisation (2010) asserts that gender refers to the socially constructed

characteristics of women and men, such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men.

Gender varies from society to society and can be changed (Nyangaresi, 2016). This attests to the fact that the society contextualises traditions categorised as male or female. Thomas (2008) argues that gender is always constructed through socialisation. Thomas (2008, p. 36) suggests both males and females are gendered at equal levels and women are equally installed into symmetrically gendered positions. It transcends into setting the linear for relationship trends/pattern by determining their acceptability/unacceptability. It is more of a fashioned culture upgraded and updated to suit a cultural milieu. Hence, it is not a natural phenomenon but a human artefact for (dis)continuing power struggles of the 'hegemonic.'

According to Hearn and Morgan (1990):

the misrepresentation of the boy child calls for the need to theorise gender from "the boy's" perspective because of the dangers of what he calls: reification, essentialism and reductionism which arise when terms "boy" and "girl" are used to refer to masculinity and femininity respectively." (p. 8).

Gender issues have led to the growth of queer sexist studies which seek liberation from the 'unnatural' normalisation of norms which create intolerant binaries in the society and discriminate other gender identities. Deviance from patriarchal regulatory bodies which seek to popularise their 'maleness' and or dominance often results in discrimination. Gramsci (1976) speaks of hegemonic masculinities which project their ideology of controlling knowledge systems and demands conformity from the rest.

The global recognition of women came as a corollary of the 1945 United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. Gender issues have impacted development that the gender article on women activism (GWA, 2006, p. 1) declared that "...removing disparities in social, economic and political balances between women and men as a pre-condition for achieving people centred development." According to Newman (2018), "Gender tends to denote the social and cultural role of each sex within a given society" p.18. Family interaction, media, peers and education have played a pivotal role in (re)shaping the cultural (re)production of gender politics. Thus, people often develop their gender role in response to their environment rather than it being conferred by genetics (Newman, 2018).

Moreover, gender issues cannot be complete without discussing them in face of the pandemic. Women have been very much affected by HIV/AIDS, cervix and breast cancer as compared to males. It seems women/girls struggle to make a living out of male dominated contexts that they end up submitting to sexist ploys to gain mobility in the terrain of male chauvinism. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on HIV/AIDS acknowledges that ending the AIDS epidemic requires long term investments. Sexual and reproductive health and rights, indeed all human rights, are essential for realising this vision. And given their higher risk of HIV infection, youths and key populations require focused support.

Marginalised gender is likely to dehumanise itself so as to gain visibility but this does not go without its package of demerits. Commercial sex work has proliferated into an industry for *saving* women and girls from poverty and destitution yet this prostitution of their bodies has opened up for health risks. For example, in most African contexts, protected sex is meant for *hookers* that unwanted teen pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and high mortality rates have been induced all in the name of honouring cultural productions of gender.

Gender has had an appearance of normality since time immemorial. Its ideas have been misconstrued for scientific facts. It gives a natural face or as 'obvious truths' to its facets which are prescribed as second to none. Thus, more often than not, gender perspectives require supervision of non-conformist sentimentality. Butler (1990) defines gender as something we perform. It is a personalised embodiment of the admired role model. Hence, gender seems to be an enforcement of behavioural patterns reinforced throughout childhood to resurface in adulthood. However, these behaviours are constrained by biologically based sex assignments as reflected in the mother/father roles enacted in the play house.

The change in the thoughts on how a boy or girl should be viewed in the society is therefore a critical issue to be mapped along the spatial and temporal spatialities as the values of the context of social representations remain dynamic and this is pegged on the shift of time and space (Nyangaresi, 2016). According to Nyangaresi (2016), "boys are associated with superiority in day to day representations" (p. 18). This is a vital issue in the society that seems to be overlooked. Nyangaresi (2016) notes that there has been a departure from this traditional claim that consider males superior and as favoured by the language used to represent them in the feminist authored texts and fictional work.

According to Eckert (1996, p. 2):

sex is a biological categorisation based primarily on reproductive potential, whereas gender is the societal elaboration of biological sex...gender builds on biological sex, but it exaggerates biological difference, and it carries biological differences into domains in which it is completely irrelevant.

Stratton (2002) argues that labelling someone a man or woman is a social decision. The use of scientific knowledge may be used to make the decision, but only beliefs about gender - not science- can define sex. Furthermore, beliefs about gender affect what kinds of knowledge scientists produce about sex in the first place.

Differential capabilities and potential has been ascribed to biological differences between males and females in the determination of gender. In essence, the history of gender has to some extent justified the seemingly destructive projections by feminist texts that they have sought to (re)dress the social ills perpetrated by gender bias on women. However, some texts have been radical to the extent of advocating for the complete removal of the contribution of the boy child in the society through womanism and lesbianism. Texts should advocate for the complementarity of the two factions other than representing them as irreconcilable foes. However, the female authored works recently bring out the society to have departed from the claim of boys being favoured in representations. Examining Dangarembga's (1989) representation of the boy child Nhamo, it is noted that his representation need to be evaluated. This forms the basis of the present discussion as the study focuses more on how the selected authors represent the boy child through the male characters in the texts.

2.2.5. Literature on feminism: Who is a feminist writer?

It is imperative for the study to define and articulate the role of the feminist writer in an African context, this would help the study to establish the presentation of masculinities in feminists writing by looking at different perspectives on feminism by other scholars and critics. According to Nnomlin (2010), "African feminist narratives are submerged with excesses of radical practices" (p. 25). Western hegemony has merged with patriarchy to perpetuate the subjugation of women while Western feminist ideology has influenced women to reinforce and employ radical ideas to

challenge male dominance. In the process of reclaiming their identities, both femininities and masculinities are faced with inevitable facts of change which are largely characterised by violence and hybrid gender roles whose effects are largely detrimental to the development of the society. Central to African women's literature are motives of resistance, triumph, quests for a better life, and emancipation from racism, poverty and sexism therefore, women find liberation from the subjugation of their gender by the male in society through writing (Zhuwarara, 2016). Zhuwarara, (2016) further states that their main aim was to right the wrongs of women representations in male writing; where their place was tied to the hearth, Namibian and Zimbabwean women writers are no exception from the same.

According to Weiss (1969) feminists main thrust is centred on defending women against misrepresentation and stereotyping in society, raising women's political consciousness and radically changing power relations between women and men. According to Maccoby (2002) feminist narratives in Africa serve the purpose of "using writing as weapons to invade the battlefields that had been previously occupied by male writers by way of rewriting and questioning the traditional oppressive conditions specific to their post-colonial heritage in a constantly changing post-colonial context" (p. 148).

2.2.6. Review on African female identities in African literature

It is imperative to briefly look at the background of the emergence of women writers on the literary scene which was predominantly occupied by boy child through the review of female identities in African literature. Women writers can be nestled roughly into three developmental stages according to Showalter's analysis, an identity is a noun which carries along the ideas of what it (re)presents. It is made up of both subjective and objective realities which contextualise the phenomenal thrust of the noun clause (Nyangaresi, 2016). Thus, (re)presentation is rendered as a

political overtone which creates meaning by manipulating its environment in its consolidation of its 'true existence.' Therefore, feminism was and is a political discourse which seeks to advance the cause and needs of females in the limelight of a once male dominated sphere. Gardiner (1980) assumes that:

Female identity formation is dependent on mother-daughter bond...the maternal metaphor of female authorship clarifies the woman writer's distinctive engagement with her characters and indicate an analogous relationship between woman readers and characters. (p. 90)

This implies that a woman writer projects her self-definition, particularly in texts with a female hero. At this juncture, the voice of the narrator becomes an integral part which cannot be divorced from the female discourse sprawling in a literary work. Lanser (1992, p. 4) explains that:

The narrator has no existence 'outside' the text yet brings the text into existence; narrative speech acts cannot be said to be mere 'imitations' like acts of the characters, because they are the acts that make the acts possible.

It is natural to the story teller to narrate through one's conceived (re)packaging of events as the skipper of the narrative. Thus to drive the ship of feminism home, many writers use the voice as a framework of fleshing their ideologies both covertly and overtly. Nnomlin (2010) states that:

...(a) narrative voice situated at the juncture of 'social position and literary practices,' embodies the social, economic and literary conditions under which it has been produced...the feminine style of the surface text, that 'powerless' non authoritative form called 'women language'...becomes powerfully subversive mask for telling secrets to a woman under the watchful eye of man. (p. 190)

Additionally, Nnomlin (2010) argues that a feminist literary text endeavours to expose the ‘mechanism of its abjection’ not merely through its content but also form. Arguably the canonical has been predominately a male area. Rowbotham’s *Women’s Consciousness, Man’s World* edifies women’s social standing through her poetics: We can only grasp silence in the moment in which it is breaking. As soon as we learn words, we find ourselves outside them.

Marangoly (1993) link the 18th century ‘rise of the novel’ with the parallel proliferation of women in the literary place. This led to the emergence of female voices. This not only saw female voices and protagonist but the actual text bore her name (Miller, 1980). Gender language pervades the text as an ideological tension made visible through feminist diction in writing their body (Maccoby, 1998). This is substantiated by Obadina (2006, p. 26) that:

In theory, the entry of women into writing seriously threatens prevailing patriarchal hegemonies, just as the emergence of ‘printing culture’ challenges other hierarchies of caste and class by providing an oppositional vehicle for other persons without access to power. Not only does print allow women publicly to challenge the terms of their own domination, but once they are identified as discursive ‘I’s,’ such women become ‘individuals’ occupying the position of privileged-class men. In the discourse of ‘Enlightenment,’ in other words, individual voices paradoxically offers a potential mediating ground for transforming ‘the sex’-a caste-into a ‘we’ body politic.

In essence, women in writing made ground-breaking (re)discoveries of the community of womanhood and sisterhood by engaging the feminist scope (Christiansen, 2013). Through this lenses, the world began to witness the ‘free flow’ of the female hue which up to this time had been left enshrouded in the shadows of oblivious ignorance. The marginalisation of women got to the centre of human focus through fictional narratives which portrayed the woes of the ‘girlish

dimension.’ The championing of women rights through literary works seemed a militant move as it overhauled the linearity of the masculinity.

According Nyangaresi (2016):

Representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the ‘real’ world of objects, people or events, or indeed to talk about the imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events. (p. 17)

2.3 Gaps in literature

A considerable amount of literature has been written on the three texts under scrutiny in this study: Dangarembga’s (1988) *Nervous Conditions*, Ba’s (1979) *So Long a Letter* and Andreas’ (2001) *The Purple violet of Oshaantu*. There are a number of gaps in knowledge as well as unanswered questions, in order to find gaps in literature, a survey was carried out to find how critics and scholars have evaluated the selected novels and from what angles they have reviewed, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*. Ogbeide (as cited by Zhuwarara, 2016), in the article “Violet without Purple” focused on women’s position of victimhood of spousal abuse. Ogbeide (2013) argues that wife battering continues, courtesy of the silence of the fairer sex, until such a time that women can define their own existence by freeing themselves from the oppressive patriarchal yoke.

Zhuwarara (2016) researched on how the female authors portray the male figures in a stereotypical or balanced approach seconds this view and augments it by concluding that the portrayal of male figures in African women’s writing is an area which has not been given adequate attention since women are often relegated to the background. The decisions made by men have been rendered as their default consent. Mainstream literature which rung masculinity often present(ed) female

characters as sex objects, inferior beings and as second class citizens, to this juncture, feminism has been described as having many faces based on the fact that it is varied as per context. Zhuwarara (2016, p. 3) explains that manhood has been presented mainly by focusing on how it negatively impacts on the female figure but hardly looking at the forces and circumstances which shape it into the roles it plays. At the same time, women characters are viewed as heroines and paragons of resilience, with men being afforded little space in female-authored-texts and their criticism.

However, Zhuwarara (2016) recommended that:

Future research can be conducted further to pursue this phenomenon of how other female authors present men to bring about a balance in gender studies, studies tracing the changes in the portrayal of masculinities by female writers over a long period spanning many generations and a comparative research on how women writers treat the subject of men from different African traditions located in: Francophone, Lusophone and Anglophone areas of Africa and apart from the themes explored in the two novels in relation to the male gender new forms of gender can also be explored, that is transgender identities. (p. 22)

Zhuwarara (2016) articulates that “it is ironic that the “feminist” writers after showing the ugliness in some men, they also go on to show evidently that there are many men who are really great examples of role model masculinities. Thus, the present study endeavoured in tackling and exploring wider on the presentations of males in feminist critical discourses.

Tsitsi Dangarembga’s works as a novelist, playwright and screenwriter have been critiqued by various scholars and most often her works have been regarded as feminist (Moyana, 1994), this research sought to establish how she presents male characters in her selected text *Nervous*

Conditions, hoping to develop an open minded appreciation of Dangarembga's texts. Outlined are other scholars' perspectives on her texts *Nervous Conditions*. However, Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1989) has received wider literary criticism but no studies have been done on the presentation of the insignificance of the boy child as an unheard of voice in her text.

Moyana (1994) indicates that the text *Nervous Conditions* (1989) is written in feminist tradition and the woman's voice in the novel is significantly feminist. Justifying her stand, Moyana (1994) makes emphasis on the fact that Dangarembga's novel is in the "feminist tradition" (p. 26). The author does not merely state women's experiences and leave them there, neither does she describe the socialisation of women into their roles, rather she depicts some women who try to protest against their usual socially accepted roles while others engage in a debate on how they are being used or misused by the menfolk. However, Moyana like most divergent scholars dwell much on the negative aspects than the positive aspects on the presentation of males. Moyana conditions the oppressive nature of men and more emphasis is made on women experiences rather than men's experiences. However, in her conclusion, Moyana (1994, p. 41) admits that it should not be about the sexes fighting for dominance but about them working together to do away with the stifling traditions. Less emphasis is put on the aspect of cooperation in the males and females; this is a sign of the little importance attached to the subject of male representation in the text.

Anderson (2010) mainly focuses on tradition and conveys the desire by women to break away from tradition and at the same time holding on to it as exemplified by Tambu. She states that Tambu departs from tradition early by attempting to fulfil her own aspirations of education. Anderson (2010, p. 5) illustrates that it was Tambu's adherence to tradition that made Tambu more successful in a familial way than her cousin Nyasha who was plagued in the end with self-doubt and mental illness due to her inability to reconcile herself with tradition.

Uwakweh (1998, p. 13) deliberated on education and gender in her paper on *Nervous Conditions* (1989), attesting that “education is critical to female independence. Socially, and often symbolically, it transports women beyond the reach of traditional shackles”. Uwakweh (1998) opines that the boy child has the advantage of acquiring education as compared to the girl child, as noted in Dangarembga’s texts; education becomes the source of conflict in the families in her texts. This could be due to the fact that Western education opens the eyes of women, making them rebellious, thus making them forsake their native cultures and traditions.

However, society expects them to be silent while through education they are empowered, resulting in them voicing out. An educated woman becomes a threat to the menfolk. Arguing in a paper, Uwakweh (1995, p. 75) asserts that the self-referential nature of the autobiographical mode adopted by Dangarembga as a literary strategy marks her attainment of voice in a male dominated Zimbabwe literary arena and continues to say that voicing is self-defining, liberal and cathartic. Having noted that the female in the African cultures is silent, Uwakweh (1995, p. 76) asserts that “The female voice promises a fresh insight on women’s reality and experiences that are generally inaccessible to the male tradition. Significantly, it debunks the patriarchal social structure through the silencing of the male voices in feminist discourse.

Mlambo and Kandemiri (2015) approach the novella *So Long a Letter* (1979) from a didacticism perspective, dwelling on issues to do with multifaceted masculinities, subjugation, modernity, religion and culture. Though Mlambo and Kandemiri (2015) state the possible emanating themes in the analysis of the novella, the issue of the boy child and male representation seems to have been peripherally highlighted, therefore the present study pursued in depth analyses of more themes and dwelt more on the presentation of male characters as it is presented by numerous voices in Ba’s novella.

More so, it seems to be lopsided for feminist writers who focus their angles as one-dimensional and retain the format of the phenomena they intend to combat against. In fact, the tug of war between the male and female genders magnifying the dispossessed position of the latter and how patriarchy objectifies it as depicted in *So Long a Letter* (1979). The relation of the two sexes is not that of two electrical poles: the man represents both the positive and neuter to such an extent that in French, 'homes' designates human beings, the particular meaning of the word being assimilated into the general meaning of the word 'homo'. Woman is the negative, to such a point that any determination is imputed to her as a limitation, without reciprocity.

Vambe (2003) exposes the constraints imposed by African cultural beliefs on the African woman in the process of reconfiguring her identity. However, Vambe's main focus is on how Zimbabwean literature has contributed in the depiction of women in the wake of HIV and AIDS and does not necessarily address the issue of male representation in these texts.

Furusa (2006) suggests that most of African women writers are too retaliatory in their portrayal of gender relations when it comes to their patriarchal representation in their texts but does not go further to unveil the reasons behind such harsh tendencies. The present study therefore demonstrated these sentiments as raised in literature on the relevance of dealing with feminists' critical discourse.

Conclusively, no study has analysed the selected texts namely: Dangarembga's (1988) *Nervous Conditions*, Ba's (1979) *So Long a Letter* and Andreas's (2001) *The Purple violet of Oshaantu* focusing mainly on the presentation of the boy child. Hence this research focused on how the feminists' writers present the boy child in their critical discourses in a bid of (re)dressing the latent gender politics. The danger has been that the purveyors of social justice have been radical in their purported campaign against gender imbalances.

As a complement, furthermore, Muchemwa and Muponde (2007) express that the absence of studies focusing on the representation of the male figures in literature owes its paucity to theoretical thinking. They argue that “to some critics, it is superfluous and vexatious addition to patriarchal strategies of domination that rams another painful nail into the crucified body of feminism” (Muchemwa & Muponde, 2007, p. 15).

It is in the light of the position and treatment of the male figure in literary writing and criticism that Muchemwa and Muponde (2007) consider masculinity and fatherhood in Zimbabwe as a field of academic study that has suffered long and unnecessary neglect. They argue that critical practices deny the existence of the marginalised and emerging masculinities. This is a shared notion by other critics who have noted that more focus is on the power at play between male and female relations. This approach has drawn a template of victimhood of the female character and ignored the male figures who suffer the same fate under hegemonic masculinity.

Thus, absence of male narratives has been a pervasive trajectory created by feminist as an outcry for freedom which has irked some as a result of its radical outlook. This has opened avenues for criticism like that of Mutunda (2009) who raises the concern that little attention has been given to the analysis of women’s writing on masculinities, as men only served as a backdrop against which to analyse African women’s experiences. Hence, manhood has been presented as a hallmark of negations on the female figure.

The criticisms have failed to look at the forces and circumstances which shape masculinity into the roles it plays. At the same time, female characters are viewed as heroines and paragons of resilience while men afforded little space in female-authored-texts and their criticism. The idea of “a good man” has thus become alien as the man is viewed as an embodiment of evil supposed to be cursed (Shaw, 2017). Yet feminist authors many times present exemplary marriages with

excellent father figures, and good partnerships between genders in a complementary existence (Zhuwarara, 2016). Often, black African female writers emphasise the images of African women as neither maltreated nor abused by their husbands and fathers, a situation that leads black African female authors to speak out for other women through short stories or other novels. African female writers such as Bessie Head, Mariama Ba, Ama Ata Aidoo, Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Tsitsi Dangarembga and others represent female voices and present more serious challenges for academic feminism through literature.

Nyashongo (2015) explored the way black African female authors depict other black women in literature, as well as how, they address different themes relevant to many societies. What remains un-investigated in Nyashongo's (2015) analysis are the gender relations which are at play, especially the treatment of boy child in feminist critical discourses. Nyashongo (2015) dwelled much on the way black African women function in cohabitate relationships as portrayed in selected fictional African short stories. However, Nyashongo (2015) recommends that future studies may investigate how men cope in their marriages in Africa which the present study slightly considered in observing the presentation of the African boy child.

Muponde (2011) concludes that blaming patriarchy and African culture for women's contemporary problems is a case of misdirected anger and recommends that a relook at Zimbabwean women's plight, the likely causes and the possible solutions be done in their socio-historical context and literary context. Muponde (2011) recommends that intensive and extensive research on gender relations in pre-colonial African culture be pursued to enable contemporary scholars, citizens and legislators to see and draw lessons from on positive and healthy male-female relations.

2.4 Theoretical framework

The study used the tenets of the two theoretical frameworks, Masculinities and Nego-feminism as the magnifying lenses which position both males and females on the stage of literary works.

2.4.1 Masculinities

In quest for relevance, this study sought to propagate the theory of Nego-feminism and masculinities in the elucidation of the selected literary texts, specifically to demonstrate the characters depicted in the novels and to unravel the themes. The concept of Masculinities would help to embrace many other emerging forms, as masculinities are not static but are evolving all the time. Connell (1998) defines masculinities as a concept which is derived from gender as a social construct based on patterns and practices associated with the position of men in any society's set of gender relations. According Chabari (2009), "Masculinity can simply be defined as a specific attempt to construct a particular kind of manhood through repetition of a particular behaviour either by an individual or a group" (p. 100).

Connell (1998, p. 20) states that there are different ways in which an individual can be "masculine", the societally dominant form of which is known as "hegemonic masculinity". The main purpose of hegemonic masculinity is to perpetuate the patriarchy, legitimise the dominant position of men in society, and keep women subordinated. In order to accomplish this, it must reject contesting views of masculinity and exist in opposition to femininity.

Connell (2005) aptly defines masculinity as configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ to gender relations in a particular setting. Connell's (2005) definition is substantiated by studies of various communities in Africa which confirm the designed practices of what it is to be a man.

Connell's book *Masculinities* provides a general summary of the different avenues of knowledge that have been obtained to date on masculinities as a field of study. While each avenue of knowledge has provided insight into masculinities, Connell (1997) argues that they fall short in critical ways he theorises masculinities as "relational" in that, it involves concepts of masculinity and femininity in relation to each other in addition to different forms of masculinity all relating to each other and all vying for cultural dominance.

Furthermore, it has to be emphasized that "unlike maleness, which is a biological state, masculinity, is a gender identity category constructed socially and interpreted from a cultural view" (Mutunda, 2009, p. 18). Mutunda (2009), further points out that masculinity has ambiguous and multiple meanings according to contexts which change with time. Shefer, Ratele, Strebel, Shabalala, & Buikema (as cited by Nyangaresi, 2016) assert that, 'masculinity, like femininity, does not come 'naturally', but is rather constantly and continuously fought for through performances of idealised and normative versions of masculinity" (p. 22).

Zhuwarara (2016) used the concept of masculinities in a study as a social and cultural construct. According to Zhuwarara (2016), "In the last thirty years gender studies have been broadened by emerging interests in the development of focus on men and the masculinity dimension" (p. 20). Furthermore, Connell (1997) supports the theory of relational masculinities by gathering many life histories of men and exploring the plural nature of masculinities and their hierarchal arrangements in relation to each other.

Connell (1997) does not believe that there is a hegemonic femininity, but that there are plural femininities that exist in a relational hierarchy to each other. The feminine ideal has been crafted

and maintained by hegemonic masculinity. Women in most societies have not been able to define what it means to be female. It has already been defined for them. The situation has greatly improved for most women in Western societies, “girls” are still encouraged to have perfect hair, perfect bodies, perfect makeup, and to provide pleasant company for men while they rule the world.

Thus the present research positions itself by exploring how African novels embody such a theory in addressing battles of masculinity. It is no question that feminist across the globe have embraced all instruments available so as to clamour for their recognition. The texts used as a case study are of no exception in this regard.

2.4.2 Nego-feminism

The study employed Nego-feminism or a ‘negotiated feminism’ which is inspired by the Igbo/African woman’s experience as it is argued that ‘the theology of nearness grounded in the indigenous installs feminism in Africa as a performance and an altruistic act. Nnaemeka (2004, p. 378) notes that, ‘negotiation’ in feminism means give and take/exchange and cope with successfully/go around. This is to say, the principles of African feminism deal with negative elements in a patriarchal society through compromise and negotiations based on the shared values in many African cultures. The theory becomes the shorthand of gender complementary possibilities surrounding issues of peace, conflict management and resolution, negotiation, complementarity give and take, and collaboration (Nnameka, 2013). Nego-feminism becomes a guide in dealing with feminist struggles that occur on the continent and it considers the implications of patriarchal traditions and customs, and it aims to dismantle and negotiate these, and these principles shed light to the presentation of characters in the selected novels.

The idea of ‘no ego’ is succinctly elaborated metaphorically by (Nnaemeka, 2004, p. 378) that, “it knows when, where and how to denote patriarchal landmines, it also knows when and where and how to go around patriarchal landmines.” It expounds on the idea of how Nego-feminism paves ways of negotiating with or negotiating around patriarchy in different contexts (Zhuwarara, 2016). In other words, it knows when, where, and how to negotiate with or negotiate around patriarchy in different contexts (Nnaemeka, 1991, pp. 377-378). This is to say, the principles of African feminism deal with negative elements in a patriarchal society through compromise and negotiations based on the shared values in many African cultures.

Scholars have documented the economic empowerment of Igbo women in pre-colonial and colonial Nigeria, in part facilitated by flexible gender systems within Igbo culture (Chimamanda, 2014). Wang’ondur (2015) argues that the African female is vastly different from the Western female given the different socio-economic, political and cultural structure. It has emerged that in the plight for female empowerment the African female fights for a different type of feminism. African feminists address cultural issues that they feel pertain to the complex experiences faced by all women of all cultures on the African continent.

Ba’s *So Long a Letter* is a feminist work that challenges the dehumanising tendencies of the menfolk as evident in the character of Ramatouyale who eventually exposed the African conception of an ideal woman who keeps dumb even in the face of humiliation, victimisation, and brutality so as to be perceived as a good woman. However, as events unfold, she is forced by situations beyond her control to respond and go radical in order to crush anything that stands in her way to happiness.

Efforts were made to show how African women are rated based on the real and good women. Ba, focuses attention on women and what they go through in life, their love for the family, respect for their husbands even when they treat them shabbily, and how some of them were able to refute all forms of subjugation by the menfolk.

2.5. Chapter summary

This chapter reviewed literature related to the boy child narratives in feminist texts and relevant scholarly views and criticisms so as to account for the gaps to be filled by the research. It also highlighted on theoretical frameworks on which the research has been built on. The researcher found out that there is a variant and open treatment of the boy child and the admission that the representation of the boy child has gaps in feminist critical discourses. This presents a diversionary view; it would therefore be valid only in cases of ambivalent situations where representation of reality is the case.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the research design and the strategies adopted to explore the research objectives. It details the format used to acquire the data so as to come up with an informed research. The process of coming up with a research calls for a cast which determines the tools and instruments used for gathering information. It also describes how judgements are reached in the research so as to avert bias and adhere to research ethics.

3.2. Research design

The research applied a qualitative research design which ensured that content analysis is consulted for relevant information. Kothari (2004) brings to light the fact that there are two basic approaches to research, namely quantitative and the qualitative approach. According to Kothari (2004, p. 5), a qualitative research is concerned with subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behaviour. Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 2009). This gives room for the researcher to use insight and formulate impressions on underlying motives of human behaviour. It is concerned with understanding the processes and social and cultural contexts which underlie various behavioural patterns.

The current study utilised a qualitative approach, focusing on understanding the social and cultural contexts which underlie various behavioural patterns in the novels (articulation of gender concerns in this case). The actions of humans can only be comprehended when the thoughts, beliefs, values,

feelings and assumptions that preceded those actions are understood. Creswell (2009) states that, research designs are plans and procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis.

Denscombe (2007) states that the aim of research is to develop insights into people's beliefs and their lived experiences while Creswell (2009) explains that "data represented through words, pictures, symbols, videos or icons" and qualitative data is "a process for moving from qualitative data to understanding and interpretation of people and situations under investigation" (p. 354).

By using thematic analysis as one of the design methods, it afforded the researcher to analyse the literary texts, draw interpretations and made informed conclusions in relation to the position of the male figure as they unfold in the selected female authors' texts. This was achieved by unravelling the background, culture and societal expectations which shape and mould the male character as these aspects determine masculinities' interaction with other characters in different contexts. Masson (2002) further asserts that, the qualitative research design is interpretative. This aspect shows that the design is concerned with the interpretation of the social world and it is applicable to novels as they are based on fictional social worlds. This is averse to the standardised methods of a quantitative research design which are rigid to suit every study. The interpretive element allowed the researcher to examine and interpret the position of masculinities relation to the roles they play as: fathers, husbands, uncles, friends, brothers and at work places.

Masculinities and Nego-feminism are suitable for the study as they sought to interrogate the position of the boy child in relation to men. African feminisms positioned the male figures under a microscopic lens and unravelled the way they are depicted in female literary works. The male figure is often shaped by background, culture and expectations of society. The study examined how these male figures play out in Dangarembga's (1988) *Nervous Conditions*, Ba's (1979) *So*

Long a Letter and Andreas' (2001) The Purple Violet of Oshaantu. Works by literary critics, book reviews, journals, scholars' research papers, academic presentations on masculinity were used in this study. These facilitated a close and critical analysis of the texts in order to understand and accommodate emerging themes.

3.3. Population

Shank (2002, p. 100) views the population as the entire group of individuals that the study intends to investigate. In this study, the population was texts written in English by Dangarembga: *The Book of Not* (2006), *She No Longer Weeps* (1987), *Neria* (1993) and *This Mournable Body* (2018), and for Ba: *Scarlet Songs* (1986) and Andreas (2001) *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* that include the boy child characters but with unheard voices. According to Bhattacharjee (2012, p. 65), “a population can be defined as all people or items unit of analysis with the characteristics that one wishes to study”. Literary works written in English by female authors in Southern Africa which present masculinities were considered. The population selection was based on the depth of the depiction of an array of male characters.

3.4. Sample

Shank (2002) defines a sample as a group taken from a large population for examining by the researcher. It also refers to a process of selecting the individuals who constitute a sample and consists of the actual individuals that participate in a study. Zikmund et al. (2010) assert that a sample involves any procedure that draws meaningful conclusion about the whole population.

Purposive sampling technique was used to select the three novels: Mariama Ba's (1979) *So Long a Letter*, Tsitsi Dangarembga's (1989) *Nervous Conditions* and Neshani Andreas' *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001). These were selected on the basis of similar thematic concerns.

3.5. Procedure

The researcher first completed an in depth reading of the selected primary texts, through character analysis and narrative exploration using the critical lenses of the two theories: Masculinities and Nego-feminism. The underlying conditions which influence characters, settings, styles and emerging relevant themes were explored. An evaluation of the authors' position and attitudes towards the boy child were attempted and presented in narrative form.

3.6. Data analysis

For this study, thematic content analysis was used to capture different aspects on the absence of the boy child in feminist literary discourses through the portrayal of different characteristics emerging from backgrounds determined by societal expectations. According Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data” (p. 79). The findings were then extracted from the interpretations and analysis to formulate discussions and conclusions. This study used thematic analysis through its flexibility; it allowed the researcher to give a rich, detailed and complex description of the data collected.

The researcher analysed data according to themes which stem from the research topic. Suitable topics which covered the themes in each unit were assigned to different segments arranged pertaining to their thematic thrust. The researcher critically examined each novel to identify the male characters and the circumstances as they play various roles as partners, brothers, sons, uncles, husbands and fathers. Close attention was paid to categorise them into negative and positive figures according to their character and behaviours in the texts. Finally, an informed critique was on the way the feminists writers create and present the images of the male figures in the selected three texts. The interpretation was done by linking the findings with the literature review and the two theoretical frameworks in response to the research objectives.

3.7. Research ethics

Research ethics is defined as “conformance to the standards of conduct of a given profession or group” (Bathacherjee, 2012, p. 137). This researcher has maintained objectivity and the integrity by reporting the findings in full. All sources used in the study were acknowledged in order to uphold the ethics required of an academic to maintain transparency and honesty. The researcher has evaded personal bias by reporting different perspective as well as contrary results. Since the work is based on fictional work, reference to names of real places and people in the study are fictional.

3.8 Chapter summary

This chapter, Chapter 3, focused mainly on the procedures that were used in the compilation of this research. The population and sample for this study were specified. Also noted were considerations of research ethics that included and compelled the researcher not to ridicule the authors of the selected novels (sample) for this study. The next chapter, Chapter 4, focuses mainly on the in-depth and critical analysis of the selected texts, Mariama Ba`s (1979) *So Long a Letter*, Tsitsi Dangarembga`s (1989) *Nervous Conditions* and Neshani Andreas` *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001) bound by Nego-feminism as well Masculinities frameworks, and as informed by the reviewed literature in Chapter 2 of this study.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses how Mariama Ba's (1979) *So Long a Letter*, Tsitsi Dangarembga's (1989) *Nervous Conditions* and Neshani Andreas' *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001) present the boy child in their texts. The chapter examines how the boy child is presented in the selected texts by integrating the objectives of the studies in the analysis. The objectives were as follows:

- Examine the literary presentation of the (in)significance of the African boy child in the selected feminist fictional works;
- Analyse emerging themes from the discussion of the (in)significance of the boy child as an unheard voice in the three selected novels; and
- Explore the literary presentation of the positive possibilities emanating from significant boy child contributions to gender concerns in the selected novels.

The chapter was presented in three sections. Firstly, a summary of each of the novels was given. African women writers have braced the stage to reconstruct phallogentric representations of females than those of males. It was imperative to conduct this study in order to examine the presentation of boy child, by paying attention to the specific ways in which the boy child in particular and males in general are represented and constructed. The study equally interrogated how the boy child is characterised within feminist critical discourses the style and language employed in the construction.

Dangarembga's *Nervous Condition* (1989), Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1979) and Andreas' *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2005) can be considered as texts which embrace Africana Womanist ideology for a number of reasons.

This chapter examined the literary presentation of the (in)significance of the African boy child in particular and males in general in the selected feminist fictional works. This was done by analysing emerging themes from the discussion of the (in)significance of the boy child as an unheard voice. The chapter also discussed the positives emanating from the (in)significant boy child and males in general the (re)presentations and their contributions to gender concerns in the selected novels. According to Nyangaresi (2016) representation involves a process of 'description, depiction or symbolisation' (p. 17). This is purely meant to show us what a subject portends or what the narrating voice assumes the subject to portend. Shaba (2005) states that:

Representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the 'real' world of objects, people or events, or indeed to talk about the imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events. (p. 17)

Hall (1997) further suggests that there are two systems of representation. The first involves the direct associations of objects, people and events with a set of concepts or mental representations that people hold in their minds. Meaning is, therefore, dependent on these correlations. The second is that which indirectly drive a reference through symbolisation.

The chapter analyses the presentation of the male characters in the selected texts and explores the imagining boy childhood, challenges of representing the boy child, images of violence as a reaction to the emasculated masculinities and an equal existence of a son, brother, exemplary husband and

a good father. Thereafter, the discussion critically explores masculinity and the control of the female, characterised by different versions of masculinities: masculinity of a soft and loving man, masculinity in a complementary relationship and finally men who display unconditional love and a generosity of spirit.

The chapter also examines how the three texts employ a boy child inhibiting motif that is embraced in muted efforts of the African patriarch to improve gender issues by pedestalising the female voice. It also evaluates the effectiveness of male silences in matters/events pertaining to human affairs and the erasure of hegemonic influences on the globe as one of the fundamental aspects of feminism. Some women studies have gone to the extent of being radical by developing queer sexualities not condoned by the African society (for example the characters Celie and Shug Avery's lesbianism in Alice Walker's *Color Purple*).

Some of the African traditions have often been condemned for failing to appease the African woman's spirit hence; the woman now perceives the death of masculinity as the solution to her hardships. Male voices are known to be dictating and authoritative in their command that their exclusion in a particular genre has been interpreted for a symbol of sisterhood and female empowerment. However, the researcher assumes that this strength has its downside of working on the pretext that ignorance of the *oppressor's* shouts liberates the *oppressed*. It forgets, for example, Shaba (2005) concept of internalising the image of the oppressor by the oppressed expressed through some women retaining the patriarchal ways in their matriarchal offices.

Thus, this discussion explored how feminists' writers present the sisterhood betrays the brotherhood or the other way round. Worse more, there is proof of both the Fanonian concept in the gender related issues of *vertical* and *horizontal* violence embellished in the battles of sexes.

The issue of slander and gossiping among co-wives in polygamous relationships explored in Andreas' (2005) *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* and Ba's (1984) *So Long a Letter* and the matriarchal aunties who act as a subordinate masculinity and enforce African tradition on fellow women in Dangarembga's *Nervous Condition* (1989) and Ba's *So Long a Letter*, for example, serve as testimony to the horizontal violence waged by women against women. However, the vertical violence wherein a woman goes against a man is accepted as therapeutic within the feminist circle.

4.2. Summary of Mariama Ba *So Long a Letter*

Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* recounts the stories of two women - lifelong friends - and their husbands, living in Senegal during the post-colonial period. The novel explores how women face the challenges of patriarchal institutions to subjugate them through polygamy, neo-colonialism, and constraints of tradition, caste prejudices, political instability and the patriarchal subjugation. The discussion of the text draws from and speaks to themes discussed by Mlambo and Kandemiri (2015) such as those women subjugating other women, multifacetedness of masculinities, the value of education, resilience and survival tactics, championing sisterhood, adapting traditional wisdom in the face of modernity as well as exorcising the double burden of religion and culture. The novella is written in the form of a lengthy epistle from the protagonist, Ramatouyale, to her beloved friend Aissatou. Ramatouyale the protagonist and the voice in the book had just experienced the death of her husband Modou Fall.

Ramatouyale is a proud teacher, aware of the responsibility that she bears. Aissatou is divorced from her husband, Mawdo Ba, having separated with him after he took in a second wife. Ramatouyale's letter unfolds in a string of reminiscence, beginning in their youth at a French colonial teachers' college. Ramatouyale's story portrays the blossoming of two couples' love and

their dedication to one another despite the disapproval of their communities. Ramatouyale's mother is greatly disappointed in her daughter's choice for a husband. Ramatouyale has twelve children. Modou Fall is a social promoter and ideologue for union workers.

Ba's *So Long a Letter* tackles the daily predicaments of a woman under a patriarchal umbrella of existence that it has been accorded as a literary text which fights for the recognition of feminist inputs to social life. Ba employs dialectism in a subtle way which calls for deductive and inductive skills in the reader as she uses witticism, acute criticism and sarcasm to teach on social contexts projected on life by humanity's pressures. This chapter explored the dynamism of this didacticism in *So Long a Letter* (1989) by evaluating how the text is militant towards social constructs. What is striking is that, the text is dedicated to all women and men of goodwill, that it proves not only to serve the ends of women but scaffolding, or perhaps, sewing the yawning moral fibre together. The "art for art's sake" component seems to be out of question for the text transcends into being a 'mirror of the society' which reflects human experiences so as to teach/instruct a corrective measure for troubleshooting social mishaps. The didactic attribute of *So Long a Letter* is embedded in social constructivism of phenomena like traditional customs and religion which perpetuate the inhibition of freedom on society. The text challenges the very fact of hegemonic masculinities. According to Carrigan et al. (1995),

Hegemony...is about winning and holding of power and the formation (and destruction) of social groups...the ruling class establishes and maintains its domination. The ability to impose a definition of the situation, to set the terms in which events are understood and issues discussed, to formulate ideals and define morality is essential part of the process. Hegemony involves the persuasion of the greater part of the population, particularly

through...the organisation of social institutions in ways that appear ‘natural,’ ‘ordinary,’
‘normal. (p.129)

Despite the fact that patriarchy has a long history of subjugating women through systemic processes highlighted by Carrigan (1995), Mariama Ba also hints on possible contributions of fellow women in the subjugation process. Nkechi (2012) aptly diagnosed this situation as a result of the ‘internalised oppression’ which moves a woman or a group of women to assume the role of the oppressor. Usually, they inflict ‘horizontal violence’ and give a hell of a life to other women. Women are to blame for their subjugation as they, amongst themselves, undermine each other and strengthen the fetters of the patriarchy. It is sad that psychologists trace such inclinations from childhood. The following male characters in the text *So Long a Letter* are to be examined by looking at their representation, Mawdo Ba, Modou Fall, Samba Diack, Daba’s husband, Ibrahim Sall, Tamsir, Malick, Little Oumar, Aissatou’s four sons, Abou, Dauda Dieng and Ousname. The study considers, with regards to such representations of these boy children, their socialisation space – including the physical and cultural spaces – as well the presence versus the absence of domineering male figures with the ultimate goal to understanding the significance of all these aspects within feminist discourses in which the text is located.

4.3. Summary of Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*

Nervous Conditions (1989) is a novel authored by Zimbabwean writer Tsitsi Dangarembga and the novel was first published in the United Kingdom in 1988. It was the first novel published by a black woman from Zimbabwe in English (Uwakweh, 2010). The semi-autobiographical novel focuses on the story of a large Shona family in post-colonial Rhodesia during the 1960s. *Nervous Conditions* is the first of a proposed trilogy, with *The Book of Not* as the second novel in the series.

The book works through multiple complex issues of patriarchy, depression, emotional and spiritual abuse, the undervaluation of the girl child and navigating colonisation in the black family setting. The novel illustrates the dynamic themes of race, colonialism, and gender during the post-colonial conditions of present-day Zimbabwe. The title is taken from the introduction by Jean-Paul Sartre to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. The condition of native is a nervous condition – From an introduction to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Tambu is the main character of the novel. The novel opens up with the news that Tambu's older brother, Nhamo, had just died. Tambu is not upset about this as Nhamo studied at a missionary school away from home with his uncle, Babamukuru and his family. The only thing Tambu desires is to attend school, but her family is very poor and does not have enough money to pay her school fees. Tambu's uncle, Babamukuru is a successful and educated man and he stays at the mission. Babamukuru as a result of his attainments in life, he is the breadwinner of the family, he is worshiped whenever he comes to visit, the whole family looks up to him and even his decisions. During one of his so many the visits, Babamukuru insists that Tambu should take Nhamo's place and attend the missionary school by his house. Upon arriving, Tambu soon becomes close to her cousin Nyasha and completely focuses on her studies. During term break, everyone returns to visit the family back in the homestead. Tambu begins to despise her home in the village and she now prefers to stay at her Babamakuru's lavish and comfortable home even during the term breaks.

Towards the end of the term, there is an exam administered at Tambu's school. This exam is to test the students and offer them an opportunity to study at a well-known missionary school. Tambu excels on the exam and is offered a scholarship to attend this well-known school. In the new school Tambu is introduced to many cultural changes; however, she remains resistant to the changes. As always, she is fully focused on her studies. Consequently, she remains cautious of her daily

situations and nervous of the conditions that surround her. There is one particular ‘Nyasha’ Babamakuru’s daughter, a character in the story that challenges things and is a rebel of some sort but there is a ‘Lucia’ who is “a man herself” who takes on respected men like little boys! Tambu, heart swells with gratitude for insults that promise to take her out of the squalor condition in which she lives, and that like Nyasha, the weight of patriarchy suffocates the very essence of her being their nervous conditions are centred around misogyny and patriarchy. In examining the text for the purposes of this research, representations of Nhamo and Chido as boy children was done. However, a clearer understanding of the signification of such representation is more meaningful if done in comparison with that of the girl children – Nyasha and Tambu. The belief is that such a contrastive enterprise sheds more light on the reasons and the signification of the boy child within the broader feminist discourses. For the same purposes, glimpses of Babamakuru’s boyhood days as explicated by his young brother Jeremiah are also examined and contextualised within the study’s research goals.

4.4. Summary of Andreas’ *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*

The Purple Violet of Oshaantu (2005) is a story based on the unique friendship between two women- Ali and Kauna. They live in the village of Oshaantu, the northern part of Namibia. Ali and Kauna migrated there as a result of marriage. Kauna who is a young wife and has young children and Ali is a bit older than her. Their hailing from outside the Oshaantu village draws them together into a friendship which spans over years. The personal account of these two women is set during the post-apartheid period in Namibia where HIV/AIDS and domestic violence are evidently prevalent in the Oshaantu village. The novel opens with Mee Ali tending to her homestead business in the village like any other woman during this time of the year. Most of the men are working far away from their homes and the women take over responsibility to tend the fields, look after the

homesteads and bring up children. The pulse of lives of the women in the village is measured by the rhythm of seasons and the land. Kauna is married to Shange and she got married to her husband during the time the purple violets are in bloom in the village of Oshaantu, and she is regarded as “the purple violet of Oshaantu” for her beauty, when she arrived as a young wife. The beauty does not last long as her husband begins to abuse her. Unfortunately, Kauna does not conceive a child immediately which makes her an object of ridicule from her in-laws. Mee Ali, who has been married in the village first, is the only friend Kauna has and is one person who tries to intervene and help her in all the suffering she goes through at the hands of Shange.

Mee Mukwankala, an elderly woman, is the only person who confronts Shange directly and lashes at him and this brings the physical battering to an end; but emotional abuse continues. The church elders do not concern themselves with intervening and stopping Shange’s unbecoming behaviour, as spousal abuse is considered as a private affair. Kauna does not hide her husband’s abuse, as a result the whole village knows that she does not have a loving husband, but that she is entrapped in a loveless marriage. She has left him on three occasions and returned to her parents, but Shange brings her back by promising her family that he would be kind to her. He makes sure that she is not happy in every possible way. Kauna is not given her own cooking space for a longer period. Hence she is forced to share the hearth with eight other women in Shange’s father’s compound. Precisely different from Kauna, Mee Ali enjoys a peaceful marriage with her husband Michael, who works far away and returns home once in a while, but supportive of his wife whenever he is home. This does not sit well with her in-laws who think that she bewitched their son. On the hand, there are other man who are in the village and these include, Victor, Peetu, Mukwankala’s husband, Kauna’s father, Tate Oiva and Tate Phillipusa.

There are other women characters who come into play in the story; Suster (a local nurse who always helps Ali to nurse Kauna's bruises), Mee Martha (a church elder who is interested more in Mee Ali than Kauna's predicament), Mee Fenny (Kauna's aunt who is divorced from an abusive husband) and Mukwangala (the woman who dares to put Shange in his place). Kauna's respite from Shange's abuse does not last long as Shange suddenly dies in his home when he has just been at the "white house." Kauna is suspected of having poisoned Shange, especially that he has been abusing her. Kauna worsens the suspicion by defying the traditional behaviour of a widow; shedding of tears over a dead husband and giving a moving speech on how the husband was a good man. The widowed Kauna is stripped off everything she has worked for by Shange's family members who take over her homestead and everything in it. She leaves a destitute, with only her children, but has a renewed spirit to start over. The representations of the boy children are of essence here, especially with regards to their upbringing in a fatherless home, disconnected from both their social and cultural anchorage. The signification of Kauna having to raise her children on her own after the late husband's family leaves her destitute is also symbolic within feminist discourses.

4.5. Boyhood as a construction through socialisation, tradition, cultural practices, education and projections of gender

In order to fully appreciate the projections of the boy child in feminist writings, we need to have an appreciation of how the boy child is 'made' socially through socialisation. An understanding of such requires therefore an appreciation of gendered socialisation processes within the contexts in which the texts are set – Africa. This section explores and discusses such processes as part of understanding the premise on which the general analysis is based. Projections of gender relations in most African female authored feministic fictional narratives need to be examined and

understood within the social, traditional and cultural contexts in which they are set. Tradition and/or culture are pertinent to understanding female oppression in patriarchal societies. Anderson (2010) explains the desire by women to break away from tradition and at the same time holding on to it as exemplified by Tambu in *Nervous Conditions*. Anderson (2010) observes that Tambu departs from tradition quite early by attempting to challenge the hegemonic oppressive tendency of African cultural practices for preference for educating the boy child over the girl child. Demystifying the traditional images of the African woman calls for adoption of ways that would suit the struggle of the African woman, with African origins and specifically with the woman of African descent in mind. It would be inappropriate to adopt foreign ideas in trying to solve the problems of the local, especially those that do not fully address the struggles of the local. Hill (1995) exposes colonial education and adoption of Western ways as bringing painful consequences for the modern African woman and yet the men also suffered during the colonial era.

Furusa (1996, p. 2) points out that:

The British reproduced and valorised European cultures within the colonized Zimbabwe geopolitical and mental spaces, thus systematically transforming the way Zimbabwean males and females experienced their relationships together within time and space to replicate western gender notions.

Thus, though the silencing of boy child is meant to liberate the girl child from the bondage of masculinity, the tact is purely foreign to Africa. As noted by Furusa (1996), it re-enacts Western ideologies on the African soil; it liberates women by colonising male society. In this way, the issue of gender equality marginalised males who ended up living under oppression and colonialism. Imperialism subverts the tradition just at the same time it disillusioned women. Thus, instead of

having a complementary gender life, imbalances are (re)created. The silencing of the boy child in the texts becomes fruitless as in some moments women need males to speak. This is seen in Andrea's text *The Purple Violet* (1989) when Kauna leaves her husband's compound the bleakness and grim chances of survival hint on the reliance of the now deceased husband. Males are often thought as the breadwinners who fend for the family. Though the character is determined to live on, the lengthy gravel dusty road she walks on along with her children symbolises an unknown future which needs her input. In the same way, *Bamukuru* in Dangarembga's *Nervous Condition* (1989) remains central to the way the family is run, he makes most of the decisions and he is the breadwinner of the family. This sense of headship is supported by the aunties who perpetuate the domination of their gender by reinforcing what the patriarch dictates. Moreover, Tambu helps out Nhamo despite their differences and often cleans after her brother's mess as required of the African woman. Ba's Ramatoulaye claims to have been relieved by the death of her husband yet her other emotions are divided and seems consummated in memories of their childhood, she reminisces over their relationship before they met each other, how they used to dance and write each other letters (Ba, 1979, p. 14). It may seem as another way of creating a motif of infantile regression in the patriarchal system but that little pocket of yearning for males reveal that the two genders should amicably co-exist.

More so, the feminist writers have seemingly made it observable that whenever both the boy child and girl child appear in feminist critical narration. There seem to be a lack of gender balance in their presentation of the girl child and the boy child behavioural patterns. This is seen in Dangarembga's text *Nervous Conditions* portrayal of Nhamo, the boy child is negatively represented as compared to Tambudzai the girl child. Nhamo is a victim of the African boy child misrepresentation in the novel *Nervous Conditions*. Nhamo is not living according to the norms

and cultural expectations of the African society; he behaves contrary to what the African elders expect from him. Nhamo is then, however punished by Dangarembga and does not display any deviation in behaviour as we do not really hear his voice throughout the novel. The girl child becomes the main character and the voice of the protagonist in Dangarembgas' novel *Nervous Conditions*. Thomas (2008) points out that there is existence of subconscious mechanisms which are used to assign gender roles in feminist critical discourse. Nyangaresi (2016) further states that gender is always constructed through socialisation.

Nhamo is also in a manner of speaking, a muted voice against the social injustices against women – and thus insignificant. He merely illustrates the generational perpetuation of an oppressive patriarchal system that is handed down from generation to generation. Nhamo is well conscious of the imbalances between the boy child and the girl child yet he 'chooses' to embrace the oppressive nature of his society and not speak against it. Quite aware of his privileged position as a boy child, Nhamo further practices his sexism and male chauvinism on both Tambudzai and Netsai by always asking them to go and fetch some of his luggage from the nearby shops even when he could have carried it all (pp. 9-10). It is no wonder therefore, that Tambudzai feels relieved when Nhamo leaves for further education at the mission and does not feel remorseful when he dies. In fact, Nhamo's 'killing' by the author is symbolic of the need to 'eliminate' future stumbling blocks in the fight against discrimination and patriarchy. Nhamo, through his reproduction of the nature and character of his father and largely Babamukuru, is a symbol of how deeply entrenched the system is and how it would reincarnate in the future through him – considering how he embraces his privileged position as a boy child in the society. Nhamo's acceptance of and comfort in his privileged position represents a problem in the future for future female generations and thus he

must be muted – silenced permanently. Nhamo’s death is a form of silencing – muting the voice of the boy child.

But it should be question why a mere boy like Nhamo would display such chauvinistic, sexist tendencies and not speak out against it. Can Nhamo really be blamed for being silent? For embracing the privilege that society bestows on him as a boy child? Is it his fault that he is ‘blind to the social injustices towards females? No. Nhamo is a victim of a system that entrenches within him norms and values that oppress women. He is a victim of socialisation and has no voice against an age old system – even if he wanted to speak out. It is as if Nhamo gets socialised into his gender role even before he is born. One is in this regard tempted to believe that as a result of the gendered ways society is hence Rodgers (2013) notes that:

Every society assigns new arrivals [i.e. newly borns] particular roles, including gender roles, which they have to learn. The little animal born into a human society becomes a socialized individual in a remarkably short time. This process of internalising is both conscious and unconscious. This seems to be the case with Nhamo. The process of internalising his gender role as a male personality who automatically looks down on the female persons has been done consciously and unconsciously ‘in a remarkably short time. (p. 33)

Dangarembga thus thrusts Nhamo into insignificance in the fight for equal recognition and the rights to equality for the girl child by ‘killing’ him. He is, as far as the feminist quest for equality is concerned, a muted voice and a future stumbling block as he is already socialised into the system of ‘othering’ and belittling the feminine. Nhamo thus represents a perpetuation of the system that female characters attempt to debunk and he is so through socialisation. He is in fact for all intents and purposes, a reincarnation of Babamukuru especially, and to some extent – his father. He is

after all, his father's son! And for this reason, he needs to go and thus Dangarembga 'kills' him and his death represents the rise of the feminine – specifically Tambu who ultimately gets a chance to get education after Nhamo's death.

Hill (1995) states that in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1989), the cultivation of the female voice and the mind through education is inextricably connected with problematic silencing that is manifested through symptoms of illness as Nyasha is the character who articulates most of the historically sincere events mentioned, she expresses most clearly Dangarembga's thematic articulation of the patriarchal emancipation.

Anderson (2010) exposes the passion of women to semi-break away from tradition. The breakaway never entirely completes as womanhood is defined through the very culture thus, one cannot erase one's belonging without it resurfacing again. In fact, the independence of the girl child can only be understood through their dependence that history has a major role in trendsetting the progress of women emancipation. For instance, Dangarembga's Tambu defies tradition by sponsoring her education above what patriarch had intended her to be, but it is her adherence to tradition which renders her more successful in the family than Nyasha. Nyasha is in the end inflicted with self-doubt and psychic conditions for failing to reconcile herself with tradition. Thus, education creates a paradox by being both the redemption and curse to African families. Education has been socially and symbolically considered a vessel which transports women to independence by putting them beyond the ignorance of tradition. Education has been considered as pivotal within gender studies as it has been used to demarcate the biological divide between the two sexes (Uwakweh, 1998). Furthermore, Uwakweh (1998, p. 13) suggests that "education is critical to female independence. Socially, and often symbolically, it transports women beyond the reach of traditional shackles". Uwakweh (1998) makes an observation that the boy child has the advantage of acquiring education

as compared to the girl child, as noted in Dangarembga's text. Education becomes the source of conflict in the families in her text. It can be noted in Dangarembga's text that education has been rendered as a tension and conflict ridden sphere at the familial level. Uwakweh (1995) asserts that the self-referential nature of the autobiographical mode adopted by Dangarembga as a literary strategy, marks her attainment of voice in a male dominated Zimbabwe literary arena. Uwakweh (1998) continues to say that voicing is self-defining, liberal and cathartic. The politics stem from the tradition of boy education preferences over girls. African culture and the patriarch believed that Western education unscales the eyes of women to the extent of embracing rebellious attitudes towards their native cultures and traditions.

Kauna in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2005) seems to be an ordinary woman, uneducated formally and that Shange expects her to breed children for him. Yet, in comparison, Kauna is portrayed as more sagacious in judgment and decision making than Shange. Shange the boy child in this case works as a domestic worker for his survival. Andreas portrays him as a servant and a master of menial jobs. Therefore, the study notes that the boy child characters are presented as victims of social constructs outside their perennial canon. The boy child has been awarded a domestic role and represented to be in the struggle to safeguard their existence in this kind of society that has been fictionally created in feminist critical discourses. However, the boy child life struggles are full of hurdles. Their predicaments through boyhood have been shaped by socialisation with their economic hardship as boys. This plays an important role in descriptions given to the boy child since their childhood.

They must exclusively struggle for survival or else they perish in the society. This work henceforth interrogates the ideas of Foucault (as cited by Nyangaresi, 2016) where power is spelt out that it is constructed, reconstructed and conducted through feminist critical discourse. Nyangaresi 2016)

argues that this discursive play of power is inevitable in our life. The traits depicted by the young growing boys in Andrea's text are quite interesting with relevant ideas related to power constructions. The fact that they are boys denies them economic powers which they are involved to reconstruct by working as domestic workers. Shange works in the kitchen doing *womanly* chores. The author deliberately effeminates him so that he comes down to the very ground he distastes.

Neshani Andreas focuses on female characters as central to her narrative, they develop and operate within their social relationships with the male figure, who deserve to be explored. In Andreas' novel, the reader is acquainted with the absence of the male characters who are away most of the times as they are migrant workers in the mines during the post-apartheid period in Namibia. For economic reasons, the male characters spend most of their lives on their own in a predominantly male environment as presented in the novel. They intermittently visit home, mostly during festive seasons and this represents them as absent husband and absent fathers to their sons. This has its own impact on family relationships: it culminates in a separate development of characters independent of each other particularly in a marriage partnership, the dynamics of power shift in the family arena where women become 'heads of households. A father becomes a stranger in his own home and this places fatherhood in a precarious position as it undermines the male authority. This also makes it difficult for the upbringing of little boys who are brought up by their mothers in the absence of father figures to guide them through their boyhood.

The boy child faces challenges on its own, it challenges the idea of what is it to be a man, especially to the masculinity which is steeped in the traditional and cultural setup. This historical period of post-apartheid could be indicative of the pressures on the male characters as they try to re-configure and assert their positions in the family circle. This is a man who becomes alienated from

his own family as a result of migrant work in far places from home. At work places, the same man lives and operates like a single man which can lead to multiple relationships with other women. He is reminded of his role of a father and a husband when he comes back to the village. It is a staggering responsibility to find one's bearings in reasserting one's role as a man in a society shaped by traditional values. Social roles as child bearers and aides to male causes have been used to subdue women as second class citizens. Moreover, it has been the inclination of African societies to call women who stay at home doing seemingly non-intellectual house chores as a role for an ideal 'wife material.' To this end Furusa (1996, p. 3) posits that, "Colonialism bracketed the ... woman into restricted roles of wife and mother. Her performance space was the home, with her major staging area as the kitchen."

Throughout history, the boy child has been warranted with unlimited mobility in virtually all human aspects that girl child has felt as if under house arrest yet cultural traditions have been manned to keep them under surveillance in fear of disillusionment. Thus, society expects females to be silent which runs parallel to the ends of education which empowers them. In the same way, Modou Fall's death in Ba's *So long a Letter* (1979) serves the same motive. Mawdo Ba studies medicine at the most prestigious institution but all intelligence acquired is rubbished by the fact that Mawdo Ba still falls into the trap of polygamous marriages. He is indecisive, he ends up divorcing his educated loving wife and marries an immature second wife, young Nabou, to please his mother. This indexes the failures of the patriarch to proffer social healing diagnoses to the needs of women. In the same way, the success of Modou Fall is muted, Ramatouyale mentions how Modou Fall died a poor man even though he was very educated, he is presented as a man who perishes devoid of legacy but much debts, Ramatouyale mentions:

Dead without a penny saved. Acknowledgements of debts? A pile of them: cloth and gold traders, home delivery grocers and butchers, car purchase instalments. In essence, the way these three texts mute male success in the field of education successfully addresses the need of equal education rights between male and females. (Ba, 1979, p. 10)

The protagonist also typifies Mawdo Ba to another boy child character in the text, Samba Diack as one who is educated just like Mawdo Ba and yet he gives his wife a horrid time through his actions to the extent that the wife suffers a nervous breakdown. He is an unfaithful husband and an irresponsible father to his boy children. Ramatouyale mentions:

And I think of Jaqueline, who suffered from one. Jacqueline, the Ivorian, had disobeyed her protestant parents and had married Samba Diack contemporary of Mawdo Ba', a doctor like him. (Ba, 1979, p. 43).

Consequently, the education of the boy children characters is portrayed as useless, it is silenced and eradicated by their actions. The boy child characters as represented by Ba and Dangarembga do not act according to their education level. The boy child characters are portrayed as characters that are good at chasing women rather than focusing at their professions and they do not act according to the education that they have attained. Ramatoulaye who is a female teacher actually represents the actualised one who can brighten the future of African societies darkened by the dominance of males – and the boy children represent a perpetuation of such forms of patriarchal domination. The boy children, in Ba's vision, are expunged from the influence of their father, who represents patriarchal oppression. By being socialised in the diaspora, away from the social influences that their father and patriarchal social constructs that Africa represents, Ba silences patriarchy and nips its future perpetuation in the bud. She manages to eliminate its perpetuation in

the future through the children. Their new place of upbringing is perhaps a more receptive and evolved society and the hope for the future – the end of patriarchal oppression – is premised on the hope that the Western socialisation will create in the boy child a more evolved being than the one socialised in African contexts.

4.6. Father and daughter relationships/father and son relationships/mother and son relationships

In discussing the (in)significance of the boy child within feminist discourses articulated by the texts under study, it is also important to examine the relationships they share with their parents and how these ultimately shape their worldviews on gender relations. In the end, in the grander scheme of things, these relationships are determinant of the role, or lack of it thereof, that they play in feminist discourses. This section discusses that in relation to the texts and part of analysis. Shaw (2007, p. 7) asserts that “reading the novel *Nervous Conditions* (1989) provides insight into sexual tension in the father-daughter relationship and suggests that Nyasha’s nervous condition in good part derived from the opposition between becoming a woman and being a daughter”. The father-daughter relationship in *Nervous Conditions* (1989) is explored more compared to the father-son relationship hence, this cultivates and resonates to the boy child becoming unimportant as brought out in the text. The father-son relationship is a significant factor - the son creates his own father-son relationship with his child (a second-generation relationship). In *Nervous Conditions*, the father-son relationship is characterised by a lack of emotional availability and a stilted emotional connection. The father-son relationship between Nhamo and Jeremiah is restrained as presented in the text. They are presented as a pair that hardly converse or spent time together as expected from a decent father and his boy child relationship. Wang’odu (2015) posits that a father is supposed to educate his son on how to become a man and to endorse him with all that he requires to become

masculine enough. In other words, the father is expected to teach his boy child on how to become a man. Perhaps, in examining Nhamo's deportment towards women, it can be understood from his observing his father's treatment of women. In both texts, fathers are presented as irresponsible and absent fathers to the boy child and leave society and social processes of socialisation to shape the boy child's perceptions of reality and gender.

Examining Dangarembga's (1989) representation of the boy child Nhamo, it is noted that his representation need to be evaluated. This forms the basis of the present discussion as the study focuses more on how the selected authors represent the boy child through the male characters in the texts. Harageib (2018) suggests that many boys are trapped in the same suffocating, outdated model of masculinity, where manhood is measured in strength, where there is no way to be vulnerable without being emasculated, where manliness is about having power over others. This is seen through the character babamukuru in the text *Nervous Conditions* (1989), he is recognised as typical African boy child who is responsible, hardworking, he takes care of his parents and extended family. Babamukuru has power over his younger brother Jeremiah because he has qualified and proven to be the typical African boy child. He is educated, he becomes the breadwinner of the family as expected of an African boy child in his community. However, babamukuru brother Jeremiah is not fully recognised in the text, Dangarembga emasculates him, he is presented as a poor, uneducated and irresponsible boy child. This is evident of how the boy child is silenced in feminist texts through emasculation. He becomes a voiceless boy child in the Dangarembga's text, his poor status does not allow to make decisions in the family he is voiceless, he does not have the right to decide over his own children. He is not awarded the room to voice out as a character because he has been emasculated. This is evident of how the boy child does not have the language to talk about how he feels about being trapped and to be misrepresented, because

the language that exists to discuss the full range of human emotion is still viewed as sensitive and feminine.

In *So Long a Letter* (1979) fathers are represented as absent father figures to their sons. Ramatouyale mentions how Modou Fall abandoned her and her children including their sons (Ba, 1979, p.10). Ramatouyale also mentions how Samba Diack disrespected his sons and never spent time with them as expected of a father but instead he abandoned his sons and spent time chasing around slender Senegalese girls (Ba, 1979, p. 44). In addition, Ramatouyale also mentions how Aissatou raised her four sons in the United States as a single mother in the absence of their father Mawdo Ba. Father son relationships seem to be subtly presented in the feminist texts, they are hardly focused on, and the boy child is presented as one who is neglected by his father. Father figures as presented as absent fathers to their boy children. Perhaps eliminating the influence that fathers could have on the boy child socially and in ways they project gender relations and view women in general is a deliberate ploy to expunge the patriarchal system by avoiding its transference from one generation to another. The oppressed women, by raising the children themselves would perhaps instil a new form of socialisation in the male child – one in which he has respect for the feminine and female. Women remain a property of men throughout their lifetime as demonstrated by such traditional practices as lobola. However, Dangarembga presents characters who feel they should break away from the men who are the chief problems in their lives. Men are presented as stumbling blocks to women's liberation and uncalled for occupants of their space. The new male child, socialised away from the influence of patriarchy that their fathers and the African context represent will perhaps emerge as a different species and thus fulfilling the feminist quest for equality. The boy child, in Ba's vision, it seems, is important and significant in

the future nature of gender relations in African social spaces and such needs a new form of socialisation different from the one that 'home and their fathers represent.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Nyasha, Babamakuru's daughter, does not always behave as her parents expect by challenging her father's authority and reflecting more deeply about gender and class and her condition as an African woman. The first serious disagreement between Nyasha and Babamakuru happens around D. H. Lawrence's book. Her parents think that a good girl cannot read *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Without her permission, the father takes the 'immoral' book that contributes to pervert the daughter.

The difference between the importance and value of genders is demonstrated here by Babamakuru's reaction to this incident. The treatment that Nyasha got, is one that her brother Chido would never receive from Babamakuru. Babamakuru was distressed, looking sad, then hurt, then ultimately annoyed ... "I don't no sense of decency, none whatsoever" (Dangarembga, 1989, p. 81). So saying, he took the book and left the room, returning a minute later without the off ending volume. When Nyasha realises that her parents are censoring her reading, she gets frustrated, interrupts her meal, and asks to leave the table. Babamakuru's abuse is always associated to Nyasha's femininity. He accuses her of indecency, calls her a whore, and finally accuses her of having a sexual relationship with one of the Baker boys, a white man. An African girl educated in the United Kingdom, Nyasha cannot meet her father's expectations regarding the appropriate feminine behaviour in Zimbabwe. The boy child is seemingly given preferential treatment over the girl child. This could be attributed to the gendered social constructs that the male characters have been socialised in. For example, in the case of Babamakuru, there is a clear distinction between the treatments he gives Nyasha, his daughter and Chido, his son. Nyasha is forbidden from establishing social relations with white people, especially white boys – something not denied to

Chido. Chido, as a male/boy child is pedestalsed and given a position of privilege. As expressed by Rodgers (2013, p. 46),

To emphasize the difference between girls and boys, Chido, his son, associates so much with Whites that he is hardly home and he is totally alienated from his family as a result. But because he is a boy, it is all right as far as Babamukuru's expounded ideology is concerned.

The portrayal of the boy character Chido interacting with the white boys could be a means of changing the expected social reality; encouraging the questionable behaviours and deconstructing the power interplay between the girl and the boy child. It is expected that 'Chido' is a victim of adventure with other young Baker boys who are there to present Chido as one who defies his father's orders. Chido continues to socialise with the white boys despite his father's hatred and disapproval against socialising with the white boy child. Chabari (2009) argues "that adventure narratives play an important role in constructing masculinities in feminist critical discourses" (p. 30). Chido's masculinities as a boy child is simply reduced to a platter of deviance and rebellion through his interaction with the white man against his father will, hence the boy child is misrepresented as one who is rebellious and mischievous. At the end of the novel, Maiguru mentions that Chido was chasing after the white girls but we never get to witness the incident in the novel. It imperturbably and is peripherally mentioned at the end of the novel. However, this is evident of how the voice of the boy child is suffocated and suppressed in Dangarembga's text. It was going to be fair enough if we had witnessed Chido's incident of chasing after the white girl that Maiguru specifically mentions.

In further illustrating the privileged projection Tambudzai envisions initially, the home at the Mission as one that should be pleasant and liberating physically and spiritually but it ends up being

very stifling for the girl child. This is clearly illustrated comparatively with the portrayal and treatment of the boy child. The boy child is projected as a privileged being. In the village, at least Tambudzai could talk to her father and even ask questions sometimes. The girl children, in comparison to the boy children suffer from patriarchal oppression while the boy child is socialised into psychologically embedding the notions that he is more superior to the girl child. Nyasha in particular agonises more about these restrictions and oppression. In comparison, the boy child Chido, since he is a man:

...being a boy, he can do what he wants. He is rarely at home, does not visit the village often and gets totally assimilated into the White people's culture as he associates more and more with the Bakers. This leaves Nyasha at the crossroads, not knowing which way to turn: either to the inhibitive new home culture, or to the African culture which these same parents neglected to teach her, or to the freer Western culture for which she is reprimanded time and again.” The father does not approve of the words she speaks or the clothes she wears like mini-skirts, while the mother does not mind them and in fact buys the mini-dresses for her (which could be her way of protesting against the father's values. (Onuchi, 2009, p. 65)

Despite his attempts to try and fight for his sister, Chido is silenced and not accorded the space and voice to project and expose such societal inconsistencies. Perhaps as a result of his mostly European upbringing and Western influence culminating from his association with the Baker boys, he was ‘self’ socialised differently and could notice the injustices of African society and intended on challenging them in defence of her sister and her behaviour. He is quite conscious of the manners in which African culture privileges him as a boy and is all ill at ease about it. However, the long hand of African patriarchy hushes him down and his voice is suppressed. He is, as a male,

expected to accept his privileged position and follow the oppressive and strict deportment of his father and all other men in society towards women. He must, as a man, embrace the privilege that comes with being one in a society that cares little of the opinions and feelings of the women. He is thus silenced by patriarchy and as such projected as a ‘victim’ of the system too.

The representation of Nhamo’s position of privilege as a boy child is enviable as depicted by Tambu’s reaction when he dies. Nhamo represents, through his deportment, the continuity of an oppressive patriarchal system. He is socialised into believing in his superiority over the females. In this regard, Tambu’s callousness over the death of her brother, Nhamo, can best be explained by examining the disparities in the projections of both the girl and the boy child she says “I was not sorry when my brother died....”, in her reason for “her lack of feelings for her brother” (p. 1), an important aspect emerges – patriarchy and its privileging of the boy child as evinced by the representation of Nhamo and Tambu comparatively. In the beginning, Tambu adores her brother – a normal behaviour for siblings. However, in time and through the realisation that as a boy child, Nhamo was more privileged than her, her feelings suddenly change to those of hatred and scorn. This rude awakening is also informed by her sudden realisation of her brother’s sexism. As Rodgers (2013, p. 84) explains:

Tambu’s first-hand experience of unfair inequality structures relying solely upon one’s biological sex, uttered by her brother Nhamo, triggers her negative feelings towards him and initiates her nervous condition. His words, “I go to school. You go nowhere” (21) deeply shock her. Tambu recalls, “Nhamo was not interested in being fair. Maybe to other people, but certainly not to his sisters, his younger sisters for that matter” (12). The moment she learns that Nhamo blatantly advocates universal gender inequalities that preclude her from going to school, she states, “My concern for my brother died an unobtrusive death”

(20). Nhamo fully approved the sexist mind-sets that boys shall have first access to education, and thus appropriated sexism into his repertoire of values.

For the purposes that Nhamo represents the same kind of gender problems for the feminine, he is 'killed'. His death is symbolic of the eradication and subversion of the perpetuation of the same oppressive patriarchal social structure that the elder men (Jeremiah and Babamukuru) represent. Nhamo, as a boy child, is significant in that he is a symbol of the continuity of male domination and reading the text from the perspective of feminist discourse and project, his death is also significant in marking the demise of chauvinism and socially sanctioned oppression.

As the father attempts to fit her in the society, his continuous bullying becomes as indigestible as the food Nyasha cannot eat. Kalisa (2009) points out that in African societies "patriarchal violence combines European models of violence against women with models of patriarchal oppression that existed before and after colonialism". Nyasha's response as a boy child to patriarchal violence which is spared Chido and Nhamo since they are boys is her refusal to eat which may be interpreted as metaphorical and political. Chido is spared of the humiliation and wrath of Babamukuru. To Babamukuru, Chido represents the future of his household and perpetuation of his name and dynasty. Nyasha's refusal to eat is a metaphor for her inability to cope with these oppressive cultural norms, patriarchal dominance, and the inconsistencies of a modern society which secure masculine privilege as evidenced by the disparities in the treatment that Chido and herself receive. It is also her political response to the food scarcity that was a serious problem in Zimbabwe, especially during wartime, and if Babamukuru could provide this family with an abundance of food, this was not a reality across the country where the majority of Africans lived segregated and without enough to survive, as was the case of Tambu's father, Jeremiah.

When Nyasha begins to vomit to empty her stomach and loses weight, she demonstrates her refusal to consent to the abuses of her father. Such demonstrations are clearly a result of her observation of her subjugation merely on the basis of sex. For her, being a boy child like Chido represents privilege and the perpetuation of the oppressive system. The violence perpetrated by her authoritarian father contributes to Nyasha's traumatic experiences, which start when she arrives in Harare from the United Kingdom, but symptoms of nervous conditions take a while to become visible. As Brown (2015) remarks "subtle manifestations of trauma, allows us to see the hidden sharp edges and secret leg hold traps, whose scars we have borne or might find ourselves bearing" (p. 108). Nyasha gradually develops the illness as she understands her condition as a black girl – especially in contrast and comparison to the privilege that boy children enjoy simply for being male - in an African country and sociocultural context, colonised by the British and ruled by a white minority which imposed a regime of segregation. She wanted to understand the history of her country, and her position as a privileged woman in that context.

In her quest to achieve equality and freedom, Nyasha attempts to find an escape for herself. She finds her own strategies to remain in the path she traced for herself, even if she needs to disconnect from the self to maintain her dignity and integrity, and her commitment with her goals without going through a metaphorical death. Nyasha's nervous illness worsens when she has a serious fight with the father after a night out at a school party. Babamukuru realises that she stayed outside the house alone with one of the Baker boys, a white man, while her brother and her cousin entered the house. The privilege to socialise with the white people denied Nyasha is accorded to the boy child, Chido, for whom the father turns a blind eye to his close affinities with whites. Perhaps in a manner of correcting the culturally entrenched oppressive nature of patriarchy, the association with and socialisation of Chido within the western cultural context, which awakens him to new realities and

contributes to his alienation from his family and culture is a feminist ploy to evince that the new generation of men has a role to play in the realisation of equality for all genders. Chido rejects the views of his culture and seems to embrace more accommodating views possibly learnt from his association with a different culture. Dangarembga perhaps is intimating that there is hope after all in the future generations of men. Chido technically rejects the influences of his father and the oppressive culture that he represents. Representing the future generation of men, and not socialised by and through the oppressive African culture, he perhaps represents in Dangarembga's view, the significant role that the boy child needs to or will play in the future of society – especially in the quest for an ungendered society.

Bamukuru loses control and hits Nyasha, stating that he needs to educate her daughter to be a decent woman. In suffering physical violence from her father, Nyasha breaks free in an explosion of kicks and punches against him.

“I told you not to hit me”, said Nyasha, punching him in the eye. Babamukuru bellowed and snorted that if Nyasha was going to behave like a man, then by his mother who was resting in her grave he would fight her like one. They went down on the floor, Babamukuru alternately punching ... Nyasha, screaming and wriggling and doing what damage she could. (Dangarembga, 1989, p. 117)

After the fight with her father, Nyasha gradually enters a process of bulimia which leads to considerable weight loss. According to Shank (2002), “her illness can be understood as her only available response to the double alienation of being a Western-educated female who has returned to Africa and cannot reconcile those two sets of conflicting cultural values” (p. 229). Her drastic loss of weight may be considered as her ambivalent desire and inability to fit in the modern African

society in which her brother Chido – younger brother to be precise – is privileged on merely the basis that he is male. As a result, Nyasha enters a process of bulimia, vomiting all the food she eats and becoming cadaverous. In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangaremba's postcolonial and feminine representation of violence reveals how women find strategic ways to cope with various forms of violence. Epistemic violence, embedded in discourse, and systemic modes of violence, which are result of political and economic decisions, target female characters in many ways. Through her text, the author shares the pain of her characters with readers, unveiling the deterioration of women's minds and bodies, but also promoting their rebellion. In the novel, both Tambudzai, the narrator, and her cousin Nyasha cannot come to terms with an ambivalent process of modernisation that maintains an inherent state of order that does not challenge patriarchal power or social, racial, and ethnic divisions. By entering through the back door of the uncle's house, Tambudzai finds escape from poverty and dependency through education, merit, and the opportunities provided by modernity, while Nyasha probably faces death. However, her death does not represent the end of her rebellion; it is through her deteriorated body that the protagonist unveils her refusal to consent to the epidermalisation of discipline to which women are constantly submitted.

In the novella *So Long a Letter* the father daughter relationships are also brought out through the relationships of Daba and her father Modou Fall, Young Nabou and her father chief and Aissatou and her father the goldsmith. Daba was betrayed by her father who went on to date and marry her best friend Binetou. This leads to Daba lacking respect for her father and disrespecting him in his face. The protagonist of the novella mentions how Daba exhibits utmost insolence to his father, she says:

Daba would go to the night clubs, dressed simply she would appear on her fiancé's arm, she would arrive late on purpose so as to sit in full view of her father. It was a grotesque

confrontation; on one side an ill-sorted couple, on the other a matched couple and ends up disrespecting his father. (Ba, 1979, p. 38)

This presents the boy child as failures in fatherhood, the boy children are represented as useless and void in their children's life.

4.7. Brotherhood and Sisterhood

In understanding the role and (in)significance of the boy child within the discourses of gender and gender in/equalities, we also need to examine how these socially privileged boy children relate with their sisters. The goal of undertaking such an exercise to examine how such relationships also speak to the concerns of feminist discourses. *So Long a Letter* evokes emotions and rage towards the discriminatory nature of the patriarchal hegemony especially this is seen through the manner in which it oppresses the female society. Bà's novel centres the healing powers of female friendship that soothes pain and facilitates women with enough vigour to survive the male prejudices.

A voice from women is a cathartic element which sheds on a woman's experience and reality in a way which remains locked for the patriarch (Uwakweh, 1995). Hence, the silencing of the boy child and male silence in these texts is meant to disparage the macho social scaffold which is (re)created by tradition and *imposed* as truths about the *mythical woman*. The very fact that children are raised in the absence of their 'irresponsible' fathers and in a Western world is a clear indication of the feminist movement belief in the need of a new kind of socialisation for the boy child in order for him to embrace more accepting and accommodating relations with females in his environment. Since the males in the text all seem to exude sexist and oppressive patriarchal tendencies, perhaps, for feminist purposes they are not the best examples for the socialisation of

the boy child who would then assimilate the very similar patriarchal tendencies. The significance of the boy child in this regard is that he represents the future and is thus in need of a transformation of behaviour and belief.

Feminist texts usually lock male in the Adamic silence to reflect on the potential of women to control world's events and history as highlighted by Eve in the Garden of Eden. Perhaps this is message that is sent here by both the 'killing' of Nhamo by Dangarembga and the removal of the boy child in an African setting that socialises them in oppressive patriarchal ways represents such kind of Adamic silencing. The three female authors manage to reflect the image of the African woman in the mirror of the society so that one could sympathise and empathise with the victims of social ills perpetrated by the masculine contexts of the real world. Ambition and responsibility are usually ideal qualities for measurable development that feminists are ambitious to replace males by being their responsible custodian (Hudson-Weems, 1993, p. 71) that the shutdown to the boy child's menace in the texts fulfils such heights.

Moreover, ambition and sense of responsibility in a wife are essential in keeping the hearths of African family. The woman becomes a symbol of endearment which enables her to be patient with tiresome errands which demands patience like baby sitting and doing the dishes amongst the clattering noise. This same role of being house wives like Kauna entails that women can mother men and can hence hush them when they see the need. Ramatoulaye's mother in *So Long a Letter* (1979) perceives her son-in-law Modou Fall as a schoolboy dressed in khaki uniforms. The boy child is presented as an agent of mockery. Males are treated as boys whose pranks deserve a spanking punishment of a mother who wants to right her son's ways. Boys are known for mischief and being recalcitrant that the juvenile delinquency of the patriarch is recorded in the *black book*

(in this case, the novels) so that an account of the harm it has done to the society is booked and known to all.

Tambu fights her struggles and grew to help her brother out as well as the entire family through her gardening project in Dangarembga's *Nervous Condition*. Likewise, Kauna in Andreas's (2005) *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* fends for the family needs in the absence of Shange just as Ramatoulaye in Ba's *So Long a Letter* manages to stay economically afloat despite the non-supportive nature of Modou Fall. The texts portray female characters unravelling life's mysteries and struggles which prove insurmountable to men. All forms of struggles fought bear the mark of violence which is a quality of aggression considered *male-ish* by traditional culture. The boy child in all these contexts also becomes depended on the female as well.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambudzai acknowledges that the death of her father's first boy child was a blessing to her, thus she implies that, paradoxically, her brother's death means survival for herself. She enjoys listening to the uncle's statement that "there is no male child to take this duty, to take this job of raising the family from hunger and need" (Dangarembga, 1989, p. 56). This reinforces the stature of the boy child in African society which privileges them since they are imagined as the future of the family and dynasty. By using linguistic violence, Dangarembga's narrative subverts not only language but to societal rules as well. Tambu declares that the death of the boy child, her own brother, accorded her the privileges that she deserves as an African girl child. If Tambu has the courage to state that the death of the brother afforded her with the opportunity she desires, violence through language becomes part and parcel of her path to freedom therefore presenting the male child as a huge obstacle to the emancipation of female child.

4.8. Being male-ish: Language, violence and betrayal in the gender discourses of *Nervous Conditions* (1989), *So Long a Letter* (1979) and *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001)

The depiction of the boy child can further be better understood with an understanding of the conditions that both genders, young and old, live within societies. Women, both young and old, are mostly projected as victims of male violence – both physical and verbal. Women and the consequent violence that ensue as a result of adopting acculturating cultural practices. According to Chabari (as cited by Nyangaresi, 2016), culturally the boy child is expected to act as being masculine and in isolation from girls and women (p. 32). However, Weiss (1996) assumes that Africana feminism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. Feminist works represent the male society as being responsible with the display of violent orders which make them to stand out in contemporary societies at the expense of women who are manipulated and suppressed. These works have highly contributed to liberating girls and women from biased traditional roles which society expects of them. The credo is that it stems from African culture with its major thrust reinforcing the idiosyncratic perdition of Africana women. Thus, the texts erect a barricade towards oppression by the masculine realities. Masculine realities stifle women through racism, religion, class and colonialism to engender submissiveness in a society. As texts originating from the African continent, they address gender problems through eliminating equations which index the phallic supremacist context. Contextualisation of problems basing on spatial and temporal factors solve tensions between participants in a power struggle by being its own testimonial. Moyana (1994, p. 26) posits that:

Dangarembga's novel is in the feminist tradition. The author does not merely state women's experiences and leave them there, neither does she describe the socialization of women into their roles, rather she depicts some women who try to protest against their

usual socially accepted roles while others engage in a debate on how they are being used or misused by the menfolk.

This same pervasion of the African patriarch is usually taboo or treasonous as it is behaviour contrary to traditional culture. In the same manner of 'naming and shaming of hegemony,' Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1979) probes the passivity of women advanced by religion. Muslim women are mythicised as sexually virile that the composer's distancing from its rites and doctrinal efficacy seems to snub the portrayal of women as sex objects. This serves as the greatest harm to male sex instinct which is silenced to hint on male emasculation vouched for by these three texts under study.

Chabari (2009) points out that, in African women's literature, associating masculinities with physical violence and through linguistic violence, is a vehicle and tool of liberation that is found within feminist writers' discourse. African women writers present violence, through a feminine and postcolonial perspective. They open up creative ways to portray the boy children as a violent community, connected to systems of power. In this sense, the female writers' narrative instils in the reader, through language and discourse, the sentiment which evolves from women's condition in the novel.

The connection between linguistic discourses and social practices of violence imposes a perspective which disturbs not only literature and genre but provides the reader with new forms of conceptualising a usual, but an improper subject. As female characters attempt to regain humanity through their violent reactions, the female writers also carve a site for themselves in a world where literary genres and aesthetics do not always permit counter violence or counter-hegemonic discourses. On one level, in transposing forms of violence to a discursive level, Dangarembga, for

example, pushes the reader to the limit, while on the other hand, her narrative challenges the ways in which violence of representation has defined the black men and African women.

Dangarembga and Ba's narratives subvert hegemonic discourses. When Dangarembga's Tambudzai's brother, Nhamo, is still alive, she describes one of her moments of insanity when she attacks him with fury. With the prosperous uncle living in London, her parents could not afford to send both children to school. They decided to pay the fees for the boy child. Meanwhile, Tambu has the idea to grow maize to pay her own fees. She puts her idea into practice, but her crop starts to disappear from the field. Tambu discovers that Nhamo is stealing her maize as a way of mocking her. The boy child is presented as a thief and as a stumbling block to the emancipation and breakthrough to achievements of the girl child. His behaviours portray him as a kind of a character who is only forced to be domesticated otherwise given choice. Frustrated with her situation and surprised by the cruelty of the brother, Tambudzai utilises physical violence to make her voice heard therefore silencing the voice of the boy child.

Tambudzai mentions that:

I remember at one moment I was playing pada, Nhamo and I rolling about in the dirt of the football pitch, a group of excited egging us on. They said I went straight to my brother and brought him down on a single charge. The element of surprise was on my side. I sat on top of him, banged his head into the ground, screamed and spat and cursed. Nhamo heaved. He pinned me to the ground, not striking, only holding me there, the malicious twinkle back in his eye. What's the matter with you? He drawled. "Have you gone mad."
(Dangarembga, 1989, p. 23)

This portrayal of the position of the boy child and the subsequent behaviour communicates the fact Nhamo is not praiseworthy. The behaviour of Nhamo deliberately serves to show how Nhamo is not deserving the adequate attention as a boy child even from the readers. This guides the reader through the society and sees the image of the general boy child in the text. The boy child is seen as the only character who comes out as an agent of moral deficiency this is seen through the behaviour patterns exhibited by Nhamo. So the society has built the manners of behaviour of the boy child. It has disseminated the vocabularies of spells and stealing as a defence mechanisms applicable in male child. After that episode, Tambu reveals that she considers her brother a betrayer who is always enjoyed his masculine privilege. Therefore, the way of understanding masculinity should be derived not from the perspective of the members of the society but the boys themselves and given due respect (Nyangaresi, 2016). According Chabari (as cited in Nyangaresi, 2016) masculinity can simply be defined as a specific attempt to construct a particular kind of manhood through repetition of a particular behaviour either by an individual or a group. The boy child is presented as a one who does not encounter problems and challenges in life.

Tambu presents the boy child as a betrayer rather than a brother to her, this is also seen when the uncle, Babamukuru, elects Nhamo to live in with him, Nhamo starts changing. The boy child is presented as a delusional person and also presented as male child who is suffering from complex issues. These are formulated and reinforced through language and discourse. The narrator mentions how Nhamo gradually begins to despise his own culture, language, and family. In the effort to understand themselves as black Africans, Nhamo is brought out as having an identity problem as a challenge. Nhamo forgets how to speak Shona, and when he visits the house, he prefers talking to his father in English. His attitudes, particularly towards language and culture, infuriate his sister, who cannot accept his betrayal. The factors that shape the lack of admiration of Nhamo as a

character in the text emerge trivial in the novel. All this is depicted in the boy child; an evidence of the reduction the society holds about their character traits. The boy child is a subject of erosion of identity as an African and thus a representation of a colonised culture. This consequently portrays this boy as confused. Nhamo's death metaphorically represents a desire to destroy a betrayer, someone she could not rely on. It means the end of a dream of solidarity and brotherhood. Tambu's feeling towards the death of the brother represents the feeling of sadness and bitterness of women who expected loyalty from those once called brothers or comrades.

This theme of betrayal is also seen through the presentation of male characters in *So Long a Letter* (1979), Ramatouyale points out that Modou Fall her late husband, was a betrayer, she says:

I measure the extent of Modou betrayal, His abandonment of his first family (myself and my children) was the outcome of the choice of a new life. He rejected us. He mapped out his future without taking our existence into account. (Ba, 1979, p. 47)

The boy children are presented as money squanderers as (re)presented in the novel *So Long a Letter* (1979). The protagonist of the novel Ramatouyale also takes time to at least explore how Modou Fall would spend money and getting into debts by buying a duplex for his mistress, she mentions his acknowledgements of debts, "A pile of them cloth and traders, home delivery goods groceries and butchers, car purchase instalments" (Ba, 1979, p. 10).

Ba presents men as wicked beings and enemies of progress and as chief contributors to the regression of female beings' achievements. Ramatouyale states that Modou Fall destroyed the life of the innocent girl that he married as a second wife that the young girl who was gifted, wanted to continue her studies and sit for her baccalaureate. So as to establish his rule, Modou wickedly

determined to remove her from the critical and unsparing world of the young. Ba mentions the challenges that the boy child faces to further themselves academically:

entrance of into secondary schools is no more panacea for the child at the age fraught with problems of consolidating his personality, with the explosion of puberty, with the discovery of the various pitfalls, drugs, vagrancy, sensuality and the lack of jobs. (Ba, 1979, p. 19)

Male children are also presented as more understanding. The acceptance of Nhamo and Chido's behaviours by both Babamukuru and Jeremiah evinces the belief that male children can do no wrong. On the other hand, the girl children, Tambu and Nyasha, are cast as rebellious and refusing to conform to culture and customs. Ramatouyale compared her mother in law whom she mentions that she would come in their house bringing her friends just to show off her son's social class. She says her father in law was more understanding, she says "more often than not, he would visit us without sitting down". Ba represents father figures in this case father-in-law's as considerate people compared to mother-in-laws, so as to present women as subjugators to their fellow women and at the same time presenting other men as good men. Another critic, Adichie (as cited in Zhuwarara, 2016 p. 29), postulates "that society stifles the humanity of boys by defining masculinity in a very narrow way where it is hard, and becomes a small cage in which boys are put".

More so, in comparison to the boy child, Ba also tries to represent the girl child as ill-behaved, she presents the girl child as chain smokers, she deviates from other feminist writers who usually present boys or men as smokers in their critical discourse. Ba deviates from such feministic representation of the boy child. In Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1989) the protagonist mentions how she caught the girls smoking she says "The other night I surprised the trio, Arame, Yacine and

Dieynaba smoking in their bedroom. Everything about their manner showed that they were used to it, their way of holding the cigarette between their fingers or raising it gracefully to their lips...” (Ba, 1979 p. 80). Boys are also presented as disobedient and irresponsible. This is seen in the text *So Long a letter* (1979) when Ramatouyale sons Malick and Alioune are involved in the motorcycle accident. Ramatouyale confirms to the motorcyclist that it was not his fault but rather his sons were to blame as they enjoy playing in the road. Ramatouyale also mentions that his sons slipped without her consent whilst she was praying (Ba, 1979, pp 82-83). Hence this represents the boy child as troublesome and mischievous.

4.9. Boy child education and education as reflection of gender preferences and an instrument of ‘oppression’

In the three texts, the boy child is presented as generally given the opportunity to be educated and have opportunities to empower themselves. Males are presented as very learned, highly educated people with high ranks and good jobs in the selected texts. In *Nervous Conditions* (1989) this is seen through the characters Chido, Nhamo and the Baker boys who are enrolled in school. In addition, the mentioning of the narrator who describes her uncle’s house - a metonym for the new government adds water to the issue of the boy child education and education as reflection of gender preferences and an instrument of ‘oppression’. This is quenched by the narrators’ description of her uncle’s achievements and lavish lifestyle. The uncle’s house is the place of a diligent, intelligent and prosperous black leader, the house of Babamukuru, the missionary school’s headmaster. The myth of origin of Babamukuru traces back to the arrival of the missionaries in Rhodesia. Tambudzai’s grandmother recounts a story of her giving a boy child to the missionaries. They took good care of her boy child and provided him with an education. After missionary school, Babamukuru went to South Africa where he got his degree. After that, he was awarded the

scholarship to pursue a graduate course in London. When he returned from London, Babamukuru became the headmaster of the missionary school, becoming the only African to live in a white house where missionaries used to live.

The house's opulence, luxury, and location strike Tambu, who could not imagine that her uncle was so wealthy and fortunate. Males are presented as affluent, educated and hardworking people as seen through the lifestyle of Babamukuru in *Nervous Conditions* (1989) and the boy child is the inevitable inheritor of the affluence as well as provider. For that reason, the boy child is given unlimited opportunities to empower and elevate themselves. This is why Nhamo's education is given primacy over that of Tambu. The narrator Tambudzai takes her time to expatiate further on her uncles' flamboyant lifestyle, she says at the time that she arrived at the mission, missionaries were living in white houses and in the pale painted houses, but not in the brick red ones.

My uncle was the only African living in a white house. We were all very proud of this fact ... except Nyasha, who had an egalitarian nature and had taken seriously the lessons about oppression and discrimination that's he had learnt first-hand in England. (Dangarembga, 1989, p. 63)

This is also demonstrated, in the novella *So Long a Letter* (1979) Ramatouyale mentions about Iba Sall's education and mentions in the text that her son-in-law was currently a law student at the university (p. 86). However, it is also important to note that, this is demonstrated, in the novella *So Long a Letter* (1979) the protagonist alludes to how, Modou was promoted to the rank of technical adviser in the ministry of public works. She mentions that her husband was a very practical man. This is also seen when Modou's work companion of thirty years gives a speech at Modou Fall's funeral. He endorses that the late Modou had royal blood; he was from a bourgeoisie

family. He also indicates that the late Modou Fall frequently gave him a bag of rice therefore presenting males as philanthropists in the society.

While male characters, such as Babamukuru, are presented as men who work within an ambivalence which permits them to fight for liberation, but also secure that the order cannot be totally disrupted, they paradoxically maintain the order of a complex society rooted in masculine authority and ethnic, racial, and class divides. Males are presented as patriarchal structures which contribute to women's poverty, displacement, and disempowerment. By entering through the back door of the uncle's house, the narrator can observe and analyse its flaws, not easily perceived by those who enter the house through the living room.

After a while, as the novelty progresses, you began to see that the antiseptic sterility that my aunt and uncle strove for could not be attained beyond an illusory level because the buses that passed through the mission ... rolled up a storm of fine dust (Dangarembga, 1989, p. 71).

The dirt is there, even if it is not perceptible. That red fine dust reminds Tambu of her brother Nhamo who got so fascinated by the luxury and comfort of the house that he could not perceive the dust. At that moment, she promises herself that she is not going to be like the brother: "I became confident that I would not go the same way as my brother" (Dangarembga, 1989, p. 71). For her, Nhamo was blind as he was not able to perceive that not everything at the uncle's house was real. That illusion of purity and cleanness contributed to Nhamo's death. As Maithya (2016) points out "modernity fails to deliver the serious social good or delivers Africans into the hands of false gods who require from them the uncritical worship of goods and the good life" (p. 194). Modernity does

not provide liberation, freedom, and equity for all citizens in Zimbabwe, for the society has been divided along the lines of class, race, ethnicity and gender.

The death metaphor also represents the ways in which male leaders forgot their own ideals and compromise with the people's struggle. In the end, they were not loyal to the people. African male leaders are presented as greedy and corrupt whereas women leaders can also be greedy and corrupt. Like Nhamo, who could not perceive the red dust at the luxurious house, Dangarembga's narrative suggests that male leaders in Zimbabwe were enchanted by the new power, whereas in Zimbabwe they are new women leaders in the elections committee, in the national women leagues who are being investigated for corruption cases. They are also women who have stayed in the system for too long since the Independence of Zimbabwe in 1980.

4.10. Muted boy child voices and activities: gendered representation of the masculine

There is overt subversion of the boy child voices in the three texts. The boy child is seemingly not accorded the same level of expressive space to articulate his views compared to the girl child. Moreover, it seems like the silencing of the male voices in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1989), Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1979) is a feminist ploy to topple the male chauvinist driven social hierarchy. Hence, the texts subvert the oppressive nature of males by acquainting the reader with women experiences rather than amplifying men's experiences. The muted male voice in the texts acts as a present-absence phenomenon which upholds that there is more to the unsaid. In essence, inhibiting the freedom of male characters in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1989) is argued to be a deliberate move to wage a battle for the sexes. This, however, leaves a little room for the co-operation and potential symbiotic relationship between males and females. This is seen in the text *Nervous Conditions* which opens with the boy child in the novel being silenced through death,

Dangarembga kills the narrator's brother, Nhamo, at the onset of the novel and the narrator in the novel begins with a metaphorical and nostalgic statement:

I was not sorry when my brother died. Nor am I apologising for my callousness, as you may define it, my lack of feeling. For it is not that at all. I feel many things these days, much more than I was able to feel in the days when I was young, and my brother died, and there are reasons for this more than the mere consequence of age. (*Nervous Conditions*, 1989, p. 1)

The death of Nhamo is symbolic of the elimination of the boy child, who like the older men, represents patriarchal oppression for the women. As he is privileged and socialised in the society, the boy child represents a perpetuation of the violence and oppression of patriarchy. For example, Tambudzai's deportment towards her brother's death can be read as a metaphor of how feminist ideals produce women who will not flinch to completely wipe men out of existence. Already one witnesses a historical response that does not affiliate to the African woman's culture. To borrow Freire's (1993) notion, this gives room for a cycle of subjugation which does not change the situation. Consequently, Tambudzai is later seen becoming no better than Nhamo, detesting Nyamarira and her rural home once she gets comfortable at the mission (Dangarembga, 1989, p. 59). Dangarembga purposefully removes Nhamo who is the supposed stumbling block to the emancipation of his sister Tambudzai. Dangarembga manages to give Tambu, who represents the women in general, a clear way to begin to assert herself. In a promising start, unhindered by patriarchal subordination, Tambu makes her way to the mission, to attain education which had once been reserved for Nhamo – and does manage to make a transcendence at this stage, as she notes to herself “thus began the period of my reincarnation” (Dangarembga, 1989, p. 92). However, Tambudzai's victory is short lived when she later discovers that there is yet another

stumbling block, more complex than 'Nhamo', that she has to come to terms with before she can find her rightful place at the top of society. It is too late as she too has been trapped as she is now attached to the mission, "I always hated leaving the mission" (Dangarembga 1989, p. 108). When Tambudzai arrives at the mission, she is so excited about discovering new things and finally accomplishing the education she has always wanted. As she gloats in the new environment in Babamukuru's home, she cautiously notes how she must be careful not to become like her brother, Nhamo.

At this stage, Tambudzai is not yet brainwashed and carries with her all the hopes that education would bring back to her rural home. Tambu thus ponders to herself, "some strategy had to be devised to prevent all this splendour from distracting me in the way that my brother had been distracted" (Dangarembga, 1989, p. 69). However, this strategy of not getting too absorbed in the lifestyle of the mission is fleeting as Tambudzai soon becomes like her brother Nhamo. Justifying her cousin Chido's refusal to join the rest of the family for the journey to the rural home for Christmas, Tambu explains that "...he was too old now-we all were, and too civilised too-to be amused by eating matamba and nhengeni, and by trips to Nyamarira" (Dangarembga 1989, p. 120). This statement confirms Achebe's view that cultural invasion results in the colonised disassociating with their past. This cultural obliteration is seen as early as the day when Tambu leaves for the mission in Babamukuru's car when she begins to reflect upon the squalid lifestyle at the homestead and does not hide the joy that she has "...My clothes would be clean too, without fields and smoke and soot to mess them" (Dangarembga, 1989, p. 60). Without realising it, Tambudzai was becoming like the brother that she detested. Tambu becomes the typical African who cannot wait to submerge herself in "civilisation". Tambudzai who shows no remorse towards the passing of her brother Nhamo, Nyasha's disrespectful attitude towards her father and Lucia's

prostituting ways in the novel, create an underlying moral of the text. Dangarembga adeptly employs a naïve narrative voice through Tambudzai, in order to portray the gullibility of the African female's consciousness to the "Otherness" that binds her in her search for emancipation from the patriarchal society. Tambu, like Nhamo, has been brainwashed to believe that whiteness is the ultimate identity. Dangarembga thus reminds the African woman of her double consciousness and how she can easily give in to the world without weighing its contribution to the progression of her society. Tambu gradually becomes comfortable with the mission than her old home, having no zeal for Nyamarira like she once did when she was young.

Furthermore, the issue of dealing with the death of a beloved one is attributed to be devastating to girl child rather than universalising it to the boy child too. *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* problematises the ordeal through the boy child Shange's death which Kauna resists from the chains of funeral and burial rites. This rebellious move is justified by the author as fighting against the reigns of a dead husband. Despite the ostracism a woman may get from failing to traditionally mourn her husband, Kauna braves the sneers from her in-laws and the society to be herself. In the same line, Modou's Fall death in Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1984) is treated likewise by Ramatoulaye though she goes further into desecrating Islam fundamental doctrines. In real life situations, Arab worlds with a strong grip of Muslim fundamentalism punish such people with death. Thus, Ba's female protagonist subverts religion and reveals its sham to the reader - that religion is indeed used as the opium of the people by the masculine order. Hence, the authors of these three texts can be applauded for using silent male voices in their texts. The way the experiences of women in the male world are portrayed represent a court room wherein the reader cross examines the evidence offered by characters in the text as the author presses the judgement in a covert way. The patriarch seems to be given a purgatory experience before its chauvinism is debunked.

Although Andreas focuses on female characters as central to her narrative, they develop and operate within their social relationships with the boy children, who deserve to be explored. In *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, the reader is acquainted by the absence of the male characters who are away most of the times as they are migrant workers in the mines during the post-apartheid period in Namibia. For economic reasons, they spend most of their lives on their own in a predominantly male environment. They erratically visit home, mostly during festive seasons. This has its own impact on family relationships: it culminates in a separate development of characters - independent of each other particularly in a marriage partnership. The dynamics of power shift in the family arena where women become 'heads of households.' A father becomes a stranger in his own home and this places fatherhood in a very precarious position as it undermines the male authority. On its own, it challenges the idea of what is to be a boy child, especially to the masculinity which is steeped in the traditional and cultural setup. This historical period of post-apartheid could be indicative of the pressures on the men as they try to re-configure and assert their positions in the family circle. This is a boy child who becomes alienated from his own family for being a migrant work in far places from home. At work places, the same man lives and operates like a single man which can lead to multiple relationships with other women. He is reminded of his role of a father and a husband when he comes back to the village. It is a staggering responsibility to find one's bearing in reasserting one's role as a man in a society shaped by traditional values.

Leman (1992) brings this idea to the fore when she observes that due to economic and political changes, the traditional roles associated with the male sex roles have been rendered increasingly dysfunctional. This status-quo can result in very different responses from boyhood to adulthood as seen in this novel through Shange and Michael. In most traditional societies, hegemonic masculinity is prevalent. According to Connell (2005), hegemonic masculinity embodies the

currently most honoured way of being a man; it requires all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men. It entails that men are superior to women and women should defer to men. This concept creates a stereotypical behaviour of men; authoritative, aggressive, heterosexual, competitive and physically brave. It gives more power to the male figure and any man can benefit from these patriarchal dividends. In the African traditional society, more often than not, the men exploit this status-quo.

The reader's first encounter of Shange is when he is from his mistress' house in the late morning. It is common knowledge that he is having an extra-marital affair. The boy child is presented as one who engages in extra marital affairs. He displays a typical attitude of a boy child who exercises patriarchal power over his girl child. His attitude does not show any shame or remorse of displaying a philandering behaviour in public as he makes no secret of his escapades. Connell (1998), points out that males have access to the patriarchal dividend, the power that being a man gives them to choose to exercise power over women. Shange seems to exploit that power accorded to him by the fact that he is a man; hence he knows that nobody is going to challenge his behaviour, as tradition accepts and supports that a man can have as many women as one desires. The same approach is used by Ba when Mawdo Ba and Modou Fall marry second wives, in the novella *So Long a Letter* (1979). It is important to note that in such a traditional setup, polygamy was a philosophy with a value system of depth and beauty in African societies, yet there were protocols to be followed if a man wanted to take a second wife. The husband had to get the consent of the first wife before making it public that he had interest in another woman. This was done in a respectable manner in order not to bring the family name into disrepute. Shange's conduct in *The Purple Violet of Oshantuu* (2001) is not illustrating a normal trend in African polygamous relationships as he is not even showing interest in marrying the woman from the white house; she

is a mere concubine. He is exploiting the benefit which the patriarchal traditions offer through the attitude towards men's promiscuity. The wife is forced to relent to Shange's desire for an extra-marital affair, and the emotional scars accrued in the process are not taken into consideration. The ideal of 'happily-ever-after' is immediately shattered as soon as Kauna's husband indulges in many extra-marital relationships. The idea of a happy marriage begins to evaporate into a mirage.

Shange becomes the symbol of hegemonic patriarchy whose emotional abuse spells out danger that keeps Kauna and her children under total fear and silence, in such an African traditional set-up. This silence does not come glibly, but at a price of deep emotional pain that becomes ingrained in the victims. The community, instead of sympathising with Kauna, actually blames her for not being able to control her straying husband. It goes without saying that as soon as a man indulges in extra-marital affairs publicly, the wife is neglected in terms of her conjugal rights. Thus Shange denies Kauna of a basic need and leaves her high and dry. She suffers a double dose of emotional pain as the villagers do not make it any easier for her, but they ostracise her. Her husband reduces her into an object of public laughter and ridicule. Shange is portrayed as a boy child who has failed to play his role as a husband. Another woman who has suffered from the same fate is Mee Sara. Her mother-in-law blames her for not confronting her cheating husband. When Mee Sara asks for the in-laws' intervention; she was informed that her husband was just like his father and grandfather who had many wives and mistresses.

This corroborates with Chabari (2009), assertions that masculine identity is shaped daily in the varied institutions like family, and quietly these practices and norm-enforcing mechanisms go on slowly, building an accepted masculine identity. Once this identity has been accepted in society it becomes normal, though it might impact negatively on those closest to the person. As much as the family may have acknowledged the unacceptable behaviour of their son, they dismissed it, as if to

say, 'it runs in the blood.' Hence it became normal and acceptable, for such reckless display of hegemonic masculinity. In Mee Sara's husband's family, the infidelity of the male figures goes back into three generations of the lineage which outlines a template of a society structured by patriarchal values where men are condoned for womanising with no consequences. The behaviour of these men becomes an acceptable norm and Andreas shows how everyone involved is browbeaten into submission and is incapacitated to do anything about it. The community as a whole becomes a silent victim to the patriarchal practices for the traditional gender norms that promote a sense of male superiority and a sense entitlement.

Moreover, Andreas' presentation of masculinity is evidenced in that Shange does not only emotionally abuse his family, but denies his family benefits of his financial gain as he built a house for the girlfriend where he spends most of his time. Kauna, the legitimate wife, has an ordinary hut in which she is accommodated during the husband's funeral. This means that he has financial obligations towards his mistress, and this reduces his participation in the economic needs of his family, and even though during the postcolonial period, migrant workers worked for next to nothing and this is perhaps the money that Shange splashes over the other woman. As a result, he is put across as a man who fails to support his family in a way a man is expected to; as a provider, and a central figure from which a family evolves. He also asserts his domineering attitude over his wife by deciding when she could visit her own family. She is also economically abused, as Shange discouraged her to own her own animals. This tallies with patriarchal wisdom that prevails in some traditional African villages that "a wealthy bride is not good for a husband's ego," (as observed by Ogbeide, 2013, p. 57). Most men in African societies are more comfortable with women who are more dependent on them; consequently, some marry women who have lower educational qualifications as a woman who earns more than a man, becomes a challenge.

This notion has its origins in the fact that according to patriarchal formulations, it was the man who was expected to provide for the family (Chitando, 2015). However, as much as Shange is preoccupied with his life outside the family circle, Kauna is able to fend for her children without much of the husband's support. He reduces his wife to a woman who cannot develop in any way, but spends her daily life working around what Shange wants. In a way Shange is paraded as a man who restricts his wife's access to financial and other resources, as a way of having total control over her. Traditionally, any responsible man would make sure that his family was well provided for. By exposing the male figure who fails to fit into that traditional role of a provider; the writer is criticising such a representative of masculinity. Andreas is frankly and unapologetically exposing the image of an unacceptable male figure whose behaviour exhibits total control over his counterpart, yet he fails to fulfil his role as the head of the family. The male figure, in this case, practices hegemonic masculinity in which men dominate women and they exploit this societal stratification based on sex, and this gives men, both power and material advantage over women. Besides the emotional abuse, Shange's behaviour could have far-reaching consequences for the whole family, as the setting of the story is during the period when Southern African countries are at post-colonial rule.

It is only when Victor's co-worker, explains what had killed him that they stop harassing the widow. Yet still, Mee Sara is not completely exonerated as she is still accused of allowing Victor to behave the way he did, hence she is partly to blame for his death. Victor is not treated as the perpetrator but a victim "... you let him walk straight to his death" (Andreas, 2001, p. 107). Mee Sara has no control over her sexuality and since she is married, there is no room to negotiate for safe sex even if she had the knowledge of the disease. Her uncle is right when he bluntly says she is a 'corpse.' Victor makes Mee Sara a victim of his insatiable appetite for women even after his

death; “And don’t forget one thing, Mee Sara, she is a corpse now, she is dying”, (Andreas, 2001, p. 106). If she has contracted the AIDS virus, then her fate is sealed. In this case the family does not want to hold the dead man accountable for his reckless behaviour. The author projects a society whose manhood is not accountable for its decisions and actions; hence it puts a heavy burden of responsibility on the women. The society allows the male figure to behave and live a life without any moral obligations. As a result, most of the women are subjected to patriarchal values which put women under the male way of operating in communities.

However, as much as the hegemonic masculine values are common, there are still some pockets of men who do not subjugate the female gender, as they decide to work along with them. The author, Andreas also portrays masculinities who find the emasculation of their manhood so stifling that they react by using violence.

4.11 The good and admirable boy child

Ba presents the good and admirable boy child through the character of Ibrahim Sall. He is portrayed as a punctual, handsome, down to earth and ‘romantic young lover’. Ba deviates from her presentation of the bad male characters to the presentation of a perfect example of a good boy child. Ba gives the boy child Ibrahim Sall a very good and reputable character, through Ramoutyale who she sings all sorts of praises about her daughter’s boyfriend (Ba, 1989, p. 89)

In addition, Dauda Dieng is also one of the male characters who also receives praises from Ramatouyale for being the smart, charming intelligent and learned throughout his boyhood and manages to keep himself well until adulthood (p. 62).

The boy child is seemingly lacking and incomplete without the girl child, Ramatouyale mentions Iba Sall as he is married to her daughter. Though this might be true, there is no justification that

Iba Sall is also nice and deserves Ramatouyale's daughter Daba. Ramatouyale consequently mentions, compliments her daughter's first then she last but not least remarks the boy children in her daughter lives. She mentions:

Bewildered, I look at my daughter, so well brought up, so tender with me, so ready to help in the house, so efficient in every way, so many fine qualities allied with such behaviour! Iba is a law student at the university. They met at a friend's birthday celebration. Iba sometimes went to meet her at school when she did not come down at lunch time. He had invited her on two occasions to his room in the university halls of residence. She confessed liking for him! No, Iba had not demanded anything, had not forced her. Everything had happened naturally between them. Iba knew of her condition. (Ba, 1979, p. 86)

The society has since formulated a way of judging boys and not girls, nevertheless Ba in this case is fair enough, the writer deviates from the typical African tradition where the elders seemingly blame the boy child for impregnating the girl child. Ramatouyale the protagonist of the novella *So long a letter* defies the typical norm in African cultures whereby the boy child is totally blamed for destroying the African girl child's life. Alternatively, Ramatouyale defends the boy child 'Ibrahim Sall' she praises him, for being a responsible young father to be to her daughter Aissatou, she mentions, "He had refused the services of one of his mates who wanted to help him. He loved her. Though he was on a scholarship, he had decided to deprive himself for the maintenance of his child" (Ba, 1979 p. 86). To note, from the above context is the way in which Ramatouyale dubs the boy child "Iba" as a responsible, loving and caring boyfriend to her daughter. This draws a contrast and the reader interrogates why she then chooses to compliment the boy child after mentioning girl child in the first place, especially in a marital context. This displays a soft spot for the girl child at the expense of the boy child.

Abou is male character who is presented by Ba as an example of a good boy in her *novella* through his portrayal as a good husband to Daba. This is seen through the praises and admirations of their marriage that the protagonist Ramatouyale takes her time relating to in the novella. This is seen when she mentions:

Daba does not find household work a burden. Her husband who claims, when I tell him he spoils his wife, he says 'Daba is my wife, she is not my slave, nor my servant, I sense the tenderness growing between this young couple, an ideal couple, just as I have imagined. They identify with each other, discuss everything so as to find a compromise.'" (Ba, 1979, p. 77)

The boy child is not provided ample space to voice out in the feminist critical discourses. The boy child is seemingly crucified for his father's sins, the boy child grows in homes where they are absent father figures, divorced fathers and mothers resulting in their voices being suppressed; the female characters are the ones who tell us about the boy children. In Ba's *So Long a Letter*, Ramatouyale is the protagonist and narrator of the novella same as Dangarembga

It is imperative for this study to mention the boyhood of Babamukuru in Dangarembga's text. Babamukuru was a self-made boy, hardworking and intelligent that his mother was very proud of him. He was a different boy child in contrast to Nhamo and his father Jeremiah. Babamukuru was a typical African boy child, he would do all the expected house tasks as expected from a typical responsible Zimbabwean boy child 'Mwana mukomana'. Babamukuru during his boyhood, he would look after the cattle in Shona 'kufudza mombe'.

Lastly, Andreas also presents the good boy child through the character of Michael. Michael is presented as a good gentleman, a protector of his wife and his family. Michael protects his wife

from the hatred of his family specifically his mother who wants to subjugate his girlfriend whom he has impregnated out of wedlock. It is imperative to note that sometimes feminist authors present the good boy child even though it is to a very less extent, this is subject to criticism.

4.12 Chapter summary

This chapter explored the (in)significance of suppressing the male voices, specifically that of the boy child, in the three texts under discussion. It examines such (in)significance within the broader context of feminist discourses. It laid bare some of the tacit stylistic devices which may be harnessed by feminist literary writers to drive their point home – including especially, the silencing and/or ‘killing’ of the voices of the boy child as a means to subvert the patriarchal project and the oppressive hegemony it represents. The researcher came up with the male inhibiting motif and explained the various contexts of the African women’s experiences. Men fail to establish a good relationship with their families, as well as absent fathers have been imagined here as a feminist means to argue that the boy child requires a different form of socialisation and not the current one which prepares them to perpetuate the same oppressive tendencies in the future. The authors probe the African woman to look at these loopholes and as a nurturing and assertive woman, develop solutions that can transform society including challenging existing hegemonies by focusing on more socialisation of children of both sexes. Again, the authors address an important issue that the African woman needs to uncover the reasons for violent expressions of masculinity. Western feminist ideals fail to prepare the African woman for such phenomena in a society where the people have been brainwashed to loathe their culture and have been taught to aspire towards the culture they only have half access.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to examine the in(significance) of the African boy child as unheard voice in the selected female authored texts namely: Mariama Ba`s (1979) *So Long a Letter*, Tsitsi Dangarembga`s (1989) *Nervous Conditions* and Neshani Andreas` *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001). The study examined how males are presented in the selected texts by integrating the objectives of the studies in the analysis. The objectives were as follows:

- To examine the literary presentation of the (in)significance of the African boy child in the selected feminist fictional works;
- To analyse emerging themes from the discussion of the (in)significance of the boy child as an unheard voice in the three selected novels; and
- To explore the literary presentation of the positive possibilities emanating from significant boy child contributions to gender concerns in the selected novels.

The study used the concept of Masculinities and Nego-feminism to analyses the selected text to analyses how the feminist writers present the issues of the boy child through various male characters from the text. The conclusion is presented as below.

5.2 Conclusion

It was imperative to conduct this study in order to examine the presentation of boy child, by paying attention to the specific ways in which the boy child through all males was represented and constructed in feminist critical discourses. The study equally interrogated how the boy child is characterised within feminist critical discourses through language employed in the construction and through the male characters in the selected literature. Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1989), Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1979) and Andreas' *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2005) can be considered as texts which embrace Africana Womanist ideology for a number of reasons. This study examined the literary presentation of the (in)significance of the African boy child in the selected feminist fictional works, through the analyses of the following emerging themes, religion, women subjugation, marriage, betrayal, sisterhood and brotherhood, education. The study explored the rise of feminists and advocates of gender equality that are propagating for the migration of society away from patriarchal society.

The study demonstrated through an engagement with themes and character (re)presentations that the male figures' identities are a product of a social construct which differs from community to community, and are constantly subject to change. The researcher further observed that, as portrayed by Ba, Dangarembga and Andreas, some boy children are good and some exploit the patriarchal dividend of power and hold on to the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. In discoursing about (re)presentations of the 'boy children' adjunct inter-texting themes explored include muted voices, the boy child emasculation of masculinity- reaction of thwarted personhood, male relationships (father/son), sexual orientation, brotherhood, boyhood as a construct through socialisation, tradition, cultural beliefs, religion, education and projections of gender, boy child education as a reflection of gender preferences and an instrument of oppression.

The study discussed the positives emanating from (in)significant boy child (re)presentations and their contributions to gender concerns in the selected novels. The expunging of the voice of the boy child is symbolic of the attempt to eradicate the persistence of patriarchal hegemony as well as the rise of the female voices – specifically the girl child. The suppression of the boy child voice within the context of feminist discourses thus represents opportunities if the girl child to be heard and seen literary representation. The study found out that masculine realities stifle women through racism, religion, class and colonialism to engender submissiveness in a society. The selected texts originated from the African continent, they addressed gender problems through eliminating equations which index the phallic supremacist context. The study found out that the African boy child and girl child are not represented equally in the texts therefore, creating a gap in the representation of the boy child. African women writers have braced the stage to reconstruct phallogocentric representations of the girl children than those of boy children.

The study explored the (in)significance of suppressing the male voices in the three selected texts that were scrutinised. It laid bare some of the tacit of the themes which may be harnessed by feminist literary writers to drive their point home. The researcher discussed the boy child inhibiting motif and explained how various contexts of the African woman's experience can best be explained through it. The study observed that the boy child is made insignificant in the female authored texts by being stripped of their masculinity. Babamukuru fails to establish a good relationship with his daughter and his wife which proves how his Western education does not equip him to change his world for the better, instead it results him as a failure in fatherhood and in his marriage. He however is not as harsh and strict with his boy child (Chido) and nephew (Nhamo) since they are boys. He does not castigate their behaviours (Chido) nor treatment of the female characters (Nhamo) as he sees it as normal - behaviour and perhaps a perpetuation of culture and

customs that he believes in. This proves the way in which feminist like Dangarembga try by all means to portray the boy child as the favoured one in their feminist critical discourses as compared to the girl child, however, this leaves the boy child in an endangered space. The same is also seen through the father daughter relationship of Daba and his father in *So long a letter*, Modou Fall who loses the fatherly respect he deserves from his daughter as a result of his betrayal in marrying his daughter's best friend and age mate Binetou.

Feminist writers like, Dangarembga probe the African woman to look at these loopholes and as a nurturing and assertive woman, develop solutions that can transform society. Again, Dangarembga addresses an important issue that the African woman needs to uncover the reasons for violent expressions of masculinity. Western feminist ideals fail to prepare the African woman for such phenomena in a society where the people have been brainwashed to loathe their culture and have been taught to aspire towards the culture they only have half access. Of significance in the text is the symbolic connotation that both Lucia and Tambu's mother fall pregnant in the novel, which symbolises the potential of women to transform their world, given their ability to give life and their ability to create, however without realising their true self, false consciousness will always imbue their progress towards redefining themselves in African terms. Mr Baker facilitates Chido's entrance into the government school in Salisbury. Knowing well he wanted to feed off his guilty conscience for sending his sons to the government school, he thus made it seem like a charitable and a holy cause when he had his own intentions planned. Mr Baker makes sure he protects his interests without losing his image of "self-denial" and brotherly love" (p. 103). Nyasha can clearly see through Mr Baker's treacherous intentions as she recalls the conversation he had engaged her father concerning Chido's scholarship. "...you know how it is., bwana to bwana: "The boy needs the cash old man!' He's a good boy, what. Pity to waste him" (Dangarembga, 1989, p. 106). This

confirms Nyasha's statement above on how the whites employ strategies to mislead the Africans into a false awareness of their true circumstance.

The study analysed the presentation of the male characters in the selected and explored the images of violence as a reaction to emasculated boy children and an egalitarian existence of son, brother, exemplary husband and a good father. The study critically explored masculinity and the control of the female, characterised by different versions of masculinities: masculinity of a soft and loving man, masculinity in a complementary relationship and finally men who display unconditional love and a generosity of spirit.

The study found out that feminist writers employ boy child inhibiting motif that is embraced in muted efforts of the African patriarch to improve gender issues by pedestalling the female voice. The study evaluated the effectiveness of male silences in matters/events pertaining to human affairs and the erasure of hegemonic influences on the globe as one of the fundamental aspects of feminism. The study found out that the African tradition has often been condemned for failing to appease the African woman's spirit hence; she now perceives the death of masculinity as the solution to her hardships. However, the researcher assumes that this strength has its downside of working on the pretext that ignorance of the *oppressor's* shouts liberates the *oppressed*.

Thus, the study explored how the sisterhood betrays the brotherhood. Worse more, there is proof of both the Fanonian concept in the gender related issues of *vertical* and *horizontal* violence embellished in the battles of sexes. The issue of slander and gossiping among co-wives in polygamous relationships explored in Andreas' (2005) *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* and Ba's (1984) *So Long a Letter* and the matriarchal aunties who act as a subordinate masculinity and enforce African tradition on fellow women in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1989), for

example, serve as testimony to the horizontal violence waged by women against women. However, the vertical violence wherein a woman goes against a man are accepted as therapeutic within the feminist circle. Thus the boy child is reflected to the readers by the society away from his awareness. The authenticity in this representation is fact of what happens in the social reality.

The researcher found out that the voice of the African boy child through various male characters is presented as unimportant, of argument as the study found out that there is a variant and open treatment of the boy child and the admission that the representation has gaps. This presents a diversionary view. It would therefore be valid only in cases of ambivalent situations where representation of reality is the case. The portrayals of the male characters in the selected texts indicate that boyhood behaviours are not well interpreted through the male characters who are misrepresented and emasculated. The male characters, therefore display a range of behavioural patterns which can be interpreted widely and from different perspectives. The varied behaviours are extracted from the exposure and the interaction in these male characters as presented by the feminist critical discourse. The feminist narratives for instance, play an important role in constructing these variant masculinities in these boy child characters.

However, the works authored recently bring out the society to have departed from the claim of the male child being favoured in representations. Examining the situation of Nhamo in *Nervous Conditions*, it is important to note that his representation needs to be evaluated. This forms the basis of this discussion as the study focused more on masculinity, like femininity does not come naturally, but is rather constantly and continuously fought for through performances of idealised and normative versions (Butler, 1990). It is therefore not a property of individual boys, but a socially constituted phenomenon, an everyday system of beliefs and performances that regulate behaviour between boys and girls, as well as between boys and other boys. The boy child is

presented as the insignificant other and this is seen in the selected feminists texts *Nervous Conditions* 1989, *So Long a Letter* 1979, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001). The boy child is not well represented to the extent that most of the times the feminist writers choose to erase the boy child's name, they are presented nameless, Dangarembga chooses to call the Mr Bakers sons 'the Baker boys' instead of giving them or calling them by their actual names. The males are hardly called by their real names, however this announces the boy children as insignificant as presented in the feminist authored texts, they are referred to as somebody's brother, husband, boyfriend or son. This also manifests in Ba's *So Long a letter* (1979), the protagonist of the novella Ramatouyale refers to Aissatou sons as her 'four sons', the protagonist does the same to her daughter Daba's husband he is referred to as "Daba's husband". This presents the boy children as unworthy to mention and unimportant in feminist discourse. There is much in the understanding of the boy child since like any other human being they cannot be simplified to one generalised view using language. According to Butler (1990 p. 39), language is not just a component of the mind, but the structure of the function of the mind itself. Thus the boy child through male representation is reflected to the readers by the society away from his awareness. The authenticity in other words, the boy child is portrayed as having a wide range of behaviour patterns which are sometimes overriding and shaped by other different factors in their immediate environment and the passage of time.

The boy child is brought out as confused and it is the society that controls and this is seen through Nhamo's complex identity issues in *Nervous Conditions* (1979). The boy child therefore has been simplified to be the initiator of confusion. The society has boys while in the company of others are hostile. The feminist writers do not moderate the wrong actions by both genders in their selected

texts. Most of the issues presented were the incorrect actions of the male characters that should be rated to surpass those of their counterparts in terms of hostility.

The society seems to have misunderstood the boy child and this is seen through the representation of the male characters in the texts. The society holds stereotypical generalisation of views of the boy child character. By doing this people associate him with behaviours that are uncivilised. The feminist writers make male characters to look like agents which want at societal interaction events. The males are therefore inducted by the society to sail with women, a strategy by the society to send a strong message that these subjects are not special. The narration pays attention to this for a reason; the boys have been equalised to girls.

The conclusion drawn by this study indicates that the boy child has not been presented well in the selected feminists texts. The society seems to be having a hybrid of modernity struggles as well as traditional material culture represented in *So Long a Letter*. This confused the boy child and the impact is evident in the three texts. The society therefore should do away with one of the two poles so as to minimise the effects of these two competing forces so as to realise a healthy boy in the society.

The society should do away with the gender biases through the representation of male society as immoral in most feminist critical discourses. Sibling rivalry is normal but the society seems not to understand to believe in this. The rift between brother or a brother and another or even a sister and another sister should not be blamed on either. The issues arising above therefore indicate that the boy child is a product of his own society. This indicates that their manners of queer feelings towards their counterparts are formulated by their families first then manifested in the public. In the public, the gained rivalry is here applied and at the end it embarrasses the very society that never took control. The problem should be solved by creating a more interactive environment

where no stereotypical reference is given to any gender. For example, the reference given to the sister and brother relationship of Tambudzai and her brother, Nhamo, that is full of discernment and betrayal.

The study found out that the boy child in the society has not been understood and well represented in female authored texts. The boy child is not given the ample space to voice out, the boy children are seemingly an unheard of voice in the feminist authored texts as established by this study. The society has not devoted its attention to the uniqueness of this character and the effects of this have been detrimental and retrogressive in a strong way. The feminist writers associate the male characters with violence; the males are brought out as cheating and unfaithful husbands, as heartless being, irresponsible fathers and boys' people who betray the female society. The society needs a more pragmatic approach to the handling and thinking of the boy child. This should not be fixed in their references but be treated openly in every respect of the context where the boy performs his roles. They are less positives oriented images of the male as seen from the boy child in the society.

The boy child is restricted in the selected feminist critical discourse through the attempts to make him look as a betrayer as seen through the character Nhamo who is seen as a betrayer by her own blood sister Tambudzai in the text *Nervous Conditions* and also through the marriages of Aissatou and Ramatouyale in *So Long a Letter* (1979).

This study established that the males are represented in aversive conditions that expose them to the ills of the society. Feminists seem to present predetermined ideas that dictate the position the males take in the society. The male child is hardly presented as hardworking child but as a lazy child. This is seen through Nhamo who hardly works in the field. The male child is barely represented as a church goer, this seen in *Nervous Conditions* were the male child Nhamo is

brought out as one who displeases going to the mission church, the boy child is hardly portrayed as prayerful child. Henceforth, the boy child is rarely presented as decent and righteous child, this is seen through the presentation of the boy child (Nhamo) in the in *Nervous Conditions*. Babamukuru is a representative of tyrannical men in the African society; he is used as tool of manipulation in the text *Nervous Conditions*. The study found out that the male child is not being appreciated enough and reinforced in order to give more to the society. The males are not being accorded adequate representation in comparison to the girl child and females in general in the selected feminist discourses. Feminists' critical discourse seems to focus on the negatives than the positives of the male characters.

5.3. Recommendations

- This study recommends some measures to be acted upon so as to save the image of the boy child in the society and to make him substantial by making his voice worthy in female authored texts. Future research should investigate on the establishment of a fair societal construction of the boy child and examine the way people in the society construct the meaning of boyhood more so negotiate for his space.
- Future studies could concentrate on the specific behaviours that are awarded to the boy child by the society in most contexts, something that is different from the rest of the characters.
- Future studies could investigate the portrayal of father and son/ daughter relationships in feminist critical discourses.
- The study also recommends parents to participate impartially in nurturing children. Most of the traits portrayed by boys and girls in this study are as a result of child upbringing.

- The language for example, is something that streams from the family level. The boys should be made to use a language that is devoid of abusive undertones. Therefore, the nurturing should contribute to representation in the sense that language is not being viewed as a factor that separates the boy child from the girl child; the two characters should be allowed to grow together without any problem in feminist critical discourse.

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