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"Nervous Conditions"

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Iva Marija Bulić BA

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Ass.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Maria Katharina Wiedlack

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1. Introduction

During the African anti-colonial emancipation struggles African women's rights were largely overlooked and the notion of gender was considered secondary in the context of European colonial domination. Consequently, African women writers were excluded from and met with disdain within the male-oriented literary scene (Makuchi Nfah - Abbenyi 2). "Despite the enviable position women have occupied" (Makuchi Nfah - Abbenyi 2) the African literary field has been traditionally dominated by male writers and even after the rise of the feminist movement it was the male voice that continued to be the dominant one. African male writers favoured highlighting male accomplishments and often debased women to subjects of marginalization. This act of subjugation is echoed by Makuchi Nfah - Abbenyi arguing that "one facet of this male tradition that has come increasingly under attack has been the subservient image that the African male writer has given of African women" (Makuchi Nfah - Abbenyi 4). In the African male writing, women are often depicted as passive, and subservient, confined to the traditional domestic roles (Makuchi Nfah - Abbenyi 4). The 1960's, when African women gained acknowledgment for their written work, brought a change in the representation of women in the African literary canon. Women writers responded to their oversimplified representation by questioning the meanings of the colonial identity, tradition, nationhood, motherhood, and sexuality, to name just a few. Furthermore, African women writers redefined gender roles and acknowledged women's sexuality, thereby challenging, and subverting the prevailing male dominated views on women. Thus, the inclusion of women in the African literary canon marks a shift from women being spoken for to women breaking the silence, bringing their own lived experiences *as women* to their writing as is evident in Tsitsi Dangarembga's path-breaking novel *Nervous Conditions*.

Nervous Conditions is the first novel published in English by a black Zimbabwean woman and is the "winner of the African regional prize in the 1989 Commonwealth Writer's Prize competition" (Sue qtd. in Bubenechik 8). Dangarembga's work garnered critical acclaim for her insights into the lives of Black women in light of colonialism coupled with patriarchy. By portraying the experiences of women, whose voices have historically been marginalized by male-dominated literary traditions, Dangarembga underscores the necessity of integrating diverse female perspectives into literature. Such an inclusive approach provides a more nuanced analysis of women's experiences within the context of colonial patriarchy, challenging the deeply entrenched patriarchal beliefs. Despite the double oppression explored in the novel,

Nervous Conditions negates the notion of women as mere victims. Instead, the portrayal of the female characters in *Nervous Conditions* brings to light how women continuously resist oppressive power relations embedded in colonial patriarchy. In this sense, Dangarembga demonstrates that patriarchy is a construct that can be continuously challenged and reconstructed, rather than an unchanging system (Bakare-Yusuf 3).

This thesis explores the representation of double oppression and resistance in Tsitsi Dangarembga's seminal novel *Nervous Conditions* through the lens of feminist postcolonial studies. In my thesis, I reveal multifaceted ways in which women struggle against the double oppression of sexism and colonialism. The aim of this research is to show how female characters bear the brunt of colonialism, contending with both patriarchal and colonial domination but also how they find their own voices, resisting patriarchy and colonialism. I will demonstrate the double oppression the women are confronted with through an analysis of female characters and key thematic elements. These include colonial and counter-violence, education as means of both colonial control and women's emancipation and hybrid identities. By analysing female characters and the aforementioned themes, I argue that colonial and patriarchal oppression of female characters overlap i.e., that colonialism reinforces indigenous patriarchy, complicating women's resistance efforts. Despite this manifold oppression, the women in *Nervous Conditions* try to find their own voice, thereby challenging the gender roles imposed on them. Their resilience, defiance, and steadfast refusal to conform to the rigid gender roles deconstruct the hitherto traditional stereotypes of women prevalent in African male literary tradition. Consequently, by focusing on the women's agency and resistance, this thesis refutes the notion of women as mere victims. Instead, it demonstrates that they are active agents of change, adeptly navigating the limitations they are confronted with.

This research begins by exploring the effects of British colonialism in present-day Zimbabwe. I provide an overview on the position of women in precolonial, colonial, and independent Zimbabwe. Demonstrating the detrimental effects colonialism had on women in Zimbabwe, I argue that women were not always seen as subservient to men; it was rather colonialism that put them in precarious positions. Prior to colonialism, gender relations were flexible, allowing women to perform roles typically reserved for men, achieve powerful positions, and inherit property while "under colonial rule 'women's legal rights were subordinated to their male counterparts' leaving them in a precarious position" (Zambakari 52). The discussion on women's role in present-day Zimbabwe introduced in this chapter will also focus on the

context of liberation struggle which is of paramount importance as the liberation struggle is incomplete without taking into consideration the role women played in guerrilla warfare revolutions (Chogugudza 31).

Chapter 3 provides insights into key concepts such as patriarchy, colonialism, Fanon's notion of colonial violence and counter-violence as well as Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity and mimicry, all of which are crucial for the analysis of *Nervous Conditions*. Introducing Homi Bhabha's notions of hybridity and mimicry, I show that the colonial presence creates identities, *third spaces*, that are not fixed but in transition and are products of cultural mixes. This is particularly evident in the analysis of the character Nyasha who oscillates between dual cultural identities. I also introduce Frantz Fanon's insights on colonial violence as there are overlaps between Fanon's theory and Dangarembga's novel, "especially with regard to colonial psychology and the manifestation of resistance through physical symptoms" (Sugnet 35). Similarly to Fanon's instances of bodily resistance to colonialism such as excessive muscular rigidity, the female characters in *Nervous Conditions* show their defiance to colonialism through their bodies, most palpably expressed in Nyasha's eating disorder (Sugnet 36). I also argue that female characters not only resist colonialism but patriarchal domination as well.

Chapter 4 introduces African feminism and its key concepts. The importance of understanding feminism not strictly in Western terms cannot be overemphasised, as it manifests itself differently across cultures due to distinct social, political, economic, and cultural contexts. Due to the limited scope of my research, I disregard feminism as is seen from a Western perspective and instead focus on African feminism since it is more pertinent to my thesis. This chapter discusses the African perspectives on feminism from numerous theorists such as Zoë Wicomb, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi and Mary E. Modupe Kolawole, to name just a few. Furthermore, drawing on the work of Dobrota Pucherova, I argue that African Feminism in the 21st century has undergone a major epistemic shift.

Chapter 5 explores distorted representation of women prevalent in male authored Zimbabwean literature. Drawing on Rudo Barbara Gaidzanwa's seminal work *Images of Women in Zimbabwean literature*, this chapter demonstrates how male literary representations are abounded by negative images of women. These stereotypical and oversimplistic representations of women are contested in chapter 6, illustrating how the inclusion of women in the African

literary canon changed the ways women are portrayed. Furthermore, chapter 6 demonstrates how Zimbabwean female writers challenge the androcentric views of women, thereby allowing for a more nuanced analysis of their experiences.

Chapter 7 analyses numerous themes in order to explore the concept of double oppression and resistance in *Nervous Conditions*. For example, I discuss the theme of the education system as both the colonial power structure and the means for women's emancipation. Furthermore, I explore the theme of hybrid identities in *Nervous Conditions*, demonstrating how "the identity of both the colonizer and the colonized within a postcolonial society evolves into a hybrid identity, since colonisation creates spaces that are corporal positions of multiplicity" (Eslamieh 6). Drawing on Homi Bhabha's notions of hybridity and mimicry, I show how hybrid identities are not fixed but are continuously in the state of flux, particularly evident in the analysis of Nyasha. This chapter also explores the impact of colonial violence on the characters in *Nervous Conditions*, focusing particularly on its psychological effects. Additionally, it investigates the acts of counter-violence through Nyasha's and Tambu's bodily resistance, serving as both a form of anti-colonial resistance and resistance against patriarchy. In this sense, Dangarembga not only employs Fanon's theoretical insights into the pathological effects of colonial domination, but also expands and revises them from a black feminist perspective (Plasa 122). Lastly, despite the manifold oppression, I analyse how the female characters in *Nervous Conditions* defy the rigid gender norms and, thus, find the courage to speak in a society where women's voices are ignored and silenced. This shows that women in *Nervous Conditions* actively resist and fight the oppression, refuting the notion that they are passive victims.

Finally, chapter 8 brings forth my conclusions based on the analysis of the novel.

The significance of my study is to contribute to the existing body of research in gender studies and post-colonial literature by offering new perspectives on the portrayal of gender in *Nervous Conditions*. What is more, my study has social implications as it highlights the significance of the novel's themes to current debates around gender equality and post-colonial identity. My interest in writing about gender and race in postcolonial novels developed during my exchange semester at the University of Sorbonne and when I attended the course *Critical Readings in Literature* and first read *Nervous Conditions*. Although aware that I am a white woman who grew up in the West, this novel made an everlasting impression on me and made me see how literature opens a world of understanding, resonating, and empathizing with the experiences foreign to me, all through the compelling power of words. In line with Fanon's

powerful words, it made me see that literature has the power “to touch the other, feel the other, discover each other”.

2. Historical Context

2.1. Colonial history of Zimbabwe and its impact on indigenous people

The colonial era in Zimbabwe started when the European settlers arrived in 1890 and what is known as Zimbabwe today was called Rhodesia, after Cecil Rhodes - the founder of the British South Africa Company. Rhodes recruited a Pioneer Corps to colonize “Mashonaland”, lands occupied by the ethnic groups Ndebele and Shona respectively (Bonello 346). As Julie Bonello points out (346), the colonists deceitfully acquired land and mining rights from the Ndebele and their primary aim was to fully exploit the area’s gold resources. To that end, they carried out an invasion of Ndebele Kingdom in 1893 on the pretext of the Shona needing protection from predatory bands of Ndebele warriors (Bonello 346). In the months to follow, the Ndebele monarchy was destroyed and the territory comprising Matabeleland and Mashonaland became part of the British empire, directly governed by the British South Africa Company (Bonello 346).

The advent of colonialism in Zimbabwe had an immense impact on the indigenous population, to say the least. Colonialism had multifaceted effects, leading to the loss of the indigenous languages, land dispossession, forced labour of the Africans, violence, breakdown of the local family structure, social inequality, and segregation, to name just a few. Economic control was established through the construction of socioeconomic distinctions positioning whites as the dominant minority while coercing the indigenous population to become economically dependent on them (Bonello 347). For example, the imposition of a hut tax (on a per hut basis) in 1894 whereby cattle were seized, and crops burned, aimed to diminish the profitability of indigenous agriculture, compelling the indigenous people to pay their taxes in labour; the initial regulations assigned specific land parcels to Africans while reserving the best land for Europeans (Bonello 347). Furthermore, the colonists utilised the racist narrative that perpetuated the need for indigenous people to work in order to strengthen and *improve* (emphasis added) their character and temperament (Bonello 347). This has been noted by a plethora of colonial records writing in favour of a labour tax and is best echoed by one colonist

claiming that it was necessary to “instil into the native mind that civilization means industry, peace and justice, and not improvidence, drink and theft, a lesson that was important to the slow evolution of the native perception” (*Rhodesia Herald* qtd. in Bonello 347). This example highlights the correlation colonizers made between labour and “curing the ostensibly inherent deficiencies in the ‘native’” (Bonello 347), showing a strong inclination to control the Africans socially and economically. Undoubtedly, the colonists not only wanted to ensure a steady supply of cheap labour but also demonstrated a strong desire to establish separation and difference among racial groups (Bonello 347). Therefore, British colonial policies enforced discriminatory laws to maintain power and exploit the indigenous people while perpetuating the erroneous notion about their superiority, vital for maintaining their privileged status.

Moreover, the advent of colonialism had a significant impact on the family structure. There is a growing body of research suggesting that colonialism in Zimbabwe led to a breakdown in the family structure (Mtombeni, Jaji, Pingol). As Rose Jaji (230) astutely notes, the introduction of rural-urban migration, wage labour, Western education, and conversion to Christianity in colonial Rhodesia brought about a dispersion and the weakening of the extended family structure. The increased mobility created physical, social and economic distances among family members, undermining the social cohesion that has previously characterised extended families (Jaji 230). Consequently, “a new configuration based on an individualized reality emerged as people migrated and lived far away from people with whom they had had an inextricable family bond” (Jaji 230). Unlike in the past when families ordinarily lived close to each other, the migration during the colonial-era dissolved family structures as some family members relocated to urban centres, farms, and mines while the others stayed in the rural area (Jaji 230). This has also been noted by Butholezwe Mtombeni (1187) who highlights the immense impact the breakdown of the family structure had on women. He argues that men moving to urban centres in pursuit of work opportunities left women in rural areas with double burdens – “as agents of both reproduction and production” as they not only tended to agricultural tasks and nurtured their families but also “initiated the boy child to manhood in the absence of the fathers” (Mtombeni 1187). Hence, colonialism not only destroyed indigenous family structures but also placed women in precarious positions, separating them from their husbands and reducing them to the mere instruments of reproduction and production.

In the context of life of Zimbabwean people during colonialism, it should also be noted that important ethnic differences existed. Anna Katharina Hildegard Weinrich highlights that the

Ndebele carried the greatest burden of colonialism (Weinrich qtd. in Jacobs 254). Weinrich argues that by 1948 approximately 60 per cent of Ndebele men participated in wage labour compared to about 40 per cent of Shona men (Weinrich qtd. in Jacobs 254). This difference can be attributed to the fact that Ndebele land was less fertile, resulting in limited opportunities for cash-cropping (Weinrich qtd. in Jacobs 254). What is more, most Shona men worked in urban centres whereas Ndebele men typically found employment on ranches for lower pay and in 1975 the average household income was twice as low for Ndebele than for Shona (Weinrich qtd. in Jacobs 254). Weinrich's data also reveals that there was a notable difference between the Shona and the Ndebele regarding education in colonial Zimbabwe (Weinrich qtd. in Jacobs 254). As the Shona were largely receptive to Christianity whereas most Ndebele were reluctant to convert, they missed out on the education opportunities (Weinrich qtd. in Jacobs 254). Consequently, in the early 1980s most men with secondary and higher education in rural areas were Shona-speaking while "Ndebele were more highly proletarianized and on worse terms, less educated, less Christianized and more poverty-stricken than the Shona" (Weinrich qtd. in Jacobs 254). Hence, it is evident that while colonialism had detrimental effects on the whole indigenous population, the ethnic differences were prevalent. These differences greatly contributed to disparities in education, employment and economic status between the Shona and the Ndebele, ultimately impacting the social hierarchy of the mentioned ethnic groups.

2.2. Women's position in precolonial Zimbabwe

Literature regarding Zimbabwe's diverse ethnic groups shows considerable disparities in its treatment of women during the precolonial period (Cheater 66). Arguably one of the most important reasons why there was so little said about women in Zimbabwe prior to colonialism is that precolonial historical narratives were written predominantly by men whose androcentric views were not in accordance with women's lived experiences. The male orientated literary scene disregarded the position of women in precolonial history of Zimbabwe, leading to scant information about women in precolonial Zimbabwe (Cheater 66). While some scholars such as Jeff Guy and Cheryl Walker contend that women were helpless and powerless victims of patriarchal oppression prior to colonial rule, there is growing evidence suggesting the important influence women had, both on economic, political, and religious level (Mtombeni 1186). As Butholezwe Mtombeni (1186) states, precolonial times may have been patriarchal in nature, but women were not mere victims of the patriarchal society. This is particularly evident if one considers that women were "active in agricultural as well as craft production and had some

control over grain store” (Cheater 66). In her seminal article *The Role and Position of Women in pre-colonial and colonial Zimbabwe*, Angela P. Cheater contends that despite not having control over the means of production and metallurgy, women were active participants in agricultural and craft production (Cheater 66). She argues that the payment of bride wealth, known as *roora* and *lobolo*, is the main reason why women were denied direct control of the means of production (Cheater 66). This payment of bride wealth shifted the rights to a woman’s labour and reproductive abilities from her to her husband’s family while also compensating her family for this loss (Cheater 66). Therefore, women in precolonial society can be considered as “comprising an equivalent to the class in industrial systems of production” (Cheater 66).

Women in precolonial Zimbabwe also occupied an important role in the context of the family structure. As Cheater observes:

Shona women did exercise authority in other roles: as mothers, especially over their daughters; as *vatete*, particularly over the education of their brothers' children; as ancestors, over the reproductive capacity of their female descendants (although the degree to which women were able to control their own fecundity is less certain); as producers or service-workers possessing special skills (in pottery or healing, for example), over the proceeds of their own work; as mothers of married daughters for whom *roora* had been paid, over property. (Cheater 67)

This observation suggests that women played a pivotal role in the home and held a complementary rather than subordinate position in precolonial Zimbabwe. Interestingly, the age was of paramount importance regarding women’s authority (Cheater 67). Typically, a newly married wife lacked authority in her husband’s home, however, by the time women became grandmothers they had immense impact on various matters pertaining not only to her own but also to her husband’s family (Cheater 67). Marking the loss of mystical influence that was associated with menstruation in precolonial Zimbabwe, women were perceived as an “honorary male” in village societies, acquiring personal property while domestic responsibilities were taken care of by younger women (Cheater 67). In a similar vein, the family in which women had been born into and that into which they had married were of vital importance regarding their influence. This is echoed by Susie Schmidt who argues that a female hierarchy existed, and age, marital situation and socio-economic situation were key determinants of women’s status. While some women attained positions of authority as healers, spirit medium and midwives, others who came from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds were susceptible to “being taken hostage or to being used as pawns to pay debts”

(Schmidt qtd. in Jacobs 244). Therefore, it is clear how important socio-economic background was in shaping the opportunities and social status of Zimbabwean women in precolonial times.

The role women played in precolonial Zimbabwe is further emphasised on a religious level and is best exemplified when considering the spirit mediumship. In Shona belief and practice, spirit mediums serve as the link between the living and the dead. Cheater (68) notes that while autochthonous spirits such as *Chaminuka* and the *mhonodoro* (royal ancestral spirits) spirits of deceased chiefs were predominantly male, their mediums communicating the spirit's messages to the living were as likely to be women. Arguably one of the most important examples of spirit mediums is Charwe, the medium of *Nehanda* who was "elevated to a higher heroic position during the struggle for Zimbabwe" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 6). Generally, women who were chosen as spirit mediums no longer had sexual contact with their spouses, ceased their reproductive roles and all domestic tasks were carried out by assistants (Cheater 68). The spiritual authority of the medium, for which she was held in great reverence, overrode the prior social identity of the medium (Cheater 68). Gender was considered irrelevant to the exercises of the spiritual authority because "the demands of the male spirit are by definition legitimate, even when these interfere with the 'modal social personality of woman'" (Cheater 68). Interestingly, in other African countries women reportedly utilised and took advantage of their possession by male spirits to break free from the standardized female identity or even to demand material goods from their husbands (Cheater 69). Therefore, religious roles in traditional belief system "afforded and continue to afford exceptional women who refuse to conform to the standard female 'social personality', an escape route into individualized positions of power as well as authority, based on traditional religion" (Cheater 69).

To conclude, while women in precolonial Zimbabwe might not have held the same power as men, they were not mere victims of society but held a complementary rather than subservient position on both economic, political, and religious level. Prior to colonialism, "gender relations were [...] flexible and women could perform male functions, achieve powerful positions, and inherit property" while "colonialism effectively put an end to this process and reduced the sociopolitical status of women to objects, thus preventing them from achieving social and economic mobility within society" (Zambakari 52). Doubtlessly spurred by British colonialism, Zimbabwean women found themselves in a precarious position as becomes evident in the following chapter.

2.3. Women's position in colonial Zimbabwe

As already mentioned, British colonialism in Zimbabwe had adverse effects on the indigenous people. Although colonialism had an immense impact on the whole population, it was women who bore the brunt of colonialist oppression and were stripped of social, economic, and political roles. While the colonial administrators and missionaries in Zimbabwe harboured hostile attitudes towards African men, their views on African women were even more disparaging (Schmidt 735). This has been documented by colonial records that are abundant with pejorative adjectives describing women as “indolent, lazy, slothful, immoral, frivolous, savage, and uncivilized” (Schmidt 735). The article written by Elizabeth Schmidt *Patriarchy, Capitalism, and the Colonial State in Zimbabwe* highlights the correlation between the ideological basis for controlling African women and the larger economic goals of colonial capital and the state (Schmidt 739). The prevailing view among colonial officials was that the most effective way to control woman was through economic means. “As long as women were totally dependent upon their husbands’ access to land and cash income, their behavior could be kept in line” (Schmidt 739) and they could be controlled. Consequently, the control of women was even enforced by colonial laws such as the 1916 Natives Adultery Punishment Ordinance, considering it essential to “control female sexuality in order to ensure a male labour supply in times of shortage” (Jacobs 246). The 1916 Natives Adultery Punishment Ordinance criminalized adultery with married African women with the intention of “reassuring men that their sexual interests would be protected in the reserves if they migrated to work outside the rural areas” (Jacobs 246). It follows, therefore, that the control of women was inextricably linked to the larger economic goals of the colonizers.

Similarly, women's social status deteriorated further by the codification of Customary Law. As Susie Jacobs (247) notes, the codification of Customary Law made it impossible for most African women to make contracts, represent themselves in court, marry without the permission of a male guardian, and to be awarded custody of children since they were defined as legal “minors”. This overlooked the fact that all members of society except for elders were considered ‘minors’ in precolonial Zimbabwe (Milroy qtd. in Jacobs 247). According to Johan Frederik Holleman, the result was that Zimbabwean women were stripped of rights such as *mavoko* property (literally meaning ‘of her own hands’ in Shona) which included earnings from wages and from simple commodity production (Holleman qtd in Jacobs 247). While Customary Law was created by colonial officials, Shona and Ndebele elders and chiefs participated in

enforcing it as well (Jacobs 247). Settler colonialism had stripped African men of their political domination but simultaneously attempted to strengthen male authority within the household to prevent direct male rebellion (Jacobs 247). Hence, it is evident that the purpose to control Zimbabwean women was twofold – on the one hand, the colonial regime wanted to restrict women to deprive them of their independence and on the other hand, this control served as a higher purpose to “mollify a potentially powerful opposition force – namely African men” (Schmidt 735).

The control of the Africans during the colonial era is nowhere as clear as in the education system policies. Similar to the aforementioned laws introduced by the colonizers, the education system in colonial Zimbabwe was a way to control the indigenous population. The colonial education system was characterized by two salient features - racial segregation, on the one hand and exploitation of the African majority, on the other hand (Zvobgo 13). This becomes particularly evident if one considers that under the Compulsory Education Act, education became not only obligatory but also free for all European children aged six to fifteen (Zvobgo 13). “European children were thus provided with the best formal education available in the colony” while “African education [...] was geared to produce a better worker and a more useful servant to the European” (Zvobgo 13). The 1907 Education Ordinance, therefore, advocated for inclusion of farming, brickmaking, road making, building carpentry, and ironwork because Europeans were not in favour of incorporating academic training in African schools, harbouring deep fears that it might pose a threat to their status as the ruling class (Parker qtd. in Zvobgo 13). “To limit an influx of African students into upper primary and secondary schools, the government introduced a pyramid structure into African education which allowed a large number of pupils to enter primary school and then progressively restricted opportunities as African pupils climbed the educational ladder through secondary school to university” (Zvobgo 14). This was done to limit an influx of educated Africans who were eligible to qualify for the franchise and to deter them from entering the labour market because it would put pressure on the government and employers to provide jobs to Africans that were traditionally occupied by Europeans (Zvobgo 14). There was also great apprehension among the Europeans over the large reservoir of trained but unemployed Africans leading to political unrest (Weinrich qtd. in Zvobgo 14).

Education was not only the way to maintain status quo of racial oppression but it was also utilised to maintain gender imbalance and keep women in control. For example, in her seminal article titled *If You Can Educate the Native Woman: Debates over the Schooling and Education*

of Girls and Women in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1934, Carol Summers (471) notes that the development of education programs in 1920s had a dual purpose- to pacify fathers and husbands by enforcing control over women and emphasising traditional family values, on the one hand, and to provide wives for educated African men, who were becoming more mobile and independent, on the other hand. The latter was done with the aim to use women's adherence to home to divert men's attention from the multiracial towns to the Reserves (Summers 471). Central to the education of women was teaching women about domesticity and home life which was done not only to instil new European concepts but also to teach an appropriate African domesticity (Summers 471). To facilitate the capitalistic economic development of the region, women were excluded from the market and committed to the role of wives, role models and devout church members within the reserves (Summers 471). In some cases, even the most privileged wives of agricultural demonstrators were faced with restrictions regarding their participation in cash crop production (Summers 471). As Summers argues, female education, therefore, constituted a program "which was designed not to promote change and development, but to soften development and promote harmony and order" (Summers 471).

Arguably the most evident example of how European settlers imposed their vision on women's "natural" role in society is reflected in the fact that colonial educational system differed greatly for boys and girls. While Africans generally did not have easy access to education, girls were even less likely to receive formal education than boys and even when they did, they were channelled into subjects that aligned with Western ideologies (Seidman 423). Despite the important role women played in agriculture, the education curriculum was heavily influenced by Western notions of Zimbabwean women as homemakers and, as a result, girls were more likely to study the household skills than agricultural techniques (Seidman 423). This is also echoed by Carole Boyce Davies' observation on how colonial policies attempted to prevent women from having access to education:

The selection of males for formal education was fostered by the colonial institutions which made specific choices in educating male and female. Then too, the sex role distinctions common to many African societies supported the notion that western education was a barrier to a woman's role as wife and mother and an impediment to her success in these traditional modes of acquiring status. With few exceptions, girls were kept away from formal and especially higher education. The colonial administrations were therefore willing accomplices because they imported a view of the world in which women were of secondary importance. (Davies qtd. in Stratton 8)

As Gay W. Seidman notes, “education, through which Africans [...] could gain skills needed for their rapidly changing world, channeled different and unequal areas – and the direction of the channelling reflected European ideas, not African realities” (Seidman 423).

As discussed in the previous chapter, it is important to remember that although colonialism had detrimental effects on the whole population, ethnic differences among groups existed. For instance, education attainment provides an insight into differences among ethnic groups that had an impact on women (Jacobs 254). As Weinrich notes, “in the late 1970s approximately one-quarter of Shona and 37 per cent of Ndebele women had *no* formal education, and *no* Ndebele women surveyed had over eight years of education” (Weinrich qtd. in Jacobs 254). Furthermore, Weinrich reports that bride wealth payment was found to be smaller for Ndebele compared to the Shona and while almost all Shona participated in bride wealth payment, nearly one-fifth of the Ndebele paid none (Weinrich qtd. in Jacobs 255). She also points out the instances of severe violence, most prevalent among Ndebele in impoverished rural Matabeleland districts (Weinrich qtd. in Jacobs 255). Hence, it is apparent that ethnic differences were prominent, and they often led to discrepancies in education, employment, and economic status.

Despite the interlocking forms of oppression, women attempted to fight back and resorted to force to challenge the status quo. Many Zimbabwean women moved from rural to urban areas to find work, escape violent marriages, and to earn money in whatever ways were possible, albeit with the approval of their guardians (Jacobs 247). Despite the precarious position they found themselves in, the women in Zimbabwe tried to resist colonialism and alter the power relations.

2.4. Women’s position during independence struggle

After ninety years of colonial rule, Zimbabwe gained independence from the British colonial rule on 18 April 1980. While historiography mostly glorifies men’s involvement in the war, the variegated roles women played in the anti-colonial struggles that engulfed Zimbabwe cannot be overemphasised. Already during 1896-1897 uprisings, commonly known as the First *Chimurenga*, the involvement of women was brought to the fore. Arguably the most important example of women’s involvement in the First *Chimurenga* is the story of Nehanda Nyasikana, a central political figure in the uprisings against the British South Africa Company who was ultimately executed for the death of Native Commissioner Pollard. While some academics

disregard her significant role, and, therefore, the influence she had, others acknowledge the pivotal role she played during the First *Chimurenga*. For example, in contrast to David Martin's and Phyllis Johnson's account of the Zimbabwean struggle describing Nyasikana as a "frail woman" (Lyson 81), other scholars highlight her military leadership and importance as both military adviser and natural heroine (Lyson 85).

The engagement of women continued to be prominent during the Second *Chimurenga*. In the first years of the war, women in the guerrilla forces primarily tended to tasks such as growing food, cooking, and carrying supplies (Seidman 426). As the war went on, ZANU, a militant socialist organisation that fought against colonialism in Rhodesia, decided to train women as soldiers and by the end of the war entire squads of women were engaged in combat within the nation (Seidman 426). Interestingly, in some cases women even commanded squads with men in their rank, marking a major departure from traditional patterns (Seidman 426). As Tanya Lyson observes, the 1950s and 1960s that marked nationalist political movement gaining momentum, resulted in women's active participation in political actions against colonisation and oppression. The roles they occupied are summarized in the *Zimbabwe Review*:

The women of Zimbabwe started the struggle simultaneously with their men – folk in the country. It must be understood right from the beginning that we the women of Zimbabwe are no different from the women of other countries who went through thick and thin to convince their fellow men that they were equally responsible on national matters. A woman in Zimbabwe has always been reminded about children, that the rally place for her is the kitchen and that politics are for men only. Very interestingly enough the Zimbabwe woman has refused all that although not all the women have taken an active part in the politics in their country. The national problems affect us all as we are fully aware of that. (*Zimbabwe Review* qtd. in Lyson 92)

The role of Zimbabwean women in the war is, perhaps, nowhere as clear as in the 1961 women's protests when thousands of women marched on Salisbury, today's Harare, and more than 2000 women were arrested (Lyson 96). The protest was organized with the aim to demonstrate against the "approval of a new constitution institutionalizing racism by allocating only 15 out of 65 seats in parliament to Africans" (Lyson 96). It had significant ramifications for Zimbabwean women: thousands of women were arrested and beaten (Lyson 96). This protest, along with numerous others, is just one example of women's active participation in the liberation of Zimbabwe, a fact that is often disregarded and written out of mainstream history.

Moreover, it should be noted that women living in rural areas played a crucial role in the

guerrilla war (Seidman 427). According to Seidman (427), since rural women were primarily in charge of domestic food production, they were the ones who fed and sheltered fighters. Younger girls frequently carried messages between villagers and guerrilla fighters hidden in the surrounding countryside (Seidman 426). Even though they were initially chosen due to their “seemingly” unimportant role, these girls could nonetheless gain great power in their communities due to their connections to the fighters (Seidman 426).

Ireen Mudeka and Norma Kriger argue that reasons why Zimbabwean women participated in the struggle were manifold – some women joined due to specific incidents such as the burning of villages, the murder of a relative or a brutal visit from the Rhodesian Security Forces (Mudeka and Kriger qtd. in Law 253). Other women saw it as an opportunity to break free from traditional restrictions including a “low status, parental control and the influence of elders [...] following a lover, being inspired by a teacher or as a matter of conscience” (Mudeka and Kriger qtd. in Law 253). Collecting firewood, preparing, and transporting food, singing revolutionary songs and fitness training were some of the women’s mundane tasks (Mudeka and Kriger qtd. in Law 253). Leda Stott points out that although camp life was equal for both sexes in theory, the reality was different as women continued to face discrimination based on gender and they were, therefore, still subject to traditional decisions about their roles (Stott qtd. in Law 253). This interpretation differs from that of Gisela Geisler who argues that gender differences were secondary in the camps and that Zimbabwean women were in part able to achieve a comparable status to their fellow male cadres (Geisler qtd. in Law 253). Likewise, Tanya Lyons highlights the liberation struggle as a “transformative period during which gender roles became increasingly blurred” (Lyson qtd. in Law 253). Despite the contrasting views, the role women played in the liberation struggle undeniably challenged attitudes towards women. This is best exemplified in the debates that raged in Zimbabwe’s newspapers and pertained to whether former combatants made good wives (Seidman 426). Many of the male interviewees told the reporters that they harboured deep fears about the ex-combatant’s independence, “worry[ing] about their parent’s response if they brought home wives who had so completely broken with traditional submissive roles” (Seidman 426). In contrast, others, mainly other women supported the guerrilla girls and believed that these women proved themselves equal to men in both strength and patriotism and, ought to be seen as more desirable as wives rather than less (Seidman 426). This issue has been addressed by Naomi Nhiwativa, who was then deputy minister for women’s affairs:

When we women were in the fields, they could command men. The line of command in the military is a rather easy one: there is the commander, you follow the line of command. Woman combatants learned to take leadership, to give commands and to expect them to be followed. Now they are told ‘No, you sit on the floor while the men sit over there’. All this represent a lot of adjustment for the women. (Nhiwativa qtd. in Seidman 427)

Nhiwativa also pointed out that women who were ex-combatants were even intimidating to men who were once part of the guerrilla forces themselves since they wanted wives who will adhere to traditional gender roles (Nhiwativa qtd. in Seidman 427). This brings to the fore that although women played pivotal role during the war, the deeply ingrained and oversimplified views on the women’s role prevailed. Despite the significant role women played during the war, “traditional gender roles and patriarchal prerogatives were quickly reasserted once the war was over” (Law 262). This is best exemplified in the ‘Operation Clean Up’ that happened just three years after the independence during which thousands of women in Harare and Bulawayo were “indiscriminately detained with state machinery arguing that [they] were prostitutes, vagrants, and beggars who did not belong in urban spaces” (Law 250). According to Stott, the ‘Operation Clean Up’ illustrates an attempt to silence and suppress women who advocated for a better life in independent Zimbabwe (Stott qtd. in Law 262). This starkly reveals the gendered nature of women’s post-colonial political exclusion and how traditional gender ideologies still exist and should, therefore, be addressed and fought against to give Zimbabwean women more agency.

3. Key Concepts

3.1. Frantz Fanon’s notion of colonial violence and counter-violence

The Martinique scholar and clinical psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, who is renowned for his groundbreaking contributions to postcolonialism, gained widespread fame for his important insights into the psychological and sociopolitical effects of colonialism. His works offer perspectives on various topics related to theories of the anti-colonial resistance, identity construction under colonialism, and the psychological effects of colonialism, to name just a few. In this regard, it is worth noting that Fanon pursued studies in psychoanalysis and psychiatry, which resulted in his profound awareness of the phylogeny and the alienation inherent in colonialism. One of the most significant topics in Fanon’s line of thought is the notion of violence which is extensively explored in his quintessential book *The Wretched of the Earth*. To clarify the definition of violence, Fanon emphasises its duality, as something

perpetuated by the colonizer and the counter-violence of the colonized. As Pramod Nayar astutely notes:

Fanon proposes that it is colonial violence and its trauma that leads to the second form of violence – that from the colonized side. The second is the violence of the colonized. This violence is an attempt on the part of the desperate, frustrated, and alienated colonized subject to retrieve a certain dignity and sense of the Self that colonial violence had destroyed. It takes the form of anti-colonial struggle. (Nayar qtd. in Ndayisenga 70)

For the purposes of my thesis, I will firstly discuss the effects of colonial violence on the colonized people, focusing particularly on its psychological effects, which will later be applied to the reading of *Nervous Conditions*. Secondly, this chapter also sets out to investigate violence as a liberating and revolutionary means to break free from the domination imposed by colonizers, thus, offering new perspectives on anti-colonial discourse.

In Fanon's view, violence is an inherent characteristic of colonial systems and serves as a tool of colonial rule in which "the proximity and frequent, direct intervention by the police and the military [...] ensure that the colonized are kept under close scrutiny and contained by rifle butts and napalm" (Fanon 4) and are, therefore, controlled. Fanon contends that violence is not only perpetrated on the physical bodies but also on the mind, therefore highlighting detrimental effects on the psyche of the colonized people (Fanon qtd. in Castelli 327). This psychological violence stems from negative stereotypes portraying native people as "evil, lazy, and irrational creatures that need to be protected, subhuman by nature" (Fanon qtd. in Castelli 327), resulting in various psychological disturbances among them. The exploitative racism embedded in colonial rule aims to instil feelings of inferiority among the colonized people, perpetuating white privilege and control. As noted above, colonial violence is multifaceted, encompassing not only physical violence but also psychological forms of oppression, exemplified in the following:

Colonial violence was phenomenal. It touched both the senses, the psychic, and the affective domains. It was the purveyor of mental disorders, which were difficult to treat and cure. It excluded any dialectic of recognition and was indifferent to any moral argument. Over time it attacked even the most private, innermost areas of subjectivity and ran the risk of depriving the colonized of any mnesic trace. (Mbembe qtd. in Ndayisenga 467)

This quote clearly illustrates the destructive impact of colonialism on the subjectivity of Black people. By exploring the inferiority complex of the Black mind, Fanon conclusively demonstrates how colonialism debased Black individuals to objects solely because of their race. Further, he elucidates that the sense of inferiority experienced by Black individuals is a result of the numerous stereotypes imposed upon them by colonizers. As Black people internalize white values, they undergo a process of alienation and develop feelings of worthlessness.

These psychological effects, imposed by colonial violence, are discussed at length in *The Wretched of the Earth*, where Fanon presents numerous instances of psychiatric symptoms that arose during and after colonial rule, and which he encountered through his psychiatric patients. Colonization, according to Fanon, “appeared to be a great purveyor of psychiatric hospitals” (Fanon qtd. in Ndayisenga 473) and people subjugated to it suffered from severe reactionary disorders. For instance, providing examples such as a man suffering from impotence, migraines and anorexia following the rape of his wife by a French soldier, as well as survivors of massacres exhibiting homicidal tendencies, Fanon illustrates the detrimental effects of colonialism. Other instances of psychological effects of colonialism involve eating disorders. Fanon recounts cases of patients who “could no longer swallow a bite” and suffered “loss of appetite arising from mental causes” (Sugnet 35). In addition to eating disorders, Fanon discusses other types of voluntary bodily resistance to colonialism, such as excessive muscular rigidity (Sugnet 35). Charles Sugnet (35) observes an overlap between Fanon’s theory and *Nervous Conditions*, particularly concerning colonial psychology and the manifestation of resistance through physical symptoms, which will be thoroughly explored in the analytical section of my thesis.

Colonial violence, manifested on both physical and psychological level, exacerbates the hardships experienced by the colonized people, leading to a state where they are physically living but are internally and morally dead, as observed by Zenon Ndayisenga (471). The effects of colonial violence are detrimental and far reaching, resulting in feelings of inferiority, self-loathing, and alienation. This sentiment is echoed in Fanon’s assertion that “the oppressed will always believe the worst about themselves” (Fanon 7), alluding at the traumatic damages left by colonial experiences.

To fight this oppressive system and reclaim their cultural identity from the colonized, Fanon proposes resorting to any means necessary, including violence (Fanon qtd. in Ndayisenga 466). He considers violence to be a “cleansing force”, an intrinsically valuable tool in the context of

anti-colonial struggle (Fanon qtd. in Ndayisenga 478). Illustrating this juxtaposition of violence, Fanon argues that the pressing need for a violent revolution arises from the violence inflicted upon the colonized, as evidenced by his statement that “colonialism is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence” (Fanon qtd. in Aghamelu and Ejike 31). In Fanon’s view, the process of decolonization is inherently violent phenomenon because it involves “the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature, which in fact owe their originality to that sort of substantiation which results from and is nourished by the situation in the colonies” (Fanon qtd. Aghamelu and Ejike 31). Consequently, the Manichaeism (which Fanon utilises as an analogy for colonialism), ingrained in the colonial systems, persists during the process of decolonization (Fanon qtd. in Aghamelu and Ejike 31). This implies that “the settler never ceases to be the enemy, the opponent, the foe that must be overthrown” (Fanon qtd. in Aghamelu and Ejike 31). Fanon and Sartre share the perspective that dialectics demonstrate the practical awareness of “an oppressed class struggling against its oppression” (Sartre qtd. in Aghamelu and Ejike 31) and it is only through “the dialectical reciprocity of antagonism” that this dialectic can be resolved (Bernasconi qtd. in Aghamelu and Ejike 31). Fanon argues that there is an interplay between the violence of the colonial systems and the counter-violence of the colonized. Therefore, decolonization seeking to rectify a situation created by violence in the colonial context, should itself be violent (Fanon qtd. in Aghamelu and Ejike 31). The liberating nature of counter-violence by the colonized is nowhere as clear as in Fanon’s own words that “violence is man re-creating himself” (Fanon 21). Fanon urges us to look beyond the notion of counter-violence solely as a tool to expel the colonists, but he also emphasises how such a practice has positive effects, both on a psychological and political level (Castelli 328). The core of Fanon’s argument is that the positive psychological effects of counter-violence empower the colonized to become aware of their own identity, reclaim their dignity and overcome emotional disorders inflicted by the colonial system (Castelli 328). Therefore, anti-colonial violence provides an avenue for the colonized to express their anger towards those who are truly responsible for the injustices they have suffered from (Castelli 327). In Fanon’s words, “after years of unreality, after wallowing in the most extraordinary phantasms, the colonized subject, machine gun at the ready, finally confronts the only force which challenges his very being: colonialism” (Fanon 20). Regarding the positive effects at the political level, Fanon argues that colonialism’s eradication of precolonial autochthonous society makes it impossible to restore the previous culture or social organization (Fanon qtd. in Castelli 328). Consequently, the postcolonial nation ought to move forward in its fight against the oppressor in order to rise up “from the rotting cadaver of the

colonist” (Fanon qtd. in Castelli 328). In this context, counter-violence paves the way for the construction of a new society and enables the formation of a new political unity (Castelli 328). The urgent necessity of violence and its positive effect are further emphasised as follows:

Violence alone, perpetrated by the people, violence organized and guided by the leadership, provides the key for the masses to decipher social reality. Without this struggle, without this praxis there is nothing but a carnival parade and a lot of hot air. All that is left is a slight readaptation, a few reforms at the top, a flag, and down at the bottom a shapeless, writhing mass, still mired in the Dark Ages. (Fanon qtd. in Castelli 330)

With this in mind, it should be noted that Fanon’s positive views on anti-colonial violence does not imply that violence is something inherently good; for while he recognises its usefulness, he does not regard violence as an ideal for the new humanist society he envisions; rather, as a necessary instrument that leads to such a society (Gibson qtd. in Castelli 330). Therefore, it would be inaccurate to consider Fanon’s body of ideas as glorifying violence. He does not contend that violence inherently leads to positive results or possesses inherent value apart from the results it produces (Macey qtd. in Castelli 330). Violence is merely a viable strategy for the colonized people to reclaim what colonialism has deprived them and it can, therefore, be seen as a response to the initial colonial violence (Ndayisenga 482).

Although the importance of Fanon’s insights about race is undeniable, his failure to acknowledge the experiences of Black women experiences is conspicuous. Fanon’s omission of the multiple levels of oppression affecting Black women, as well as his disregard for the intersections of historical and cultural constructs of race with gender and class, has led to accusations of misogyny (Makward qtd. in Lane and Mahdi 169). Although Fanon explores the intricate layers of both Black men’s and women’s experiences, his arguments solely consider the experiences of Black women *in relation to men* (emphasis added), either Black or White (Ming Wahl 43). This observation is further echoed by Gwen Bergner, who maintains that Fanon regards the male as the norm since “women are considered as subjects almost exclusively in terms of their sexual relationships with men” (Gwen Bergner qtd. in Ming Wahl 43). For instance, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon repeatedly describes Black women as having one particular goal i.e., to obtain a White partner (Ming Wahl 44). As Emma Ming Wahl notes, he juxtaposes two comments: that of one woman maintaining that “it’s not that [Black women] want to downplay the credentials of the Black man, but you know it’s better to be white,” on the one hand, and another woman claiming that “there is a white potential in every one of us; some want to ignore it or quite simply reverse it. Me, I would never accept to marry [a Black

man]” (Fanon qtd. in Ming Wahl 44), on the other hand. Utilising both these comments as examples, Fanon ultimately suggests that women succumb “to the continual indoctrination of White superiority and the desire for a similar status” (Ming Wahl 44). These remarks are then used to transform “the Black woman’s experience into something that only has her operating in pursuit of and in relation to men of either race rather than as her own autonomous being” (Ming Wahl 44). While it is understandable that Fanon prioritizes race in his analysis, his portrayal of the Black male as the norm disregards the importance of the different layers of oppression. Rather than singularly focusing on the Black man, including women in his narrative could more comprehensively “encompass the totality of the Black lived experience” (Ming Wahl 49). As Ming Wahl points out, “only with attention to multiple perspectives and identities can there be the full acknowledgement and resistance Fanon calls for” (Ming Wahl 49). Therefore, although Frantz Fanon’s theories extend beyond a mere examination of racism and colonialism within discourse analysis and he meticulously explores the perception of the world by Black people, there is a pressing need to include diverse perspectives and identities, including those of women in order to understand the effects of colonialism in their full complexity.

3.2. Homi Bhabha’s notion of cultural hybridity and mimicry

Homi Bhabha is undoubtedly one of the most important figures in post-colonial studies, with his theories extending beyond post-colonial theory to encompass writing about visual arts, literature in English, and issues pertaining to human rights and globalisation (Huddart 60). Due to his central contributions to the development of post-colonial theory, Bhabha is considered one of the so-called *Holy Trinity* of post-colonial theory, alongside with Edward Wadie Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Huddart 60). Homi Bhabha was greatly influenced by Said, who himself was influenced by Gramsci and Foucault. However, Bhabha advanced Said’s thought by integrating elements from psychoanalysis and poststructuralism and applying them to postcolonial theory. Whereas Said’s notion of Orientalism maintained the dichotomy between the West and the East, for which he faced criticism, Bhabha provided new insights by adding complexities to what could be considered Said’s simplistic perspective. In contrast to Said, Bhabha views the relation between colonizer and colonized as more ambiguous and more ambivalent. His theories, particularly the notions on hybridity and mimicry, are crucial for the reading of Tsitsi Dangarembga’s path-breaking novel *Nervous Conditions*. Drawing on Bhabha’s insights, I will show that the colonial presence creates identities, *third spaces*, that

are not fixed but in transition and are products of cultural mixes, particularly evident in the analysis of the character Nyasha who oscillates between dual cultural identities.

One of the most vital concepts in cultural criticism is Bhabha's notion of hybridity, which remains influential and occupies a central place in postcolonial discourse since its introduction in 1994. To fully understand this highly intricate concept, it is important to recognise Bhabha's assertion that culture is not a static entity. Rather than fixed, culture is fluid and continuously in motion; thus, in this sense no pure Britishness, Africanness or Americanness can exist, as all cultures are characterized by mixedness. In his seminal book *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha describes hybridity as both a form of colonial anxiety and "resilience of the subaltern or colonized against colonial influence, domination, and power of the colonizers" (Bhabha qtd. in Michaels 4). Hybridity can, therefore, be understood as a transgressive act which undermines the colonizers' authority, thereby constituting an act of defiance. Bhabha lends a positive aspect to the term hybridity, which has historically been negatively connoted largely due to its "mixed and impure nature" (Michaels 3).

In the context of hybridity, it is important to consider that Bhabha resists narratives that either celebrate or dismiss global simultaneity (Huddart 65). The impetus behind his views on hybridity becomes apparent in an interview from *Art in America*:

The postcolonial perspective resists attempts at holistic forms of social explanation. I question the traditional liberal attempt to negotiate a coming together of minorities on the basis of what they have in common and what is consensual. In my writing, I've been arguing against the multiculturalist notion that you can put together harmoniously any number of cultures in a pretty mosaic. You cannot just solder together different cultural traditions to produce some brave new cultural totality. The current phase of economic and social history makes you aware of cultural difference not at the celebratory level of diversity but always at the point of conflict or crisis. (Bhabha qtd. in Huddart 65)

As David Huddart argues (66), Bhabha's perspective on post-colonialism dismisses the notion of multiculturalism that seeks to assimilate cultures into harmonious wholes which, in Bhabha's view, erases differences. Moreover, he elucidates that "disparate cultures are not pre-existents, but instead are an effect of historical change, specifically of colonialism and post-colonialism" (Bhabha qtd. in Huddart 66). Bhabha argues that cultural hybridity is neither absolutely general nor synonymous with cultural diversity. While hybridity can easily appear as a category applicable to all cultures, Bhabha warns against a notion of hybridity that "blurs all difference

into indifference” thereby making all forms of hybridity appear equivalent (Bhabha qtd. in Huddart 66). As Huddart notes, hybridization, according to Bhabha, “is a process that takes place continually, with cultures in their different forms the result of that process, each time requiring specific contextualization” (Bhabha qtd. in Huddart 66). Thus, hybridization can be considered a powerful agent for change within postcolonial contexts.

Furthermore, Bhabha’s hybridity is intricately linked with the theory of the *Third Space*, which brings to the fore the complex interactions between the colonizer and the colonized. He posits that all cultural statements and systems are shaped within what he terms the “Third Space of enunciation” (Ashcroft 108). It is within this *Third Space*, characterized by contradiction and ambivalence, that cultural identities emerge (Ashcroft 108). Bhabha contends that it is precisely the *Third Space* that undermines any notion of cultures as being completely ‘pure’ (Ashcroft 108). In his view, the acknowledgement, and recognition of this ambivalent space of cultural identity may allow to “overcome the exoticism of cultural diversity in favour of the recognition of an empowering hybridity within which cultural difference may operate” (Ashcroft 108). This concept is exemplified in the following ways:

It is significant that the productive capacities of this *Third Space* have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory . . . may open the way to conceptualizing an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s *hybridity*. (Bhabha qtd. in Ashcroft 38)

The third space embodies the “discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, historicized and read anew” (Bhabha 37).

Another term central to Bhabha’s theory which warrants careful examination and is crucial for the analysis of *Nervous Conditions* is mimicry. Bhabha describes mimicry as “one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” (Bhabha 126). According to Bhabha, “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject [...] that is almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 126) which is vital for maintaining the presumed cultural difference between the colonizer and the colonized. Bhabha contends that the colonizer aims to create an *Other* who resembles him but never fully becomes him (Bhabha 127). In doing so, colonial discourse encourages the colonized individual to ‘imitate’ the colonizer by adopting their cultural practices, beliefs, assumptions, and values (Ashcroft 125). However, this mimicry does not result in a simple reproduction of those traits but rather in a ‘blurred copy’ of the

colonizer that often appears disconcerting (Ashcroft 125). This is because “mimicry is never very far from mockery, since it can appear to parody whatever it mimics” (Ashcroft 125). To put it differently, Bhabha contends that the very idea of the ‘inferior’ colonized imitating the ‘superior’ colonizer transforms the act into a sort of mockery. Consequently, mimicry elucidates the limitations in the authority of colonial discourse, suggesting that colonial authority contains the elements of its own downfall (Ashcroft 125). In essence, the notion of mimicry opens the possibility of viewing colonial discourses as weaker and more vulnerable, as there are inherent paradoxes at their core.

While mimicry can have detrimental effects, such as the protentional loss of cultural identity, it can also be empowering as it undermines the authority of the colonizers. On a similar note, Sumit Chakrabarti (13) notes that while mimicry enables the colonizer to identify the colonized as the *Other*, thereby ultimately sustaining the master-slave binary and reinforcing tropes of power, it simultaneously destabilizes the colonial narrative. In that sense, mimicry is no longer purely negative but is in part a revolutionary trait. Bhabha also gives specific consideration to what he terms as the menace of mimicry:

The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority. And it is a double- vision that is a result of what I've described as the partial representation/recognition of the colonial object [...] The ambivalence of colonial authority repeatedly turns from *mimicry* - a difference that is almost nothing but not quite-to *menace*- a difference that is almost total but not quite. And in that other scene of colonial power, where history turns to farce and presence to “a part,” can be seen the twin figures of narcissism and paranoia that repeat furiously, uncontrollably. (Bhabha 129- 132)

The underlying message behind this is that there is an ironic compromise by the colonizers - the accomplishment of colonization inherently poses a threat to the colonial discourse. Bhabha interprets this as an expression of resistance, a subversive act made possible by the very tools utilised to subjugate the colonized. He ultimately demonstrates that a paradox lies at the heart of every colonial discourse. This paradox stems from the colonizers’ use of negative stereotypes to portray the *Other* as inferior to control him while simultaneously wishing for the colonized to resemble the colonizer. In Bhabha’s view, stereotypes are not merely utilised to debase the *Other* to an inferior object. He acknowledges that the *Other* is perceived not only as an inferior figure but also as a menacing one, ultimately indicating the fear and weakness of the colonizers. Transferred to the context of *Nervous Conditions*, it becomes evident that Nyasha, one of the

central characters in the novel, embodies the ‘mimic man’ who is “almost the same, but not quite”, which will be thoroughly explored in the analytical section of my thesis.

3.3. Patriarchy and colonialism as inseparable systems

In 2010, Gloria Jean Watkins, more commonly known as bell hooks, wrote that “patriarchy has no gender” calling for reexamination of patriarchy as an issue that affects all individuals, rather than exclusively women. Hooks calls attention to the importance of conceptualizing patriarchy as a set of power relations that adversely impacts people of all genders, and it is precisely from this vantage point that patriarchy should be examined. This chapter provides an overview on patriarchy as a power discourse within the context of colonialism. The notion of patriarchy as a power discourse within colonial contexts is of paramount importance for the reading of *Nervous Conditions* as colonial and patriarchal oppression of female characters overlap i.e., colonialism reinforces indigenous patriarchy making it difficult for women to fight against the colonial system. As point of clarification, I will first introduce the multifaceted definitions and angles through which patriarchy can be regarded. Subsequently, I will explore how these patriarchal power dynamics relate to the institutionalised colonial ideologies, particularly to the detriment of women. Prior to the emergence feminist post-colonial theory, understandings of colonialism often overlooked the correlation of patriarchy with “Eurocentrism, racism and classism inherent in colonialism” (Spencer-Wood 477). As Suzanne M. Spencer-Wood astutely observes, applying feminist theories to colonial institutions should firstly commence with the critique of ungendered and androcentric theories and concepts to explore the power structures central to institutionalised colonial ideologies (Spencer-Wood 477).

The term ‘patriarchy’ is derived from the Greek word πατριάρχης, meaning “the rule of the father”. While the word immediately alludes to power, family relations and social hierarchy, it lacks the subtext of oppressive domination which comes to the fore in the feminist interpretation of the term (Pierik 74). Historically, the term was employed to denote fatherly authority. Other instances of the pre-feminist use of ‘patriarchy’ are explained by Robert Filmer, who juxtaposes political with paternal authority. Filmer contended that “patriarchy and patrimonialism were instituted at the moment of the creation of humankind” (Pierik 76). In this sense, patriarchy is placed in close proximity with the divine and is, thus, deemed as absolute and unquestionable (Filmer qtd. in Pierik 75). Following the emergence of feminist theory, the concept patriarchy

acquired a new dimension, revealing the unequal distribution of power between men and women. However, it should be noted that the concept of patriarchy has a diverse range of meanings and there are different modes of approaching the term. For instance, Gerda Lerner, a leading figure in women's studies, defines patriarchy as a "manifestation of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general" (Lerner qtd. in Pierik 77). Likewise, it seems to be a shared assumption among many scholars that patriarchy reflects male dominance over women (Kate Millet, Sylvia Walby, Heidi Hartmann). For example, Heidi Hartmann defines patriarchy as a "set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women" (Hartmann qtd. in Chogugudza 8). She argues that regardless of the different ranks, classes, races, or ethnic groups occupied by men in society, they all coalesce in shared dominance over women and are "dependent upon each other to maintain that domination" (Hartmann qtd. in Chogugudza 8).

Radical feminist theorists foreground the issue of male dominance over women, while the Marxist feminist theory emphasises the correlation between the subordination of women and the organization of various modes of production. Within the Marxist feminist framework, it is noteworthy to mention that the Marxian concepts of domination and resistance have significantly influenced feminist post-colonial research, particularly regarding the resistance of third world women to economic exploitation (Lorber qtd. in Spencer-Wood 480).

While patriarchy undeniably invokes the oppression and subordination of women, some scholars argue that its fundamental premise is conceptually rooted in "what goes on among men" (Johnson qtd. in Becker 249). For example, Allan G. Johnson, a sociologist specialising in masculinity studies, defines patriarchy as a social structure that is male-centred, male-identified, and male-dominated social structure. He argues that the core motivating force of patriarchy lies in men's distrust and fear of other men (Johnson qtd in. Becker 24). Central to patriarchy is the notion of domination and control because "control and domination of other men ensures one's own safety from them" (Johnson qtd. in Becker 24). According to Johnson:

What drives patriarchy as a system - what fuels competition, aggression, and oppression - is a dynamic relationship between control and fear. Patriarchy encourages men to seek security, status, and other rewards through control; to fear other men's ability to control and harm them; and to identify being in control as both their best defense against loss

and humiliation and the surest route to what they need and desire. In this sense, although we usually think of patriarchy in terms of women and men, it is more about what goes on *among men*. The oppression of women is certainly an important part of patriarchy, but, paradoxically, it may not be the *point* of patriarchy. (Johnson qtd. in Becker 95)

In addition, Johnson notes that patriarchy is inherently unstable and continuously evolves in response to resistance (Johnson qtd. in Becker 26). A particularly striking aspect of patriarchy, according to Richard Epstein, is its resilience; patriarchal social structures have historically manifested in different forms, including “tribal, monarchical, and totalitarian; dictatorial and democratic; nomadic, feudal, capitalist, and socialist; religious and atheistic, among others” (Epstein qtd. in Becker 26). This historical versatility indicates that patriarchy permeates every aspect of society, making it “one of the strongest ideologies in cultures world-wide” (Coetzee 300). This holds true particularly for the colonial systems, which further distorted traditional gender hierarchy, thereby exacerbating the subjugation of women.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, colonialism and patriarchy are intricately linked, necessitating a careful examination of their correlation. In her seminal article *Beyond Determinism: The Phenomenology of African Female Existence*, Bibi Bakare-Yusuf provides insights into patriarchy as it pertains to African women. She notes that several theorists have employed the term ‘patriarchy’ in African contexts to describe the organization of social life and institutional structures where men wield authority over many aspects of women’s lives (Bakare-Yusuf 3). As discussed in the previous chapter, while patriarchy was the dominant system in precolonial African structures, women still occupied prominent positions in the society. This important fact has often been neglected by some scholars unaware of the significant evidence about women’s influence in precolonial times in religious, political, economic, and domestic spheres (Afonja qtd. in Bakare- Yusuf 2). For example, it is noteworthy to mention that some women gained political authority through family status, occupied religious roles, and that some African kingdoms had leaders who were both men and women such as Nzinga of Ndongo and Matamba, Nanny of the Maroons and Nwagboka. The advent of colonialism, spurred by patriarchal constraints, put women in precarious positions. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty argue that the Western notion of “proper women” emphasised women’s self-regulation of their social and sexual behaviour (Alexander and Mohanty qtd. in Chogugudza 11). African feminists have, thus, argued that the cult of domesticity facilitated by colonialism imposed major ideological constraints, hindering the empowerment of women, and constraining them to conform to feminine roles (Alexander and Mohanty qtd. in Chogugudza 11). In a similar vein, Gwendolyn Mikell highlights the impact

of Westernization, noting that whereas traditional African societal structures allowed for the public participation of women prior to colonialism, this drastically changed after 1896 when hegemonic control further deteriorated women's status (Mikell qtd. in Chogugudza 12). Mikell's attributes this fact to the influence of Victorian culture on European colonizers, where male dominance was a norm, ultimately imposing this norm on African society as well (Mikell qtd. in Chogugudza 12). For example, patriarchy embedded in the colonial system restricted wage employment and educational opportunities to men, thereby denying women the rights available to men. This sentiment has also been echoed by Ruth Meena who argues that women bore the brunt of colonization, leading to the oppression of women in various ways. For instance, the introduction of new laws and regulations by colonizers, aimed at safeguarding their colonial interests, reconstructed gender roles according to their own constructs (Meena qtd. in Chogugudza 57). Consequently, Zimbabwean women were subjected to various forms of oppression, as emphasised by Meena:

Customary practices such as gift marriage, ghost marriage, levirate, widow inheritance, forced childhood marriage, polygyny and even bride-wealth began to put women at a disadvantage as black males supported by the settler patriarchal governance further took advantage of these practices. (Meena qtd. in Chogugudza 57)

In a similar fashion, Elizabeth Schmidt observes that colonialism further deteriorated the status of most women, noting that "strategic resources such as land, labor, and cash increasingly became concentrated in male's hands" (Schmidt qtd. in Chogugudza 64). Like numerous other scholars, she highlights various factors that contributed to the subjugation of women, including patterns of land ownership, colonial taxation, male migration, and male wage earning (Schmidt qtd. in Chogugudza 64). It follows, therefore, that the advent of colonialism further worsened women's position during colonial times, with detrimental and far-reaching effects.

To conclude, while it is certainly true that women have suffered greatly under patriarchy in precolonial, colonial and postcolonial contexts, assuming that women are simply victims and men solely perpetrators inadvertently perpetuates the very systems we intend to criticize (Bakare-Yusuf 3). In doing this, we fail to acknowledge the nuanced ways in which individuals challenge their assigned roles and identities in intricate ways and, as a result, we may inadvertently contribute to the reinforcement of oppressive structures and relationships (Bakare-Yusuf 3). For this reason, Bakare-Yusuf invites us to perceive patriarchy as a construct that can be continuously challenged and reconstructed, rather than as "an unchanging system"

(Bakare-Yusuf 3). This has also been noted by Christine Battersby who maintains that patriarchy ought to be seen as a “dissipative system, lacking a central organizing principle or dominant logic” (Battersby qtd. in Bakare-Yusuf 3). According to Bakare-Yusuf, if we approach patriarchy from this perspective, it opens the ways to recognise how “institutional power dynamics restrict and limit women’s ability to act and make choices without completely controlling or defining them” (Bakare-Yusuf 3). Viewing patriarchy as a dynamic and unstable power structure enables us to “develop a narrative of African gendered experiences that doesn't assume fixed positions within inevitable hierarchies but emphasises change and constructive forms of resistance” (Bakare-Yusuf 3). Therefore, despite the long-lasting effects of patriarchy, there are countless opportunities for resistance. This is evident in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s novel, which depicts women not as mere victims of patriarchy but as individuals who actively question the deeply entrenched patriarchal beliefs and find ways to fight against them. Despite the dual burden of patriarchy and colonialism, these women challenge the simplification that they are mere victims, thus resisting oppressive power relations embedded in colonial patriarchy.

4. African Feminism

4.1. African women’s rejection of Western feminism

Feminism is an umbrella term encompassing a wide array of meanings and its definition is contingent on many factors such as race, nationality, and social status, to name just a few. While contemporary Western feminism is commonly categorised into liberal, radical, Marxist, or socialist feminism, there is a general tendency among scholars to treat it as monolithic (Mekgwe 166). This narrow focus has received considerable critical attention due to the common misconception that its values and concerns are universal to all women. This has also been noted by Chandra Talpade Mohant, professor of Women's and Gender Studies, who argues that “feminist theory presents itself as a universal phenomenon in ways that disguise its profoundly Western concerns and biases” (Mohant qtd. in Mekgwe 167). Failure to look beyond Western feminism runs the risk of dismissing intersecting discrimination faced by many women in the rest of the world. For this reason, I will disregard feminism as is seen from a Western perspective and instead focus on the African notion of feminism as it is more pertinent to my thesis. This chapter will introduce African feminism through the perspectives of theorists such as Zoë Wicomb, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, Mary E. Modupe Kolawole and Molara Ogundipe-Leslie. Needless to say, it is beyond the scope of my thesis to provide an insight into

all current debates around African feminism; I will, therefore, include those that encapsulate the main ideas of African feminism.

As a point of clarification on how to define African feminism, it is important to consider that in the 20th century many African women were reluctant to label themselves as ‘feminists’. Instead, ‘feminism’ was replaced with different notions such as *womanism*, *motherism*, *stiwanism*, *femalism*, and *nego-feminism*. This inclination to distance themselves from the term ‘feminism’ due to its strong connotations with the Western feminism is perhaps nowhere as clear as in Buchi Emecheta's words:

I will not be called feminist here, because it is European. It is as simple as that. I just resent that... I don't like being defined by them... It is just that it comes from outside and I don't like people dictating to me. I do believe in the African type of feminism. They call it womanism, because, you see, you Europeans don't worry about water, you don't worry about schooling, you are so well off. Now, I buy land, and I say, ‘Okay, I can't build on it, I have no money, so I give it to some women to start planting.’ That is my brand of feminism. (Emecheta qtd. in Mekgwe 169)

In a similar vein, Flora Nwapa, the renowned Nigerian female novelist, distances herself from employing the term ‘feminist’, emphasising how she is an ordinary woman who is sharing her knowledge to portray women in a more positive light and to “correct [...] menfolks when they started writing” (Nwapa qtd. in Umeh 4). Resistance to feminism among African women was a response to the domineering nature and cultural imperialism of Western feminist movements in Africa during the 1970s and 1980s, characterized by a developmentalist discourse that assessed “African women's progress in relation to the degree of their Westernization” (Lewis, Steady, Pala qtd in. Pucherova 35). The Nigerian gender scholar, Oyèrónkẹ Oyěwùmí observes how African women were depicted as primitive, helpless, voiceless, and in pressing need of “rescuing from African patriarchy and underdevelopment by white women” (Oyěwùmí qtd. in Pucherova 35). Therefore, it is not surprising that African women perceived Western feminists as exhibiting patronizing attitudes with the aim to teach Africans how to become modern liberated women, mirroring the colonial desire to 'enlighten' the colonized. In her seminal work *Feminism and Modernity in Anglophone African Women's Writing* Dobrota Pucherova (35) observes that although many facets of colonial modernity were favourably perceived by African women writers in the 20th century, the emphasis on sexual liberation in second-wave feminism was seen as menacing and inimical to African family values. At best, the focus on sexual liberation was considered irrelevant to African women who were weighed down by multifaceted oppression of “global capitalism, religious fundamentalism, racism, and

patriarchy” (Nfah-Abbenyi qtd. in Pucherova 35). At worst, “it was seen as a new form of Western imperialism, “an imperialism with a woman’s face” (Nfah-Abbenyi qtd. in Pucherova 35). Additionally, African women’s viewpoints on marriage, female sexuality and homosexuality differed greatly from that of Western feminism. For example, in her essay titled *Feminism with a Small ‘f’!* Buchi Emecheta endorses the view that:

Being a woman, and African born I see things through an African woman’s eyes. [...] I did not know that by doing so I was going to be called a feminist. But if I am now a feminist then I am an African feminist with a small f. In my books I write about families because I still believe in families. I write about women who try very hard to hold their family together until it becomes absolutely impossible. (Emecheta qtd. in Pucherova 34)

Emecheta implies that Western feminists dismiss marriage and motherhood as oppressive, focusing instead on sexual enjoyment, a luxury afforded by their unencumbered lives (Pucherova 34). She contrasts this with African feminism which she views as “free of the shackles of Western romantic allusion and [tending] to be much more pragmatic” (Emecheta qtd. in Pucherova 34).

In conclusion, the term ‘feminism’ was highly controversial in 20th century African feminist theories. This was largely due to the fact that African women did not believe Western feminism was reflective of intersecting discrimination to which they were subject to. The differences between African and Western notions of feminism were, thus, considerable and manifested themselves on social, cultural, economic, and political levels. The departure from universal feminism, prioritizing Western values and beliefs, opens the possibility of understanding more nuanced ways women can be oppressed including poverty, racism, classism, religion, or imperialism. By failing to adopt an intersectional approach and viewing Western feminism as monolithic, we run the risk of perpetuating cultural imperialism. Therefore, the importance of understanding feminism not strictly in Western terms cannot be overemphasised, as it manifests itself differently across cultures due to distinct social, political, economic, and cultural contexts.

4.2. African Feminisms – Key terms

This chapter sets out to explore the key terms and definitions of African notions of feminism. I will also briefly discuss how African feminism in the 20th century differed from African feminism in the 21st century since it has undergone major changes. As already noted in the previous chapter, African women writers in the 20th century were reluctant to label themselves as feminists, arriving at different definitions of the term. One such example is *womanism*, a

term originally coined by African American writer and feminist activist Alice Walker in 1983 which was adopted by other African scholars. Walker's notion of *womanism* centres on the Black women's identity and commitment to gender issues. However, by excluding White women she undermines her own claim that womanists aren't separatist (Arndt 37- 38). As noted by Susan Arndt (38), the exclusion of Black men from *womanism* further underscores Walker's separatist nature of *womanism*. The Nigerian academic, literary critic and writer, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi adopted the term *womanism* independently of Walker. Her perspective on feminism shares many similarities with Walker, however, it also diverges considerably in specific regards (Arndt 41). Similarly to Walker, Ogunyemi recognises that African womanism is similar to feminism, but unlike Walker she "explicitly underlines the common denominator" (Arndt 39): African womanism "believes in the freedom and independence of women like feminism" (Ogunyemi qtd. in Arndt 39). In Ogunyemi's view, *womanism* can be viewed as an ideology which:

unlike radical feminism [read: Western feminism], wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stand. It is also interested in communal well-being, thus extending its ideology towards a Marxist praxis. (Ogunyemi qtd. in Pucherova 36)

Ogunyemi argues that a " 'womanist' [...] will recognize that, along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic and political considerations into her philosophy" (Ogunyemi qtd. in Pucherova 36). Central to her concept of *African womanism* is the conviction that gender issues can be dealt only within the broader context of other relevant factors for Africans (Ogunyemi qtd. in Arndt 39-40). These include:

1. Global capitalism and consumption that impoverish the poor; 2. the political economies of race; 3. feminisms and other imperialisms – postcoloniality in cahoots with global sisterhood; 4. Interethnic skirmishes and cleansing; 5. religious fundamentalism – African traditional religions, Islam, and Christianity; 6. elitism, militarism, and feudalism; 7. the language issue; 8. gender constrictions; 9. gerontocracy; 10. in-lawism and other cultural constraints. (Ogunyemi qtd. in Arndt 39-40)

Moreover, Ogunyemi's perspectives on feminism contrasts those of other African writers who see motherhood as a burden. Instead, she perceives motherhood as "the woman's only means to power" (Ogunyemi qtd. in Pucherova 57). Rather than women's liberation from patriarchal oppression, the feminist question for Ogunyemi is how women and men can collaboratively overcome the socioeconomic crisis to "advance together into the twenty-first century" (Ogunyemi qtd. in Pucherova 57). In this context, Ogunyemi critiques Western feminism for

prioritising gender inequality over global economic inequalities and for its gender-separatist nature (Ogunyemi qtd. in Pucherova 57). She argues that Nigerian women cannot economically or socially afford to sever ties with “fathers, uncles, husbands, sons, friends, lovers and male relations” (Ogunyemi qtd. in Pucherova 57). In Ogunyemi’s view, Western feminism is an individualist ideology centred on “corrupt amassing of wealth” and “steeped in racist imagination” (Ogunyemi qtd. in Pucherova 57). African womanism, on the other hand, is an ideology of social justice which is reflective of African’s women priorities and is “inclusive, mother-centered [...], with its focus on caring – familial, communal, national, and international [...]” (Ogunyemi qtd. in Pucherova 57).

Zoë Wicomb, the South African writer, criticises both Walker’s and Ogunyemi’s concept of *womanism*, arguing that they do not adequately address the correlation of race and gender, resulting in an overly liberal assessment (Arndt 45). The impetus behind her views is clear in the following:

If white patriarchal culture is about unequal power relations, how can we fail to infer that empowering black men advocates the mimicking of white patriarchy. In the interest of more civilized gender relations, it is just as well that those of limited intelligence look elsewhere for a model. (Wicomb qtd. in Arndt 45)

Wicomb argues that “patriarchy is always ‘gendered’, as is all resistance against it” (Wicomb qtd. in Arndt 45). Providing an example from the age of Apartheid (the system of institutionalized racial segregation that existed in South Africa), Wicomb argues that alongside the fight against apartheid, black patriarchy should also be challenged (Wicomb qtd. in Arndt 45). In Wicomb’s view, the South African context asks for a theory that incorporates race, gender, and class as interlocking factors (Wicomb qtd. in Arndt 46).

In contrast, Mary E. Modupe Kolawole underestimates the significance of sexual oppression, stating that:

Most Africans, male and female, have more pressing problems that require the concerted efforts of all. So, when these women call for their rights, freedom and opportunity to be treated humanely, [...] gender is very often not the most serious problem. (Modupe Kolawole qtd. in Pucherova 37)

Similarly to Ogunyemi, Kolawole prioritizes neocolonial exploitation over gender oppression (Pucherova 37). However, in doing so, she legitimates tradition by viewing traditional gender

systems as natural and essential for social stability despite her rejection of traditional constraints (Pucherova 37). This perpetuation of traditional gender systems as natural and essential is perhaps nowhere as clear as in her “emphasis on feminine physical attributes, homemaking, and the denial of individualism in favour of a ‘collective consciousness’” (Pucherova 37). These aspects have often been utilised by patriarchal ideology to “pressure women into self-sacrifice and the suppression of their individual needs and ambition” (Pucherova 37), as becomes evident in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*, particularly on the example of Maiguru.

Another viable term alternative to Western feminism is *stiwanism* (Social Transformation Including Women in Africa) and it was coined by Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie. *Stiwanism* puts to the fore the existing economic disparities between African men and women, highlighting the significance of achieving social equality (Mekgwe 170). According to Ogundipe-Leslie, “gender relationships can change only in the context of larger social transformations – “race and class struggles which bedevil the continent of Africa today; that is, in the context of the liberation of the entire continent” (Ogundipe-Leslie qtd. in Pucherova 41). Therefore, Ogundipe-Leslie’s notion of *stiwanism* clearly shows that institutionalised structures result in the marginalisation and subjugation of women across Africa and invites us to see how gender relations are intricately linked to broader social changes. It suggests that gender inequality cannot be addressed in isolation but should instead be recognised and addressed as a part of broader larger movements for social transformations.

To conclude, the term *feminism* was highly controversial in the context of 20th century African feminism due to its strong associations to Western feminism. This explains why many African women adopted different terms to encapsulate what feminism means for them. 21st century African feminism has undergone a major shift and manifested itself in the writing of women – the themes of bodily autonomy, LGBTQ rights and women’s empowerment through sexuality were common themes in African women’s writing (Pucherova 41). In the 21st century African women were described as able to liberate themselves from restrictive heteropatriarchal traditions without risking their lives and modernity was no longer deemed as Western and tradition as African; both were understood to be “complex, self-contradictory, and multi-layered” (Pucherova 41). Furthermore, Pucherova (41) notes that while 20th century African women’s narratives are abounded with tragic endings for women (such as the death or mental breakdown of the female protagonists), this drastically changed in the context of 21st century African female writing. Even though the conflict between a woman’s individualist aspirations

and her culture continues to exist in African women's writing, women are portrayed as "actively changing the society around them; therefore, happy endings become possible" (Pucherova 41), as becomes evident in Tsitsi Dangarembga's groundbreaking novel *Nervous Conditions*. Women are no longer depicted as only seeking marriage or motherhood and even if they do, they refuse to compromise their self-respect for the sake of it (Pucherova 41). They are also portrayed as having their own income and ambitions, unafraid to challenge "traditional discourses about feminine propriety" (Pucherova 41). This is done in numerous ways such as by identifying as feminists, engaging in commitment – free sexual relationships, claiming their right to sexual pleasure and rejecting the traditions of the "bride price, polygamy, multiple motherhood, female genital cutting, heterosexuality, or even cisgender identity" (Pucherova 41). The palpable shift in African women writing is nowhere as clear as in the portrayal of women's bodily freedom. For instance, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie calls attention to bodily freedom as not only protection from violence but also as protection from body shaming (Pucherova 41). Allowing women to have control of their own bodies necessarily means to recognise them as individuals in their own right rather than in relation to others, as mothers, wives, daughters, etc. (Pucherova 44). The female body is recognised as the locus of both women's social oppression and their liberation, "the place where women's human rights are violated and where they can be repossessed again" (Pucherova 44).

5. Distorted representations of women in Zimbabwean literature

Stuart Hall once wrote that power can also be understood in "broader cultural and symbolic terms" and includes "the exercise of symbolic power through representation practices" (Hall 259). The correlation between Hall's arguments and the representation of individuals is the mutual belief that power operates in representation. Transferred to the context of portrayal of women in the African literary canon, it becomes evident that power to represent does not necessarily equate to truthful representation of individuals and their identities. Not only were female African writers excluded from the male-oriented literary scene, but they were often debased to stereotypical and distorted representations that did not align with their lived experiences. This has also been noted by Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi who argues that "one facet of this male tradition that has come increasingly under attack has been the subservient image that the African male writer has given of African women" (Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi 4), as already noted in the introduction of my thesis. The disparity between men and women in the African literary canon is starkly highlighted by the fact that the first novel by an African woman

was published 60 years later than the first African male novel. Both *Efuru*, (a novel written by Flora Nwapa considered the first African novel by a West African writer) and *The Promised Land* by Grace Ogot (the first African novel by an East African writer) highlight a huge gap between women writers and their male counterparts. Thus, the belated inclusion of women in the African literary canon is indicative of societal attitudes towards women. As already noted, prior to inclusion of women in the African literary canon, they were often debased to stereotypical representations that were not in accordance with their lived experience. Perhaps the most persistent trope in African male writing is the trope of “Mother Africa”, a female figure who embodies the colonized land. She is portrayed as passive, incapable of fighting colonization and in pressing need to be rescued from her sons (Stratton 53). The aforementioned trope utilises a woman’s body as both a symbol of colonial oppression and a site of procreation which is reflective of African values and tradition. Moreover, the images of women as prostitutes have been conspicuously present in 20th century male writing; African women were portrayed as embodying disease and death, while collaborating with the colonizer (Stratton 53). As Florence Stratton (53) notes, there is a vast number of authors, utilising the prostitute metaphor in their writing such as Cyprian Ekwensi in *Jagua Nana*, Thomas Akare in *The Slums*, Sembène in *God’s Bits of Wood*, Meja Mwangi in *Going Down River Road*, to name just a few. She adds that these texts portray prostitution as being unrelated to the female social condition in patriarchal societies (Stratton 53). Instead, they serve as a metaphor “for men’s degradation under some non-preferred socio-political system”, a metaphor depicting women as instigators of moral corruption and a source of moral contamination in society (Stratton 53). This portrayal ultimately reveals how the negative images of African women are deeply entrenched in the male literary tradition and should, therefore, be approached with caution as they do not reflect women’s lived experiences.

Rudo Barbara Gaidzanwa’s seminal work *Images of Women in Zimbabwean literature* provides valuable insights into the male representation of women in the Zimbabwean literary canon. While Gaidzanwa’s work has been criticized for its emphasis on quantitative rather than qualitative analysis (Malaba 243), she successfully encapsulates the multifaceted portrayals of women in Zimbabwean literature. Her research focuses on novels written in Shona, Ndebele, and English, demonstrating that male literary representations are abounded by negative images of women. In her book, Gaidzanwa (11) explores literary images of women as mothers, wives, prostitutes, single, divorced, widowed as well as rural and urban women. For example, the chapter titled *Women as mothers* illustrates that the perception of women is contingent on the

roles they play in society. Gaidzanwa points out that “there is a marked difference in the way mothers are perceived by their sons as opposed to their daughter” (Gaidzanwa 14). While the relationship between mothers and sons is filled with tension and incompatibility, that of mothers and daughters is less fraught with tensions (Gaidzanwa 25). Regarding the portrayal of women in their roles as wives, they are expected to “behave in comforting, non-aggressive and nurturant ways”, catering to the needs of their husbands and children (Gaidzanwa 25). Ideal wives demonstrate unquestioning obedience to their husbands even if they are wrong or unreasonable, are not vocal if subjected to mistreatment, and patiently wait for their husbands to acknowledge their virtues (Gaidzanwa 31). This portrayal of women is illustrated on the example of Maiguru and Mainini, female characters in *Nervous Conditions* who represent the burden of femininity. Furthermore, Gaidzanwa observes how women are expected to stay faithful to their husbands, facing stricter punishments for adultery than their male counterparts, suggesting the gendered double standards inherent to patriarchy (Gaidzanwa 25). Women’s duties include childbirth, fidelity, subordination to their husbands as well as deferring to the father’s mother, father, or other relations (Gaidzanwa 25). Women who are “childless, domineering, or assertive, unfaithful and insubordinate are despised and socially disapproved” (Gaidzanwa 25).

Another prevalent stereotype found in Gaidzanwa’s analysis is that rural women, contrary to urban women, make the ideal wives and mothers. According to Gaidzanwa:

Rural women are held in higher esteem than urban women. This is because rural women are more innocent and naïve [...]. Part of rural women’s innocence is their inability to rebel against or repay their men for actual insult or injury suffered. This martyr role of rural women as injured but innocent makes them ideal wives and mothers. The fact that the husbands of these women eventually come back to the wives, tired of sin and repentant, is supposed to illustrate to the wives the virtues of perseverance and subordination to one’s husband.

On the other hand, women in towns or other semi-urban environments suffer grievously [sic] when they do not behave like decent wives and mothers. They die violently, get maimed or diseased and generally live tormented lives if they survive. These images discourage women from questioning the stereotypes and expectations placed on them. (Gaidzanwa 12)

What Gaidzanwa’s observation ultimately reveals is that women’s conformity to societal expectations, or lack thereof, has a considerable impact on how they are perceived in society. Failure to behave in ways that are “appropriate” for women often leads to stigmatization, marginalisation and even violence, which will be thoroughly explored in the analytical section of my thesis.

As already noted, the portrayal of Zimbabwean women as prostitutes has also been clearly present in African male writing. Gaidzanwa explains that once women decide to enter or are coerced into sexual intercourse with men they are not married to, they become prostitutes (Gaidzanwa 12), arguing that “there is no distinction made between lovers, mistresses, concubines and prostitutes” (Gaidzanwa 12). If a woman has sex with men outside of marriage, she is automatically viewed as a prostitute, whether implicitly or explicitly (Gaidzanwa 12). This androcentric view on women is exemplified in *Nervous Conditions* on the example of Lucia, a female character whose sexuality and nonconformity to the rigid gender roles makes her a social aberration in the eyes of men. The strong focus on women’s appearance is also found in Gaidzanwa’s analysis; women’s beauty is sometimes attributed to the failure of their marriages, serving as a symbol of moral decadence and corruption (Gaidzanwa 12). Men are often pardoned for infidelity and their involvement with beautiful women goes largely unchallenged because these women are “bewitching and irresistible”. While women are enjoined to be attractive to captivate men, they are simultaneously criticised and condemned if they utilise their beauty to their advantage (Gaidzanwa 12). In short, Gaidzanwa extensive analysis provides an insight into various images of women that dominate the male literary tradition and are reflective of societal attitudes towards women. Those images are indicative of expected roles of women in Zimbabwe and do not align with their lived experiences but rather show that literature can be ideological and perpetuate a particular view of reality. By giving voices to women’s experiences, Dangarembga’s path-breaking novel *Nervous Conditions* challenges the androcentric literary representation of women, allowing for a more truthful analysis of women’s experiences.

6. Recreating gender images in Zimbabwean literature

As already noted in the introduction, during the African anti-colonial emancipation struggles, African women’s rights were largely overlooked, and the notion of gender was considered secondary in the context of European colonial domination. As a result, African women writers were excluded from the male-oriented literary scene (Makuchi Nfah – Abbenyi 2). What is more, women were often reduced to stereotypical and distorted representations that did not align with their lived experiences. The 1960’s, when African women gained acknowledgement for their written work, brought a change in the representation of women in the African literary canon. Women writers responded to their oversimplified representation by questioning the meanings of the colonial identity, tradition, nationhood, and motherhood, to name just a few.

Additionally, African women writers redefined gender roles and acknowledged women's sexuality, thereby challenging the long-prevailing male dominated views on women. Their writing significantly differed from that of their male counterparts. Whereas colonialism was at the heart of male anti-colonial and postcolonial writing, for African female writers, colonialism was on the margins. Instead, they were writing *back* (emphasis added) not only to colonial depictions of Africa but also to representations of women. This chapter will, therefore, explore how women's inclusion in the African literary canon brought changes as regards the portrayal of women, allowing them to bring their own voice into their writing. I will explore these deconstructed images on the example of Yvonne's Vera works with a specific focus on the notion of the female body, serving as a powerful signifier. Additionally, by discussing Petina Gappah's works, I will also demonstrate how the inclusion of women in Zimbabwean literary canon shifted the focus of women as victims to active agents of change.

Alongside Tsitsi Dangaremba, Yvonne Vera is one of the most prominent Zimbabwean female writers, renowned for her important insights into the literary representation of female identity in the context of African women's literature. Vera's works illuminate previously unspoken themes and reconstruct male-dominated gender images by presenting complex female characters who defy rigid gender binaries. In *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning*, Vera elucidates that the female body carries significance beyond its materiality (Pucherova 187). Dobrota Pucherova notes how understanding female corporeality as *more than material* challenges both Western mind-body dualism and Zimbabwean traditional and nationalist discourses that deny the female body its spirituality (Pucherova 187). Pucherova ultimately suggests that although Vera's characters are subject to victimization (for female bodies bring the suffering of rape, incest, or unwanted pregnancies), their bodies nevertheless serve as a means for asserting subjectivity through their symbolic significance (Pucherova 187). The body's ability to signify is crucial for Vera's heroines who often face limitations in verbally expressing their pain or desire due to their youth, lack of education, trauma, or physical speech impediments (Pucherova 187). Consequently, "[their bodies] serve as a means of communication in a realm where traditional symbolic language, controlled by men, is inaccessible to them" (Pucherova 187). The desire for individual freedom finds expression through their bodies, "often imbued with suggestive sexual undertones, as a quest for sensual gratification" (Pucherova 187). Vera's characters also struggle to free themselves from the core elements of traditional African identities such as "kinship obligation, feminine subordination, ancestral bonds, and loyalty to land" (Pucherova 186). Through their deflected female

viewpoints, they dismantle the traditional binary oppositions such as male/female, nature/culture, tradition/ modernity or individualism/intersubjectivity as becomes evident in Dangarembga's groundbreaking novel *Nervous Conditions* (Pucherova 186).

The inclusion of women in the Zimbabwean literary canon also shifted the focus from women as victims to active agents of change. This becomes particularly evident in Petina Gappah's works, another Zimbabwean writer who, similarly to Tsitsi Dangarembga, deconstructs the notion of women as mere victims. Gappah focuses on the issues faced by Zimbabwean women in their small communities, exploring the ways they stand up for themselves, "[making] their voices heard, and their testimonies taken into consideration" (Caraivan 65). By portraying women as "law students, feuding relatives, mistresses, commuters who are harassed on buses, wannabe feminists who oppress other women, and witnesses who voice the reality of domestic violence" (Caraivan 65), Gappah's multifaceted portrayal of women starkly contrasts the stereotypical representation discussed in the previous chapter. Her writing addresses the issues pertinent to African feminism, such as "victims versus perpetrators, women's voices and silences, identity and language and representations of women inside and outside their cultural and familial context" (Caraivan 67), thereby depicting nuanced ways of women's identities. By shifting her characters away from their domestic roles, Gappah places them in contexts where voicing their opinions and challenging conventional perceptions of women becomes possible (Caraivan 66). Furthermore, Gappah also emphasises education as the cornerstone for the construction of womanhood in Zimbabwe which bears a striking resemblance to Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. In her novel Dangarembga uses education as a central theme affecting the identity of the female characters, although education occupies a paradoxical role as will become evident in the reading of the novel.

To conclude, the inclusion of women in the African literary canon has considerably changed the ways women are portrayed, allowing for more nuanced analyses of women's experiences. By writing *against* patriarchal dominance and historical narratives that overlook their experiences, Zimbabwean female writers challenge the androcentric views of women and break the silence imposed by patriarchal systems.

7. Double oppression and resistance in *Nervous Conditions*

7.1. Lucia as an example of subversion of gender stereotypes

Lucia embodies resistance against patriarchy and the deconstruction of women's portrayal solely as victims. Through her demonstration of female solidarity, assertion of sexual freedom, and pragmatism, Lucia elucidates how her female body becomes a crucial locus for women's freedom, a central theme in 21st century African female literature. Lucia remains completely unaffected by external judgments regarding her sexual conduct (Thiago 176), acknowledging and asserting women's sexual needs: "A woman has to live with something [...] Even if it is only a cockroach. And cockroaches are better. They are easy to chase away, isn't it?" (Dangarembga qtd. in Thiago 176). As Elisa S. Thiago (176) notes, her behaviour defies conventional ideas of 'decency' and challenges the archetype of 'being a good girl', synonymous with obedience and silence. Unlike Nyasha, who is closely monitored by her father, Lucia enjoys a greater degree of freedom to act as she wishes, being farther away from Babamukuru's sway (Thiago 176). Consequently, Lucia represents a more robust proponent of resistance, not only against patriarchal dominance but also colonial oppression, albeit articulating her dissatisfaction in a less sophisticated fashion than other characters in the novel (Thiago 176). Instances illustrating Lucia's resistance against patriarchy in *Nervous Conditions* abound, spanning from openly voicing her opinions in the face of male disapproval to her solidarity with fellow female characters in the novel. Despite her lower social class and lack of formal education, Lucia actively seeks to alter her circumstances rather than passively accepting them, thus refuting the notion of women as passive victims of patriarchal oppression. For instance, with Babamukuru's help, she secures employment at the mission school and initiates her education. Her pragmatism becomes evident in her adept manipulation of Babamukuru, praising his power and benevolence to achieve her goals. This notion resonates with Gaidzwana's (99) argument discussed in the theoretical part of my thesis, that women sometimes manipulate societal norms to maximise their advantages. While deeply aware of the constraints imposed by patriarchal structures, Lucia adeptly navigates these limitations to her advantage, demonstrating that women are active agents of change rather than powerless victims. Perhaps the most poignant demonstration of Lucia's power occurs when the family patriarchs gather to discuss her fate, albeit in her absence. Lucia intervenes decisively, disallowing others to speak on her behalf:

It was no use telling Lucia not to go into the house, so we did not even try. We just watched her as she strode in there, her right eye glittering as it caught the yellow paraffin flame, glittering dangerously at Takesure, who wisely shrank back into his corner of the sofa. ‘Fool!’ snorted Lucia, looming over him, arms akimbo. ‘Fool!’ And she whirled to face Babamukuru, so that now her left eye glittered. ‘Look at him, Babamukuru! Look at him trying to hide because now I am here.’ Takesure looked braver when he had Lucia’s back to contend with, but his reprieve was brief. ‘If you have an issue with me,’ Lucia advised him, ‘stand up and let us sort it out plainly.’ In two strides she was beside him and, securing an ear between each finger and thumb, she dragged him to his feet. (Dangarembga 212-213)

The passage vividly depicts Lucia’s dissatisfaction with the pervasive mechanisms of male dominance aimed at condemning her. More importantly, it highlights her steadfast refusal to allow others to speak on her behalf. By openly articulating her dissent, she demonstrates resistance against oppression (Thiago 177). Additionally, Thiago (178) notes that Lucia’s courage to voice her protest so openly stems from her position as a subaltern; the inherent material dispossession characteristic of the subaltern class fosters a tendency to fight using any means necessary. Within this context, Lucia utilises rhetoric as an effective tool in her fight against oppression, thereby challenging the notion that her material dependence necessitates spiritual submission to the prevailing oppressive forces around her (Thiago 178).

However, Lucia’s assertive voice and refusal to passively accept the accusations diverge markedly from patriarchal ideas regarding women’s place in society, prompting Takesure to brand her as “vicious [...], unnatural [and] uncontrollable” (Dangarembga 215). This characterisation of Lucia as unnatural and vicious is rooted in deeply ingrained views of women as obedient, voiceless, and passive – qualities that stand in stark contrast to Lucia’s persona. From a patriarchal standpoint, her nonconformity to gender roles, unabashed sexuality and physical beauty render her alluring and bewitching in the eyes of men. This assertion aligns with Gaidzwana’s (12) argument that beautiful women are often perceived as bewitching and irresistible. Described as a “wild woman in spite of – or maybe because of her – beauty” (Dangarembga 186) she is thought to have been bewitched or more likely even a witch herself because “she sleeps with anybody and everybody, but [...] hasn’t borne a single child yet” (Dangarembga 187). As Etta Julius Ndifon notes, “her sexual freedom violates the cultural norms of chastity and restraint” (Ndifon 92). Furthermore, her assertiveness is constructed as a masculine trait, as illustrated by Babamukuru’s remark that “she is like a man herself” (Dangarembga 252), following Lucia’s bold expression of her opinions, asserting that she was able to frankly tell him what’s on her mind because she is unmarried and, therefore, exempt

from male authority. Lucia appears to transcend patriarchal constraints and is perceived as “loosely bound by patriarchal inhibitions” (Tugume 8) due to her unmarried status, which liberates her from male control.

Furthermore, Lucia fosters female solidarity, emphasising its significance in the quest for female subjectivity and agency, as noted by Thiago (182). This dynamic is best exemplified in the passage where all women gather in the homestead kitchen to discuss whether the family patriarchs have the right to discuss Lucia’s case in her absence (Thiago 182). The coherence of female solidarity is threatened when Maiguru declines to engage in “matters of the flesh or the earth,” despite her awareness that such a decision may be viewed as a distancing from fellow women (Thiago 182). Nevertheless, Lucia persists in soliciting Maiguru’s perspective: “Maiguru, what are your thoughts? Isn’t it that they aim to tarnish my reputation? What course of action do you suggest, Maiguru? *We* (emphasis added) rely on you to devise a plan” (Dangarembga 204). Lucia’s deliberate use of the inclusive pronoun ‘we’ clearly underscores her belief in solidarity as a “form of female resistance to authority” (Thiago 182). Further evidence of Lucia’s commitment to female solidarity emerges in her unwavering support for her sister. When Mainini falls ill, Lucia remains by her side for several days, providing both physical care and emotional support, ultimately contributing to Mainini’s recuperation from severe depression. Additionally, Lucia’s solidarity is evident in her defence of her niece Tambudzai (hereafter referred as Tambu), even when such advocacy necessitates confrontation with Babamukuru, who other characters hold in high reverence and are reluctant to express their opinion to. Despite being aware of potential repercussions, including the risk of jeopardising her employment, Lucia questions Babamukuru’s harsh disciplinary measures against Tambu:

‘Did you ask her what was on her mind?’, she demanded. ‘Did you ask my sister whether she wished her daughter was present? Even the wedding. Did you ask my sister if she wanted that wedding? I do not see that the child did you so much wrong by preferring not to be there.’ (Dangarembga 171)

Lucia contests Babamukuru’s disregard for children, girls in particular, instating that because they have their own thoughts, they deserve respect (Tugume 11). Furthermore, Lucia “asserts her rights without fear of anyone, even the most revered Babamukuru” (Moyana qtd. in Tugume 11), boldly reprimanding men despite their ‘elevated’ status within patriarchal Rhodesian society. Additionally, Lucia also engages in a form of rebellion through her bodily autonomy, giving birth as a single mother towards the end of the novel. Another noteworthy aspect of

Lucia's character is her employment of humour which, in Thiago's view becomes an intrinsic element of her resistance (176). Her humour serves as a replacement for the various forms of hysteria adopted by other protagonists during different stages of their development (Thiago 176). With this in mind, Lucia's humour emerges as a powerful tool rather than a mere display of superficiality (Thiago 177). Tambu echoes this sentiment, remarking "Those men! They never realiz[e] that Lucia [is] a serious person. Her laughter, like her temper, [is] hearty and quick, but never superficial" (Dangarembga qtd. in Thiago 177). Indeed, Lucia's humour is complemented by her frankness in interactions with others, irrespective of their position of authority (Thiago 177).

In conclusion, by portraying Lucia as a symbol of female resistance, Tsitsi Dangarembga foregrounds that women, despite the pervasive and detrimental effects of patriarchy, are not passive victims but rather active agents of transformation. Lucia's defiance, assertiveness, independence, and nonconformity to the rigid gender roles deconstruct traditional stereotypes of women prevalent in African male literary tradition. By illustrating Lucia's female solidarity, assertiveness, and capacity to articulate her own opinions in defiance of male disapproval, Dangarembga delineates multiple dimensions of women's identity and their struggle for autonomy against intertwined forces of patriarchy and colonialism. As Thiago (184) notes, Lucia's authenticity and agency are intricately linked to her attainment of voice and agency while preserving her African identity. Through her challenge of oppressive power dynamics within colonial patriarchy, Lucia disrupts the notion of women as mere passive victims. Consequently, her resilience against the dual oppression of colonisation and patriarchy makes it apparent that patriarchy should be seen as a construct that can be continuously challenged and reconstructed, rather than as "an unchanging and uniform system" (Bakare-Yusuf 3), as already noted in the theoretical section of my thesis. Approaching patriarchy as a dynamic and unstable power structure enables us to "develop a narrative of African gendered experiences that doesn't assume fixed positions within inevitable hierarchies but emphasises change and constructive forms of resistance" (Bakare-Yusuf 3), as exemplified through the character of Lucia.

7.2. Mainini and Maiguru as epistomes of the burden of femininity

In the opening of *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu recalls that her story is fundamentally not "about death, but about [her] escape and Lucia's; about [her] mother's and Maiguru's *entrapment*

(emphasis added); and about Nyasha's rebellion" (Dangarembga 1). Tambu's opening line immediately foregrounds that *Nervous Conditions* is a story about women, highlighting their lived experiences under the dual constraints of colonialism and patriarchy. As already noted, Dangarembga reveals the intricate ways in which women struggle against the compounded oppression of sexism and colonial subjugation. The manifestation of patriarchy's oppression is notably apparent in the representation of Mainini, Tambu's mother, who embodies the burdens of femininity. Trapped in an unhappy marriage exacerbated by her abject poverty, she perceives "the business of womanhood" as unchangeable, illustrating the intersecting discrimination faced by women. Mainini poignantly articulates this predicament in her own words:

This business of womanhood is a heavy burden' she said 'how could it not be? Aren't we the ones who bear children? When it is like that you can't just decide today I want to do this, tomorrow I want to do that, the next day I want to be educated! When there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one who has to make them. And these things are not easy; you have to start learning them, from a very early age. The earlier the better so that it is easy later on. Easy! As if it is ever easy. And these days it is worse, with the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other. Aiwa! What will help you, my child, is to learn to carry your burdens with strength. (Dangarembga 32)

Despite her profound awareness of the double burdens of patriarchy and colonialism, Mainini represents a woman who complies with her role within patriarchal society, exhibiting no inclination to challenge the status quo. In contrast to Nyasha and Lucia, who exhibit greater defiance in their resistance efforts, Mainini struggles more profoundly to free herself from "double oppression". Instead, she resigns herself to her dire circumstances, as illustrated by her assertion that "what [she has] endured for nineteen years [she] can endure for another nineteen, and nineteen more if need be" (Dangarembga 226). While Mainini understands "the root of her sufferings in imperialism" (Thiago 175) and patriarchy, she makes no effort to gain agency, in stark contrast to her sister, Lucia. Her view of the assigned role of women as unchangeable is further evident when her daughter expresses aspirations to cultivate her maize to earn money and go back to school. Although Mainini outwardly supports Tambu, her underlying conviction is that Tambu will not succeed, telling her husband that: "She is asking for seed. That we can give her. Let her try. Let her see for herself that some things cannot be done" (Dangarembga 34). Mainini's statement underscores her perspective that the burdens of womanhood are unchanging and fixed, rather than subject to continuous challenge and transformation.

Furthermore, Mainini demonstrates not only a profound awareness of the detrimental impacts of patriarchy but also of colonialism, particularly concerning the potential cultural assimilation of her daughter into Englishness. After the death of her son, she vehemently opposes sending her daughter to the mission school, harbouring deep fears about the possible erosion of her Shona heritage. This fear comes to the fore when she laments how “Maiguru has turned [Tambu] against [her] with her money and her white ways” (Dangarembga 208), depicting her acute understanding of colonialism’s impact on indigenous culture. This sentiment is poignantly expressed in Mainini’s words:

‘It’s the Englishness’, she said. ‘It’ll kill them all if they aren’t careful’ and she snorted. ‘Look at them. That boy Chido can hardly speak a word of his own mother’s tongue and, you’ll see, his children will be worse. Running around with that white one, isn’t he the missionary’s daughter? His children will disgrace us. You’ll see. And himself, to look at him he may look alright, but there’s no telling what price he’s paying’. She wouldn’t say much about Nyasha. ‘About that one we don’t even speak. It’s speaking for itself. Both of them, it’s the Englishness. It’s a wonder it hasn’t affected the parents too.’ (Dangarembga 296)

Although Mainini is commonly regarded as an epitome of the burdens imposed by femininity, she “sees things more clearly than do other characters of the text, [demonstrating] an extraordinary self-consciousness throughout the novel” (Zwicker qtd. in Bubenechik 40). Profoundly aware of the underpinnings of patriarchy and colonialism, she is reluctant to accept Western education, a stance sharply contrasting with other characters who perceive it as a path to liberation. Apprehensive that Western education leads to cultural erasure, she is unafraid to openly criticise Babamukuru, whom other characters hold in high esteem. Unlike her husband, who never questions Babamukuru’s decisions, Mainini criticises both Babamukuru and his wife, noting that although she is poor and ignorant “she [has] a mouth and it will keep on talking, it won’t keep quiet” (Dangarembga 208). When she learns of her son’s death, Mainini’s grief and emotional turmoil lead her to condemn Babamukuru and Maiguru, holding them accountable for his demise:

You are a pretender, you! First you took his tongue so that he could not speak to me and now you have taken everything, taken everything for good. Why are you keeping quiet! Why are you not speaking? Because it’s true. You bewitched him and now he is dead. Pthu! [...] And you too, Babamukuru! Pthu! I spit at you! You and your education have killed my son. (Dangarembga 85)

By openly criticizing Babamukuru and Maiguru, Mainini demonstrates her rejection of colonial education, viewing it as detrimental to African identity.

Similarly to other characters in the novel, she experiences the double bind of colonialism and patriarchy, which contribute to her nervous condition. However, her mental illness is not a sudden response to the fear of losing her daughter to British culture, but rather an “aggravation of her prior fears” (Bubenechik 40). As Milena Bubenechik (40) observes in her seminal book *The Trauma of Colonial Condition: in Nervous Conditions and Kiss of the Fur Queen*, Mainini’s depression “is likely to be attributed to the anxiety disorder of PTSD” (Bubenechik 40) stemming from multiple traumatic experiences: initially losing her son to ‘Englishness’ and subsequently facing the “immediate threat of losing her daughter the same way” (Bubenechik 40). Mainini's mental illness may be connected to what Frantz Fanon terms colonial violence, a concept discussed in the theoretical section of this thesis. Indeed, her physical symptoms such as “unlocalised aches all over her body” and her inability to eat food or walk to the fields, let alone work in them, reflect the impact of colonial violence that “touched both the senses, the psychic, and the affective domains [and] was the purveyor of mental disorders, which were difficult to treat and cure” (Mbembe qtd. in Ndayisenga 467). These themes will be further explored in the chapter on colonial violence in *Nervous Conditions*.

In essence, Mainini represents female entrapment, embodying a character seemingly oblivious to potential avenues for enhancing agency in her life, and passively resigned to her situation. Nonetheless, she demonstrates a subtle defiance, reflected in her deep awareness of patriarchal and colonial constraints affecting her and her family. Despite her inability to overcome these adversities, her awareness of the mechanisms of male and colonial oppression, and her *courage* to voice disapproval, should not be underestimated.

Similarly to Mainini, Maiguru is also an embodiment of the trapped woman, despite her comparatively better socio-economic situation. At the beginning of the novel, Tambu perceives her as liberated compared to her mother, noting that “[she] decided it was better to be like Maiguru, who was not poor and had not been crushed by the weight of womanhood” (Dangarembga 33). Tambu’s core belief of Maiguru as a free woman is quickly shattered when she moves into her aunt and uncle’s house, where she quickly learns that Maiguru, though seemingly ‘emancipated’, bears multiple burdens. These burdens include prioritising her wifely duties over personal aspirations. Describing Maiguru as “[her] sweet little aunt, who liked to

please” (Dangarembga 112) and “gentle, conscientious and caring” (Dangarembga 120), Dangarembga suggests that in patriarchal societies women often sacrifice their own needs for the sake of others, often to their detriment. Trapped in a household dominated by Babamukuru’s patriarchal authority, Maiguru “[remains] static in the miasmal mist and fog of male dominion, complacently devoid of the will and energy to extricate [herself] from the bondage” (Tugume 11). She is a docile woman, shows devout obedience to her husband and talks to him in a sweet, baby voice, calling him her “Daddy-dear” (Dangarembga 123), thereby suppressing her own voice (Tugume 11). Furthermore, her oppression is often characterized by her silence (Bubenechik 15). Refraining from voicing her opinions, Maiguru reluctantly complies with the customary silence expected of women unless directly addressed (Bubenechik 15). This silence is starkly illustrated in the passage when Tambu moves into Babamukuru’s and Maiguru’s home, and Babamukuru delivers a speech without including his wife:

‘I do not often leave my office in the afternoon’, he concluded, turning to Maiguru, who had been silent for some time, sitting with her arms folded and staring detachedly into invisible distances. ‘Isn’t that so, Mai?’ (Dangarembga 132)

Similar to Mainini, Maiguru “[...] gives numerous hints of the repressed rage [she harbours] over [her] assigned roles through [her] attempt to hide these feelings” (Scahatteman qtd. in Bubenechik 15). Perhaps the best passage that illustrates this repressed rage is when Tambu discovers her aunt’s attainment of a master’s degree. During a conversation with her niece, Maiguru reflects on her educational journey:

‘I thought you went to look after Babamukuru’. I said. ‘That’s all people ever say.’ Maiguru snorted. ‘And what do you expect? Why should a woman go all that way and put up with all those problems if not to look after her husband?’ Maiguru was more serious than she had ever been before. Her seriousness changed her *from a sweet, soft dove to something like a wasp* (emphasis added). ‘That’s what they like to think I did.’ [...] She bent over her books to hide them, and to prove that she was not unhappy at all she made a chuckling sound, I think she thought gaily, but sounding pained. ‘Whatever they thought’, she said, ‘much good did it do them!’ I still studied for that degree and got it in spite of all of them’ [...] ‘Can you tell me now that they aren’t pleased that I did, even if they don’t admit it? No! Your uncle wouldn’t be able to do half the things he does if I didn’t work as well!’ (Dangarembga 152-153)

The dialogue between Maiguru and her niece reveals Maiguru’s internal conflicts, highlighting how her accomplishments often go unnoticed in a patriarchal society where a woman’s main role is to serve her husband. More importantly, Maiguru’s words reflect the struggles even

educated women face in such a societal framework. Despite her academic achievements, Maiguru remains ‘trapped’ in her role of an obedient and docile wife, lacking control over her own earnings, “thus reinforcing her marginalized status [...]” (Zulfiqar 119). Nostalgically, she laments her situation, musing on the “things that [she] could have done [...] if things were different,” demonstrating the broader struggles of educated women in colonial Rhodesia. Maiguru’s bitterness reflects her “difficulty accepting her gendered role [...], sensing many of its contradictions and injustices” (Bhana 128). She believes that her experience in England provided her with an ability to see the contradictions of her situation, giving her a “vantage point from which to analyse and critique patriarchy” (Bhana 128): “What it is ... to have to choose between self and security. When I was in England I glimpsed for a little while the things *I could have been* (emphasis added), the things I could have done if-if-if things were-different” (Dangarembga qtd. in Bhana 128). Deepika Bahri (6) notes that Maiguru’s contributions remain unacknowledged, even though she is the most educated woman in the novel, as qualified as her husband and, therefore, equally important in sustaining the mission lifestyle that Nhamo and Tambu find so captivating (Bahri 6). Her contributions are rather used to sustain a societal order that rewards her husband with the benefits and prestige of her work, “stealing” her labour to enhance his position (Bahri 6). Towards the novel’s conclusion, Maiguru’s struggles intensify, and her patience finally reaches a breaking point. No longer able to remain silent, she finally finds the courage to voice her own opinions, marking a significant turning point in her character. Her newfound defiance is illustrated when she vehemently addresses her husband:

‘No, Ma’chido’, soothed my uncle. ‘It’s not as you say’ ‘It is as I say’, she insisted. And when I keep quiet you think I am enjoying it. So today I am telling you I am not happy. I am not happy any more in this house.’ (Dangarembga 255)

Ultimately, Maiguru leaves home, earning admiration from her daughter who observes how her mother’s decision demonstrates the possibility of breaking out (Dangarembga 255). However, after several days, her husband “brings home a slightly changed Maiguru” (Bhana 129). Even though the new Maiguru “smiled more often and less mechanically, [...] and “was more willing or able to talk about sensible things” (Dangarembga 257), thereby countering her self-suppression by voicing her opinion more often, “her nervous condition, though alleviated, remains fundamentally unaltered” (Bhana 129).

In conclusion, the portrayal of Mainini and Maiguru illustrates the formidable challenges faced by women who navigate the dual burdens of colonialism and patriarchy. By foregrounding the experiences of women, whose voices have historically often been marginalized by male-

dominated literary traditions, Dangarembga underscores the necessity of integrating diverse female perspectives into literature. Such an inclusive approach provides a more nuanced analysis of women's experiences within the context of colonial patriarchy. "Dangarembga's egalitarian treatment of all the female characters in *Nervous Conditions* can [thus] be seen as part of her endeavor to account for the multitude of voices that make up the postcolonial female subjecthood, irrespective of class" (Thiago 168).

7.3. Education in *Nervous Conditions*: Colonial control or a way to women's emancipation?

Education as a central theme in *Nervous Conditions* occupies a paradoxical role: it serves as a means to women's liberation while also reflecting colonial power dynamics, thus reinforcing imperialistic ideologies. Moreover, through unequal access to education that privileges boys, Tsitsi Dangarembga vividly portrays the gender disparities inherent in patriarchal Rhodesia. These gender disparities find exemplary embodiment in the main protagonist, Tambu. From the very beginning of the novel, Dangarembga addresses the pronounced gender inequality by juxtaposing Tambu against her brother, Nhamo, whose gender affords him specific privileges. As Hershini Bhana notes, "males need to be educated first, primarily due to the southern-African colonial state's desire to create a tier of African patriarchal elites who would make up the backbone of the imperial system of indirect rule" (Bhana 127). For this reason, Tambu's brother is sent to school while she is instructed to remain at home (Bhana 127).

Moreover, by telling his sister that he goes to school while she goes nowhere because "she is a girl" (Dangarembga 40), Nhamo "[approves] the sexist mindset that boys shall have first access to education, thus [appropriating] sexism into his repertoire of values" (Bubenechik 10). He expects his sisters to carry his school things for him, requires obedience and respect from them and acts superior, exemplifying the entrenched sexism inherent in Nhamo's thinking. However, these male-centred values were instilled in Nhamo from an early age as acceptable, and Tambu observes that "in reality [...] [he] was doing no more than behave, perhaps extremely, in the expected manner" (Dangarembga 27), demonstrating her deep awareness of how both men and women fall victim to societal expectations. In this sense, Dangarembga calls attention to patriarchy as an issue affecting all individuals, rather than exclusively women, echoing bell hooks' words that "patriarchy has no gender".

Similarly to Nhamo, Tambu's father also dismisses her aspirations for education, asking her if she can "cook books and feed them to [her] husband" (Dangarembga 32) and advising her to stay home with her mother and learn how to cook and clean instead. His words reflect deeply ingrained views on women's role in society, implying that education is useless for Tambu's future life. This ultimately suggests how women's aspirations are often overlooked and clash with societal expectations imposed on them. Although Tambu wants to be given the same opportunity as her brother, her father's lack of support and his inherent belief in women's domestic roles highlight how traditional gender roles limit women's opportunities, confining them to domestic spheres. This view resonates with Carole Boyce Davies' observation that gender role differences prevalent in many African societies "supported the notion that western education was a barrier to a woman's role as wife and mother and an impediment to her success in these traditional modes of acquiring status" (Davies qtd. in Stratton 7). Within this context, most girls were excluded from formal education, and it was precisely colonial administrations that willingly supported this exclusion because "they imported a view of the world in which women were of secondary importance" (Davies qtd. in Stratton 7).

This is further evident at the end of the novel when Tambu is admitted to the Christian convent and her uncle opposes her going, explaining how "enough chances had come [her] way" (Dangarembga 263) and that money could be better used i.e., for the only boy in her family who must be provided for (Dangarembga 264). Telling Tambu that she will eventually "be married by a decent man and set up a decent home" (Dangarembga 264) echoes Adichie's argument that the problematic aspect of gender roles is their prescription of "how we should be" (Adichie qtd. in Pucherova 61). Adichie highlights how girls are "raised to prioritize marriage, limit their ambitions, and cater to the fragile egos of males" (Adichie qtd. in Pucherova 61). Even if they are educated, they often face prejudices, as exemplified in Maiguru's observation:

It wasn't a question of associating with this race or that race [...] People were prejudiced against educated women. Prejudiced. That's why they said we weren't decent [...] I'm disappointed that people still say the same things [...] I don't know what people mean by a loose woman – sometimes she is an educated woman, sometimes she is a successful man's daughter or she is simply beautiful. (Dangarembga 265)

Maiguru's observation brings to the fore the broader issues educated women face - they still encounter prejudices because their education transgresses the stereotypical gender views

imposed by patriarchal power discourses. Aware of these patriarchal constraints and the likelihood of remaining trapped in a wifely role like her mother, Tambu views her brother's death as an opportunity for her own freedom, noting that "[she] was not sorry when [her] brother died" (Dangarembga 3). Fearing that she might share her mother's fate, Tambu embraces the opportunity to go to school, seeing it as the long-awaited road to freedom. Although Tambu's mother warns against the "Englishness" that killed her son, alluding to the devastating effects of colonialism, Tambu sees education as a necessary step to save herself. This echoes Fanon's sentiment that the goal of education in the process of colonisation included "distorting, disfiguring, and destroying the past of the colonized people [...] while persuading the indigenous population it would save them from darkness" (Fanon qtd. in Rozier 5). Tambu believes that the only way to save herself from darkness in her life is through colonial education, being oblivious to the ways it leads to assimilation and alienation. This alienation is most palpably expressed in the portrayal of her cousin Nyasha, whose early English education leads to cultural alienation, as expressed in Mainini's words that Nyasha and Chido "have been speaking nothing but English for so long that most of their Shona has gone" (Dangarembga 68). Nyasha's struggle, therefore, highlights the impending disconnect from cultural heritage that Tambu overlooks in "her eventual triumph at obtaining her coveted chance at school" (Miller 2). As Gilian Gorle notes, education in *Nervous Conditions* presents a complex issue, being both empowering, as demonstrated in Tambu's portrayal, and disempowering, as illustrated by Nyasha (Gorle qtd. in Miller 2). This dual nature of education can be explained by the dominance of the English language in colonial education, which is alienating but also not easily dismissible as it is part of a system providing opportunities (Gorle qtd. in Miller 2). With this in mind, the contrast between Tambu and Nyasha seems to highlight "the otherwise irresolvable paradox of language and education in colonial contexts" (Miller 2). Throughout the novel, the reader learns how education, or lack thereof, influences the lives of numerous characters – from Tambu's mother, whose abject poverty traps her in an unhappy marriage, to Lucia, who understands how the attainment of education can improve her dire circumstances. Western education, in this sense, can be viewed as a path to liberation, success and independence, allowing women to free themselves from the bonds of patriarchy. Conversely, Tambu's empowering views on education stand in stark contrast to Nyasha, her 'anglicized' cousin, who engages with it more critically, demonstrating a profound awareness of its alienating nature. Expressing her dissatisfaction with the prospect of colonial education, Nyasha points out how attending the Western school brings more disadvantages than advantages (Thiago 181):

It would be a marvellous opportunity, she said sarcastically, to forget. To forget who you were, what you were and why you were that. The process, she said, was called assimilation, and that was what was intended for the precocious few who might prove a nuisance if left to themselves, whereas the others -well really, who cared about the others? So they made a little space into which you were assimilated, an honorary space in which you could join them and they could make sure that you behaved yourself. (Dangarembga 262)

Nyasha's poignant words make it apparent how Western education can lead to "forgetting of who you were", i.e., the erasure of cultural identity intricately linked with colonial power structures. More importantly, her insights demonstrate how the seemingly "honorary space" provided by Western education is not a locus of progress but rather a site that requires unquestioning obedience and adherence to the existing colonial power dynamics, thereby promoting Western cultural ideologies.

Furthermore, Dangarembga interestingly parallels different views on education and its effects on the characters' choice of reading literature. As Sarah Miller (2) points out, Tambu's reading choices mainly consist of fictional stories with 'happy' endings, imbuing her with optimism. She uses these stories to "connect her new experiences as an academic under Western influence with her heritage as a member of her Rhodesian family" (Miller 2). In contrast, Nyasha dismisses Tambu's choices of books as "fairy tales", resonating more with nonfiction works that delve into themes of violence, challenge, and international oppression (Miller 2). Nyasha's interest in topics such as "Arabs on the east coast and the British on the west, Nazis, Japanese, Hiroshima and Nagasaki" (Dangarembga 95) despite the nightmares they induce, underscores her discomfort with the broader world of oppression that education has exposed her to (Miller 2). "She is horrified and restless, experiencing the negative outcomes of being instilled with a desire for knowledge" (Miller 2). For Nyasha, education is not merely a road to opportunities but also exposes her to uncertainties (Miller 2). Although Nyasha teaches Tambu to approach reading critically, she does not yet possess the same degree of critical thinking as her cousin (Miller 2). While Tambu manages to maintain "a balance between the dangers and the benefits of her education, proving herself to be the ideal compliant subject" (Miller 3), Nyasha embodies the detrimental consequences of colonial education, eroding identity and leading to distress and resistance (Miller 3). This is most poignantly expressed towards the end of the novel when Nyasha experiences an emotional breakdown. Saying "their history. Fucking liars. Their bloody lies" (Dangarembga 294), Nyasha shows a deep understanding of how education can be used as a power discourse perpetuating specific worldviews.

An equally central aspect of the discussion on education in *Nervous Conditions* is Tambu's grandmother's oral storytelling. As Bhana maintains, her stories provide an insight into the traditional methods of educating children, of passing on both agricultural skills and historical memories, thereby enacting an alternative educational model that "breaks with the stereotypes of Shona life as one concerned only with physical survival" (Bhana 130). The grandmother's accounts suggest that education "does not have to be accompanied by a painful sublimation of the indigenous/black self" (Bhana 130), thereby serving as a history lesson (Bhana 130):

History that could not be found in the textbooks; a stint in the field and a rest, the beginning of the story, a pause. 'What happened after, Mbuya, what happened?' 'More work, my child, before you hear more story'. Slowly, methodically, throughout the day the field would be cultivated, the episodes of my grandmother's own portion of history strung together from beginning to end. (Dangarembga 34)

Tambu's grandmother thoroughly combines the transmission of "tribal and personal memory with the physical labor of cultivating food" (Bhana 130). This stands in stark contrast to colonial education, teaching "a virulent disdain for racialised manual labor" (Bhana 130) while elevating intellectual labour that is deemed as inherently white (Bhana 130). These effects are best exemplified by Nhamo. Upon returning from the mission, he refuses to help with household chores and the cultivation of food, preferring to spend his time reading while his younger sisters work, thereby illustrating how the "educated elite [...] delegate manual labor to others, considering it beneath them" (Bhana 130). Conversely, in the grandmother's history lessons, the rhythm of learning mirrors the rhythm of cultivation, "as the grandmother integrates physical and mental learning" (Bhana 130).

In conclusion, through an extensive exploration of education in *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga highlights its paradoxical nature. She portrays rigid gender disparities that privilege boys over girls, illustrating how women were marginalised in colonial Rhodesia. Moreover, Dangarembga perceptively depicts both the empowering and disempowering aspects of colonial education systems. Echoing Miller's analysis, the "coexisting but contradictory 'nervous condition' of oppression and liberation through education is made clear by splitting the two outcomes between two characters" (Miller 1), Nyasha and Tambu, respectively. As Tambu's narrative unfolds, education emerges as empowering women's path to freedom, enabling them to transcend poverty and the rigid gender roles inherent in patriarchal Rhodesia. However, it also engenders feelings of alienation, exemplified by Nyasha whose critical awareness becomes volatile and exacerbates her suffering.

7.4. Colonial violence and counter-violence in *Nervous Conditions*

Tsitsi Dangarembga's groundbreaking novel opens with an epigraph from Jean-Paul Sartre's preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*: "The condition of the native is a nervous condition". As anticipated, Dangarembga's reference to Fanon's quintessential novel prompted many critics to interpret her work through a Fanonian lens (Plasa 122). Despite writing *Nervous Conditions* before reading Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Dangarembga's novel exhibits striking parallels with Fanon's theory, particularly in their exploration of colonial psychology and the manifestation of resistance through physical symptoms (Sugnet 35). The imagery in *Nervous Conditions*, depicting "eating, digestion, nutrition, vomiting and excretion" as metaphors for domination and resistance, bears a striking similarity to the cases of eating disturbances described in Fanon's "Colonial War and Mental Disorders" (Sugnet 35). Fanon recounts instances where patients, due to mental distress, "could no longer swallow a bite", suffered "loss of appetite due to mental causes," refused to eat and reacted violently to physical touch, which resembles Nyasha's behaviour during the critical phase of her illness (Sugnet 35). Dangarembga not only employs Fanon's theoretical insights into the pathological effects of colonial domination but also expands and revises them from a black feminist perspective (Plasa 122). This chapter explores the impact of colonial violence on the characters in *Nervous Conditions*, focusing particularly on its psychological effects. Additionally, it explores the acts of counter-violence through Nyasha's and Tambu's bodily resistance. Besides Nyasha's experience with anorexia/bulimia as a form of anti-colonial resistance, I argue that her eating disorder also embodies her resistance against patriarchy. As Deepika Bahri (2) notes, attributing Nyasha's disease solely to colonial effects is overly simplistic; she responds not only as a native and *Other* but also as a woman challenging the affirmation of "socially engendered native categories" (Bahri 2) that, in conjunction with colonial narratives, constrain her subjectivity.

Throughout the novel, Dangarembga foregrounds numerous nervous conditions such as Nyasha's anorexia, Babamukuru's violent temper, Maiguru's self-effacement, and Tambu's sublimation of self (Bhana 135). These conditions can be interpreted as forms of "autodestruction, [...] one of the ways in which the native's muscular tension is set free" (Fanon qtd. in Bhana 135). The manifestation of colonial violence is exemplified in the depiction of Nyasha's (psycho)pathology. Torn between two distinct cultures, Shona, and English, Nyasha's negotiation between two different cultures leads to feelings of alienation and deep suffering. Dangarembga's exploration of the colonised psyche resonates with Fanon's argument that

colonised people experience alienation and develop feelings of worthlessness. Although Nyasha is deeply affected by the colonial power structures, she is not merely a victim. Instead, she exhibits profound awareness of the Manichaeism nature ingrained in colonial systems, as reflected in her incisive remark: “their history. Fucking liars. Their bloody lies” (Dangarembga 294), resisting with her body. The pathological impact of colonisation, indicated by the intensified synaptic activity which, in Fanon’s view, gives rise to counter-violence, that “take[s] shape in Nyasha in the need to target herself as the site on which to launch a terrorist attack upon the produced self” (Bahri 2). However, Nyasha’s bodily resistance should not solely be seen as a revolt against colonialism but also against patriarchal power structures, emphasising the multiple levels of oppression faced by Black women in colonial contexts. Thus, while Fanon argues that “colonialism in its essence was already taking on the aspect of a fertile purveyor for psychiatric disorders” (Fanon qtd. in Bahri 9), it is crucial to recognise that “it is not only the colonial war Nyasha is fighting on the turf of her body but also a battle with the megalomaniacal patriarchal control represented” (Bahri 9).

Nyasha is not the sole character exhibiting physical symptoms of colonial-induced nervous conditions in the novel. Tambu’s mother, Mainini, also demonstrates such a condition through physical manifestations. Upon learning that her daughter will attend the mission school, Mainini’s agitation manifests as an inability to eat. Towards the novel’s conclusion, her nervous condition is further evidenced by “unlocalised aches all over her body,” an inability to consume food, walk to the fields and work in them, illustrating how colonialism “touched both the senses, the psychic, and the affective domains” (Mbembe qtd. in Ndayisenga 467). Her daughter Tambu also experiences moments when “the food would not go down” (91), accompanied by uncomfortable symptoms such as “a horrible crawling over [her] skin, [her] chest contracted in a breathless tension, and even [her] bowels threatened [...]” (Dangarembga qtd. in Sugnet 44). While less explicitly portrayed, Dangarembga also delineates how colonialism affects men psychologically. Babamukuru, portrayed as torn between the “demands of his life as a surrogate Englishman” (Sugnet 36) and his responsibilities as the head of a large African family, suggests that African men with advanced colonial education also navigate the precarious position of the “native” (Sugnet 36). Despite his privileged position, he “suffers from ‘bad nerves’, is alienated from his body and has “an inbred aversion to biological detail” (Sugnet 36-37). Throughout the novel, Babamukuru is depicted as ill-tempered, agitated, and withdrawn, leading Tambu to note that they “hardly ever laughed [...] [and] did not talk much when he was around either” (Dangarembga 154). One of the rare instances when Babamukuru feels happiness is when he

begins humming an old song while returning to the countryside: “Unaccountably, unusually, Babamukuru was happy. Free of tensions and in the best of spirits, he looked younger and more lovable than he ever did at the mission” (Dangarembga qtd. in Sugnet 37). This ultimately suggests that distancing himself from his “English-made job and personality” (Sugnet 37) reduces his nervous condition (Sugnet 37). In line with Fanon’s theory, Dangarembga’s vivid portrayal of psychological suffering, manifested through physical symptoms, illustrates the detrimental and far-reaching impact of colonisation on the psyche of the colonised, revealing internal conflicts akin to those explored by Frantz Fanon. Ultimately, this reveals that the legacy of colonialism transcends economic and social domains, profoundly affecting the psyche of those subjected to colonization.

Another particularly striking scene illustrating how colonial imposition results in nervous condition occurs during Jeremiah’s and Mainini’s wedding scene, depicting “indigenous negotiations / reappropriations of colonial prescriptions around behavior” (Bhana 122). Driven by his conviction that Jeremiah “is still living in sin” because he is not married (Dangarembga 217), Babamukuru proposes a Christian wedding. Babamukuru’s insistence on the Christian wedding to rid themselves of an “evil spirit that someone has sent upon [them]” (Dangarembga 217) starkly contrasts with his brother’s desire to follow Shona tradition and have a traditional ceremony performed by a good medium. Babamukuru’s resistance to his idea demonstrates two conflicting belief systems, where one wields “structural authority to suppress and erase the other” (Bhana 123). Eventually, Babamukuru, a colonially implicated male patriarch, imposes his decision, echoing the “colonial assault on [the] traditional ways of knowing the world in his attempt to superimpose Christian morality on the Shona beliefs of evil spirits” (Bhana 123). This scene mirrors Fanon’s observation that the “colonialist bourgeoisie [...] had implemented in the minds of the colonized that the essential values, meaning Western values remain eternal [...]” (Fanon 11). Babamukuru’s rejection of traditional Shona practices highlights the internalisation of colonial values and their imposition on indigenous beliefs. As Bhana observes, the notion of sin, “central in the mission’s attempt at disciplining the Africans dominates the discussions in *Nervous Conditions* around the wedding ceremony” (Bhana 123). The concept of sin preoccupies Tambu’s mind, noting how it “had to be avoided because it was deadly [...] It was definitely black” (Dangarembga 222). Confronted with the painful contradictions of colonial rule, Tambu cannot turn a blind eye to the devaluation of her family implied by the idea that their non-Christian union is sinful (Bhana 124). Struggling to accept “the definition of sin as ‘black’, of sin as her family’s ‘natural’ state unless saved by white

Christian morality [...]” (Bhana 124), Tambu ultimately experiences her own nervous condition. White Christian morality echoes Fanon’s words that “a white man’s Church [...] does not call the colonized to the ways of God, but to the ways of the white man, to the ways of the master, the ways of the oppressor” (Fanon 7). This underscores the church as an extension of colonial power, reinforcing its specific values while undermining those of the indigenous population. These attempts to delegitimize the values and traditions of Black people by branding them as sinful profoundly affect Tambu, resulting in a “split between her mind and body” (Bhana 124). “Unable to articulate her confusion and the rupture in the racist narrative of progress, she uses her body as a sign of resistance, of unwillingness to accept the proposition that to be Shona is sinful and without worth” (Bhana 124):

I was slipping further and further away from [Nyasha], until in the end I appeared to have slipped out of my body and was standing somewhere near the foot of the bed, watching her efforts to persuade me to get up and myself ignoring her. (Dangarembga qtd. in Bhana 124)

Tambu’s resistance and refusal to attend the wedding reveal two key insights: her defiance demonstrates resistance against racist colonial narratives and underscores her challenge of patriarchy by directly opposing Babamukuru’s decision. Despite perceiving colonial education initially as a pathway to liberation and escape from poverty, the wedding scene becomes a decisive moment for Tambu as she becomes profoundly aware of the “Manichaeism of the colonial world” to which she and her family are subjugated. “This reconciliation proves especially difficult for her as the western progressive lens she has put her faith in attempts to relegate her family’s beliefs, customs and existence to spectres of primitivism” (Bhana 124). In a Fanonian sense, Tambu becomes aware how in the “totalitarian nature of colonial exploitation, the colonists turn the colonized into a kind of quintessence of evil” (Fanon 6). Unable to reconcile with this imposition, Tambu’s refusal to attend the wedding leads to severe physical punishment by Babamukuru. However, it also becomes a crucial aspect of her identity formation, as echoed in her assertion that her punishment “was the price of [her] newly acquired identity” (Dangarembga 248).

In conclusion, Dangarembga illustrates the profound psychological impact of colonialism on the colonized people through numerous characters, echoing Fanon’s notion of colonial violence that leads to mental distress manifested in bodily symptoms. However, Frantz Fanon’s concept of counter-violence as a liberating force in colonial contexts, finds a parallel in Dangarembga’s novel, especially concerning women’s violent resistance against patriarchal oppression (Sugnet

39). When Babamukuru slaps his daughter Nyasha, she fights back “punching him in the eye [...], screaming and wriggling and doing what damage she could” (Dangarembga 172). Similarly, Lucia “twists her shiftless lover Takesure’s ears to make him submit to a humbling interrogation” (Sugnet 39) and Tambu physically attacks her brother upon discovering he had been stealing the maize she cultivated to finance her education (Sugnet 39). By portraying the counter-violence against the oppressive forces of both colonialism and patriarchy, Dangarembga foreshadows that there are numerous sites of resistance. Echoing Fanon’s poignant words “we revolt simply because, for many reasons, we can no longer breathe,” Dangarembga vividly portrays the suffocating effects of both patriarchy and colonialism, leading to the women’s stiff resistance. By presenting “patriarchal and colonial domination” from a woman’s perspective, Dangarembga transcends “Fanon’s canonical ‘master narrative’ of post-colonial psychiatric thought and literary criticism” (Bubenechik 9). She expands Fanon’s framework by exploring “other psychological realities that [he] leaves unexamined— most specifically the role of gender in the colonial context” (Scahatteman qtd. in Bubenechik 9), suggesting that the condition of the ‘female’ native bears multiple burdens (Bubenechik 9). Thus, by portraying the experiences of Black women in a colonial context, Dangarembga’s groundbreaking novel complements Fanon’s oversight of the various levels of oppression that affect Black women.

7.5. Nyasha’s resistance against patriarchy and colonialism

Similarly to Lucia, Nyasha embodies resistance against patriarchy and the deconstruction of women’s portrayal solely as victims. Instances illustrating Nyasha’s resistance abound, spanning from her profound critical thinking, and challenging of hegemonic discourses to her bodily resistance. Consequently, they illustrate that despite the dual oppression of colonialism and patriarchy there are numerous opportunities for resistance. Although Nyasha’s mental health drastically worsens towards the end of the novel which might be interpreted as Nyasha succumbing to patriarchal constraints, she shows how both colonial power discourses and patriarchy can be continuously challenged and reconstructed. Nyasha’s rebellion and critique of the oppressive systems are crucial for her cousin’s identity development because they serve as a warning for Tambu to adopt a more critical perspective towards society. Furthermore, by portraying Nyasha as assertive and rebellious, Dangarembga deconstructs the hitherto conventional gender stereotypes inherent in colonial Rhodesia. This chapter examines how women endure the compounded burdens of both colonial and patriarchal oppression on the example of Nyasha. I also argue that despite this double oppression, Nyasha negates the notion

of women as passive victims reflected in her stiff resistance against patriarchy and colonialism, most palpably expressed in her bodily resistance.

Raised in England, Nyasha oscillates between dual cultural identities, English and Shona respectively, resulting in her cultural hybridity. Gilian Gorle (188) notes how Nyasha's linguistic exile is correlated with her female exile since her English education has equipped her with the means to challenge the patriarchal assumptions of Shona culture. The most overt evidence of Nyasha's challenge of patriarchy is her relationship with her father, who represents a colonially induced patriarchal figure. Described by her cousin as a "rumbustious daughter" who had an "egalitarian nature [...] and [took] seriously the lessons about oppression and discrimination that she had learnt first-hand in England" (Dangarembga 98), Nyasha cannot come to terms with patriarchal constraints enforced by Babamukuru. She does not wait for her father to finish eating before serving herself, 'answers back' to him and walks out of the dining room even when explicitly told not to, all of which are just some of the vivid examples of Nyasha's defiant persona. Central to the growing tension between Nyasha and her father is the "question of 'decent' behaviour" (Gorle 187). Her selection of books such as *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, clothes (miniskirts) and leisure activities (talking to a white boy late at night after a school dance) are all departures from traditional Shona values (Gorle 187). Nyasha's rebellious nature and refusal to conform to the rigid gender expectations diverge markedly from patriarchal ideas about women. Shocked by Nyasha's disruption of her feminine role, Babamukuru remarks:

But there's something wrong with her, something very wrong. A good child doesn't behave like that. I tell you, Ma'Chido, sometimes I don't sleep, thinking about the way that daughter of mine has turned out. (Dangarembga 128)

Babamukuru's words are reflective of the Shona societal expectations about women's place in society, expecting them to be obedient and compliant. Any deviation from these norms is, therefore, met with disdain and disapproval, as implied by Babamukuru's remark that there is "something wrong with [Nyasha]". Women who defy conventional notions of femininity are perceived as abnormal or unnatural, as also demonstrated in the example of Lucia. Thus, Babamukuru's observations reflect deeply entrenched cultural expectations about women. As Dustin Rozier notes, Nyasha's defence of Westernized ideals directly clashes with "Babamukuru's [...] attempts of adhering to patriarchal rule through both traditional and

Western formats” (Rozier 8). The condemnation of women who do not adhere to patriarchal rule is best exemplified in the scene when Babamukuru physically assaults his daughter, underscoring the need for male control over women’s behaviour. Angry with his daughter for staying up alone with a boy on her own, he remarks that “no decent girl would stay out alone, with a boy, at that time of the night” (Dangarembga 170). Nyasha refuses to suppress her voice as exemplified in her assertion that Babamukuru taught her how to behave and since she doesn’t worry about what people would think, there’s no need for him to do the same (Dangarembga 170). Nyasha’s bold expression of her opinion and disobedient behaviour infuriate Babamukuru who physically attacks her:

‘Never’, he hissed, ‘never,’ he repeated, striking her other cheek with the back of his hand, ‘speak to me like that.’ [...] ‘Today I am going to teach you a lesson.’ [...] ‘How can you go about disgracing me? Me! Like that! No, you cannot do it. I am respected at this mission. I cannot have a daughter who behaves like a whore.’ [...] ‘You must learn to be obedient,’ Babamukuru told Nyasha and struck her again. (Dangarembga 171)

Babamukuru’s words reflect the exertion of patriarchal authority, particularly through his insistence on obedience and compliance. This insistence underscores a desire to maintain control and dominance over women, echoing Gaidzanwa’s (25) argument that domineering, assertive, and insubordinate women are both despised and socially disapproved. The aforementioned passage is a vivid example of how women’s refusal to conform to “appropriate” behaviours often leads to stigmatization, marginalisation and even violence. As Janice Hill points out, Nyasha’s behaviour “could conceivably jeopardize Babamukuru’s reputation in his position as the African headmaster of a racially-mixed mission” (Hill 84), for which she is physically punished. Furthermore, the colonial congruence with the “existing Western sexual stereotypes and the philosophy of life which they represented” (Nandy qtd. in Bubenechik 11) undermined the masculinity of Indigenous men, creating strained relations between them and African women (Bubenechik 11). Consequently, this dynamic resulted in the subjugation of women by African men who “participated in the double oppression [...] of the women nearest them” (Bubenechik 11), as exemplified in the relationship between Nyasha and her father. However, women actively fought against the double oppression, thereby negating the notion that they are powerless victims of patriarchy. This becomes palpable in Nyasha’s refusal to succumb to physical assault, condemnation, and insults from her father, hitting him back and showcasing her stiff resistance against patriarchy. Shocked by her disobedient behaviour, Babamukuru notes:

‘She has dared,’ he said, sweat pouring off him, his chest pouring off him, his chest heaving with the grossness of the thought, ‘to raise her fist against me. She has dared to challenge me. Me! Her father! I’m telling you [...] today she will not live. We cannot have two men in this house. (Dangarembga 172)

Babamukuru’s response to Nyasha’s “disrespectful behavior illustrates his shame at not being in control of a daughter in a society that equates his maleness with authority” (Hill 84). By rebelling against Babamukuru, Nyasha challenges both his patriarchal authority and his deep commitment to colonial ideology (Niemi 99). Furthermore, Nyasha’s assertiveness, similar to Lucia’s, is constructed as a masculine trait as illustrated by Babamukuru’s remark that “[they] cannot have two men in this house” (Dangarembga 172): her “uncontrollable” behaviour and transgression of conventional female roles directly threaten Babamukuru’s patriarchal authority, disrupting the established gender hierarchy. Consequently, the violent fight between Babamukuru and Nyasha offers Tambu an understanding of the universal oppression of women, irrespective of class:

Babamukuru condemning Nyasha to whoredom, making her a victim of her femaleness, just as I had felt victimized at home in the days when Nhamo went to school, and I grew maize. The victimization, I saw, was universal. It didn’t depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition. It didn’t depend on any of the things I had thought it depended on. Men took it everywhere with them. Even heroes like Babamukuru did it. And what was the problem? You had to admit that Nyasha had no tact. You had to admit she was altogether too volatile and strong-willed. You couldn’t ignore the fact that she had no respect for Babamukuru when she ought to have had lots of it. But what I didn’t like was the way all the conflicts came back to this question of femaleness. Femaleness as opposed and inferior to maleness. (Dangarembga 173)

This passage clearly illustrates the double oppression of women in colonial contexts, emphasising the additional challenges African women faced due to their gender. Tambu’s realization underscores how “women were subject to interlocking forms of oppression: to the racism of colonialism and to indigenous and foreign structures of male domination” (Stratton 7). Despite this double oppression, Dangarembga portrays women as actively questioning the deeply entrenched patriarchal beliefs and finding ways to resist them. Although Nyasha is aware that she is not in England anymore and should adjust, she refuses to be “anyone’s underdog” (Dangarembga 175).

Another noteworthy aspect of Nyasha’s character is her challenging of the notions of female sexuality, thereby deconstructing stereotypes about women. As Sadia Zulfiqar (127) points out,

girls who are not in control of their sexualities are perceived as a threat to their family's honour and status in traditional Shona society. Consequently, virginity is "considered invaluable, and demonstrates that men are in control of their property and are able to police and defend their borders" (Carolyn Shaw qtd. in Zulfiqar 127). However, Nyasha "ridicules this virginity syndrome" as demonstrated by her assertion: "I wish I had done it," brandishing a tampon at [Tambu], "but at this rate, the only thing that will ever get up there is this! Honestly, even on my wedding day, they'll only be happy if I promise not to enjoy it" (Dangarembga qtd. in Zulfiqar 127). Nyasha's awareness is a "complex mixture of English and Shona values" (Zulfiqar 127). She believes "that personal integrity should not be derived from either Shona or colonial structures, but rather should be dependent upon an individual's ability to make final moral discriminations and nuanced ethical judgement" (Zulfiqar 127).

Alongside Nyasha's challenging of female sexuality, she showcases a high degree of critical thinking regarding colonial power discourses, even more so than her father. As Johanna Minna Niemi (99) notes, Nyasha's observation that "daddy grovels to them [white Rhodesians]. We grovel to him" (Dangarembga qtd. in Niemi 99) illustrates her profound understanding of how "as the patriarchal head of the family" Babamukuru exerts control akin to a colonial ruler, particularly over women in his family. Nyasha grasps the workings of colonial seduction more profoundly than her father and her crisis is intensified by "her understanding of his unawareness of the logic of colonial seduction to which he has fallen prey" (Niemi 99). This is further manifested by calling Babamukuru a 'historical artefact', viewing him as "the colonized victim of international Eurocentric powers which undermine his intrinsic value as an African" (Gorle 189). Her understanding of colonial power discourses is most overt at the end of the novel when she says:

"I don't want to do it Tambu, really I don't, but it's coming, I feel it coming." Her eyes dilated. "They've done it to me," she accused, whispering still. "Really, they have." And then she became stern. "It's not their fault. They did it to them. You know they did," she whispered. "To both of them, but especially to him [her father]." (Dangarembga 293)

Besides her high degree of critical thinking, Nyasha also emphasises social responsibility, believing that people who improve their situations have a social obligation to help others (Niemi 93). Unlike most characters in the novel, "Nyasha persistently sees through her father's "God act", even as he refuses to see the vulgarity of this existence predicated on his own narcissism and assumed omnipotence" (Niemi 93). This sentiment is most poignantly expressed after Lucia

secures employment at the mission school with Babamukuru's help. While Tambu is "mesmerised by the sleight of [Babamukuru's] hand that had lifted Lucia out of her misery" (Dangarembga 234), Nyasha sees past her father's "God-act", remarking that "it was the obligation of all decent people in positions like Babamukuru's to do such things" (Dangarembga 235). Nyasha is an "independent thinker who is not willing to follow the herd mentality that would maintain structural injustice in upholding patriarchal structures and economic discrepancies" (Niemi 105).

Nyasha's resistance against patriarchy and colonialism is nowhere as clear as in her eating disorder. In his seminal article *Dangarembga's Feminist Reinvention of Fanon*, Charles Sugnet notes how Nyasha's eating disorder constitutes a self-destructive form of resistance against her father's authority but also against the dominance of the colonizer, albeit less directly (Sugnet 43). While the need to control her diet may be attributed to her adoption of Western beauty standards, Sugnet goes further to argue that Nyasha's anorexia is a way to "annihilate the female altogether" (Sugnet 43). Therefore, in addition to serving as resistance against her father's will, by stopping menstruation and reducing female curves, Nyasha's anorexia is also a rejection of her femaleness (Sugnet 43), marking her resistance against the rigid gender norms. This has also been echoed by Sally McWilliams who argues that Nyasha's bulimia can be seen as "an act of self-control" (McWilliams qtd. in Sugnet 45-44). Both Nyasha's and Tambu's bodies "talk in that that they are physical disturbances to the status quo of that society's cultural codes" (McWilliams qtd. in Sugnet 45-44). This is evident in Nyasha's acknowledgement of her role in her disease, stating that she "did it [herself]. With [her] toothbrush" (Dangarembga qtd. in Sugnet 45). Nyasha's bodily resistance to both colonialism and patriarchy aligns with Pucherova's argument, explored in the theoretical part of my thesis, that women's bodies serve as a means for asserting subjectivity through their symbolic significance. Nyasha's body serves as a means of communication, 'communicating resistance' against both patriarchy and colonialism, thereby highlighting women's bodies as a locus of resistance.

What is more, in a crucial scene towards the end of the novel Nyasha connects her rejection of food with broader issues:

Imagine all that fuss over a plateful of food. But it's more than that really, more than just food. That's how it comes out, but really it's all the things about boys and men and being decent and indecent and good and bad. He goes on and on with the accusations and the threats, and I'm just not coping very well. (Dangarembga 278)

This passage clearly illustrates Nyasha's battle against patriarchal norms, thereby highlighting how Nyasha's eating disorder is a focal point of her resistance against patriarchy. Furthermore, the refusal of food as a metaphor for resistance against colonialism has been thoroughly explored by Derek Wright in his insightful article '*More than Just a Plateful of Food': Regurgitating Colonialism in Tsitsi Dangarembga's "Nervous Conditions"*'. Wright argues that the "longer she stays at school and sits up at night, the more suppers and breakfast she misses: at the literal level, the more she reads, the less she eats" (Wright 11). Metaphorically, her neocolonial education intake leaves her not only culturally and spiritually undernourished but also deeply critical of the "diet of colonial history and literature that she is being fed, so that she digests less and less of what she ostensibly consumes" (Wright 11). The more Nyasha critically engages with colonial education, the less of its dogmatic content she absorbs, reflected in her physical loss of appetite (Wright 11).

In conclusion, although Nyasha experiences a nervous breakdown, a direct result of the double oppression of colonialism and patriarchy, her character deconstructs the hitherto traditional stereotypes of women prevalent in African male literary tradition. By portraying Nyasha as rebellious, defiant, and outspoken, Dangarembga's portrayal refutes the notion of women as passive victims. While Nyasha shows her acute awareness of victimization she is "hardly content to remain a victim; regardless of the caliber or effectiveness of her methods of opposition, she/her body are the enunciation of protest against *and* (emphasis added) the story of victimization" (Bahri 4). In this sense, Nyasha's portrayal suggests that patriarchal and colonial power structures can be continuously challenged as there are countless opportunities for resistance. In doing so, Dangarembga poignantly delineates multiple dimensions of women's identities and their quest for autonomy and agency against the intertwined forces of patriarchy and colonialism.

7.6. Tambu's identity formation

Tambu stands out as one of the most complex characters in *Nervous Conditions*. Her autobiographical account provides an insight into the double oppression of women in colonial contexts. Tsitsi Dangarembga effectively employs Tambu's first- person narration to provide a poignant lens through which the readers can experience her world. This chapter explores the impact of the double oppression of colonialism and patriarchy on Tambu's identity formation.

I argue that Tambu's exposure to Western education heightens her awareness of the patriarchal and colonial underpinnings, resulting in her navigation of identity.

As noted by Benon Tugume, Tambu's predicament, mirroring the experiences of many African women, begins in her early childhood (39). She is burdened with domestic responsibilities such as fetching water from Nyamarira River, caring for her siblings, working, and sleeping in the kitchen from a young age. Meanwhile, her brother enjoys the privileges just by the virtue of being a boy (Tugume 3). As illustrated by Tambu and her younger sister Netsai, women are expected to support men's achievements through their work so that Nhamo can attend school (Bahri 6), highlighting the persistent gender disparities they are confronted with. Despite their hard work, Tambu and her sister do not directly benefit from their own labour: according to traditional and colonial laws, African women were allowed to neither own nor control the land and the goods they produced (Courville qtd. in Bahri 6). Instead, their unpaid work subsidized the colonial wage system (Courville qtd. in Bahri 6). As Deepika Bahri (6) perceptively notes, while growing her maize helps Tambu to stay in school and later allows her to go to the Sacred Heart Convent, her educational journey could likely culminate in a societal system that exploits her labour. This system, much like it did with Maiguru, could deprive her of the benefits of her work, using it to uphold the colonial and patriarchal order (Bahri 6).

Sexuality is another aspect of gender inequality that impacts Tambu from a young age. Tambu recalls how, as she grew older and her movements grew stronger, more rhythmical, and luxuriant, people around her did not find it amusing anymore, making her realize how "there were bad implications in the way [she] enjoyed the rhythm" (Dangarembga 68). Her observation aligns with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's argument that "unlike boys, girls are praised for their virginity and taught to be ashamed of their bodies and desires" (Pucherova 61), highlighting the impact of traditional gender codes on women. An equally important aspect underscoring gender inequality is access to education, already explored in the previous chapter. Early in the novel, the readers learn of Tambu's aspiration for education, driven by her wish to escape abject poverty. Her fervent wish to get educated is met with disdain in a patriarchal society where the needs of women are considered of secondary importance, leading to her awareness of the injustices women are faced with:

The needs and sensibilities of the women in my family were not considered a priority, or even legitimate. That was why I was in Standard Three in the year when Nhamo died,

instead of in the Standard Five, as I should have been my age. In those days I felt the injustice of my situation every I thought about it [...] Thinking about it, feeling the injustice of it, this is how I came to dislike my brother, and not only my brother, my father, my mother – in fact everybody. (Dangarembga 27)

Unlike Nhamo, whose gender affords him specific privileges, Tambu is not allowed to go to the airport with her brother and father. Instead, her father tells her that it is “natural for [her] to stay at home and prepare for the homecoming” (Dangarembga 57). Her father’s views on what constitutes ‘natural’ deeply conflict with Tambu. She cannot come to terms with rigid gender binaries, noting how “[her] father’s idea of what was natural had begun to irritate [her] a long time ago” (Dangarembga 57). Similarly to both Lucia and Nyasha, Tambu’s defiant and wilful persona diverges markedly from patriarchal ideas regarding women’s place in society. This is best exemplified in Tambu’s relationship with her father, who disapproves of her intellectual pursuits:

There was no way of pleasing my father [...] Relieved, I set about pleasing myself, which antagonised him even further. He did not like to see me over-absorbed in intellectual pursuits. He became very agitated after he had found me several times reading the sheet of newspaper in which the bread from *magrosa* had been wrapped as I waited for the *sadza* to thicken. He thought I was emulating my brother, that the things I read would fill my mind with impractical ideas, making me quite useless for the real tasks of feminine living. (Dangarembga 57)

Tambu’s father’s androcentric belief that women ‘belong’ within the domestic sphere, while intellectual pursuits are reserved for men, reflects the broader societal norms Tambu finds difficult to accept. Jeremiah’s agitation about Tambu’s reading choices signifies more than mere disapproval of the act itself; he is more concerned about the transgression of the rigid gender norms that such an action represents. This ultimately suggests that women who transgress the prescribed gender roles are met with disapproval and disdain.

Despite the gender constraints imposed upon her from an early age, Tambu’s perseverance and determination are illustrated in her decision to grow her maize to pay for the school fees. Described as “wilful and headstrong” (Dangarembga 44) by Mainini, Tambu actively seeks to alter her circumstances rather than passively accepting them like her mother. Her behaviour aligns with Pucherova’s argument discussed in the theoretical part of my thesis that women are portrayed as “actively changing the society around them” (Pucherova 41), although the conflict between a woman’s individualist aspirations and her culture continues to exist in African women’s writing (Pucherova 41). She demonstrates her stiff resistance by earning her own

money despite her family's underlying conviction that some things cannot be changed. Moreover, Tambu physically attacks her brother when she learns he stole her mealies, illustrating her counter-violence against patriarchy. Quite in her own words, she demonstrates the "important lesson that circumstances were not immutable, no burden so binding that it could not be dropped" (Dangarembga 90).

However, 'the burden of poverty' she leaves behind upon arriving at the mission is further complicated by other burdens she encounters. At first, she is oblivious to her mother's warnings about the detrimental effects of 'Englishness' and disapproves of her cousin Nyasha, whom she regards as "ungrateful, awkward and ill-mannered" (Dangarembga 93). Tambu views her stay at the mission as "[arrival] in Heaven" (Dangarembga 108), made possible by her educated, heroic, "God-like" uncle who "inspired confidence and obedience" (Dangarembga 71). Adamant to follow his steps, Tambu regards Nyasha's rebellious nature as an impediment to her educational journey, stating that Nyasha could easily "wreak havoc with the neat plan [she] had laid out for [her] life" (Dangarembga 116). However, her inherent belief of the mission as the Heaven and Babamukuru as God is quickly shattered when she learns how her uncle exerts male control over women in his family. Witnessing her aunt's subservient behaviour despite her education and the physical assault exerted on Nyasha because she is not compliant with her feminine role, Tambu realizes that the "victimization [of women] was universal" (Dangarembga 173). Despite this realization, Tambu does not stand up to her uncle. Quite the opposite, her compliance, obedience, and submissiveness are exemplified in the following:

Beside Nyasha, I was a paragon of feminine decorum, principally because I hardly ever talked unless spoken to, and then only to answer with utmost respect whatever question had been asked. Above all I did not question things. It did not matter to me why things should be done this way rather than that way. I simply accepted that this was so. (Dangarembga 228)

As Carl Plasa observes, Babamukuru approves of Tambu's unquestioning compliance with patriarchal authority seeing her as embodying the virtues of "feminine decency, submissiveness and respect" (Plasa qtd. in Tugume 6). According to Babamukuru, Tambu is "as an exemplary young lady whose behaviour should be emulated by his daughter" (Tugume 6).

Dangarembga interestingly parallels Tambu's defiant persona at the homestead when she confronts her brother and openly voices her opinions to her subservient role at the mission characterized by her silence and adherence to Babamukuru's rules. As Charles Sugnet (34)

notes, Tambu's "peril is as complex and multiple as her identity: she might, for example, free herself from the sexism that denies her an education only to educate herself into perfect complicity with the Rhodesian colonial elite" (Sugnet 34). In this sense, Tambu's exposure to Western education may lead to the risk of forgetting her Shona identity, the cultural erasure her mother alludes to throughout the novel.

Dangarembga effectively utilises the theme of 'forgetting' as a result of British education, illustrated early in the novel when Nhamo visits the homestead during his first visit from the Mission and 'forgets' how to speak Shona (Bhana 132). As Fanon suggests, "[t]o speak a language is to take on a world, a culture", (Fanon qtd. in Bhana 132); by deliberately forgetting his native language, Nhamo is attempting to distance himself from the undervalued world of the homestead (Bhana 132). Similarly, as her narrative unfolds Tambu also forgets. Noting that she is busy learning exotic languages, games like hockey, and reading that she rarely remembers her family and friends, demonstrating just how easily Western education pulls her away from her Shona identity (Bhana 133). More importantly, the more Tambu engages with colonial education the more her views on her traditional culture and values begin to shift (Zulfiqar 131). This is poignantly expressed in her own words: "the more I saw of worlds beyond homestead the more I was convinced that the further we left the old ways behind the closer we came to progress" (Dangarembga 218); her need to be educated may potentially lead to alienation and cultural erosion. This shift in her identity is further apparent in her deteriorating relationship with her parents, emphasising the detrimental effects of Western education. She views her mother's passivity and father's ignorance as an impediment to her educational journey while admiring her 'educated' relatives. Deeply aware of this, Tambu analyses how adopting the Western way of life results "makes her identity ambiguous and elusive" (Bubenechik 21), which, "made [her] mother wonder whether [she] was quite [herself], or whether [she] was carrying some other presence in [her]" (Dangarembga 140). Tambu's awareness of her shifting identity is perhaps nowhere as clear as in the scene when Babamukuru physically attacks his daughter:

If I had been more independent in my thinking then, I would have thought the matter through to a conclusion. But in those days it was easy for me to leave tangled thoughts knotted, their loose ends hanging. I didn't want to explore the treacherous mazes that such thoughts led into. I didn't want to reach the end of those mazes, because there, I knew, I would find myself and I was afraid I would not recognize myself after having taken so many confusing directions. I was beginning to suspect that I was not the person I was expected to be, and took it as evidence that somewhere I had taken a wrong turning. So to put myself back on the right path I took refuge in the image of the grateful

poor female relative [...] Whereas in the years I went back to school I had grown content to let events pass me by as long as they did not interfere too deeply with my plans, the way Nyasha responded to challenges reminded me of the intensity and determination with which I have lived my early years. I became embarrassed with my new acquired insipidity, but I did not allow myself to agonise over it. (Dangarembga 173- 174)

Tambu's reflection indicates the profound impact of Western education on her identity, implying "the transformation [following] her relocation to the mission as a distressing experience and self-alienation" (Bubenechik 21). Nyasha's intensity and determination Tambu parallels with her 'older self' is a poignant reminder of the colonial influence on her identity. "The colonial education, which helps her to escape the poverty and misery of her homestead, is now the cause of Tambu's nervous dread" (Zulfikar 116). Although Tambu's project is initially "a very naive one of succeeding within the colonial system, of imitating (not to say worshipping) Babamukuru" (Sugnet 42), as a woman, Tambu occupies a subject-position that renders her less capable of assimilation than men (Sugnet 42). Despite her conscious effort to embrace Babamukuru's ideals of culture and progress, her body as well as her psyche are covertly preparing for resistance (Sugnet 42). Tambu's resistance is most evident towards the end of the novel in a crucial scene involving her parents' wedding. As already noted in the chapter on colonial violence, the wedding scene demonstrates Tambu's resistance not only against racist colonial narratives but also against patriarchy since she directly opposes Babamukuru's decision. More importantly, it also becomes a crucial aspect of her identity formation, marking the return of her rebellious side she partially repressed in the presence of her patriarchal uncle, as echoed in her assertion that her punishment "was the price of [her] newly acquired identity" (Dangarembga 248). As Salumeh Eslamieh (qtd. in Bubenechik 35) maintains, this crucial scene elucidates how her absence from the wedding represents a deliberate withdrawal from the patriarchal order. At the end of the novel, it is evident that Tambu has heeded her cousin's advice and her mother's warnings about colonial domination and oppression (Bubenechik 36). She becomes aware of the potentially alienating effects of colonial education, noting how:

Although I was not aware of it then, no longer could I accept Sacred Heart and what it represented as a sunrise on my horizon. [...] something in my mind began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed. [...] It was a long and painful process for me, that process of expansion. (Dangarembga 298)

Profoundly aware of the colonial power discourses, Tambu finds a "way in-between, a key to her survival in a changing society and a path for resistance to the obliteration of her African identity" (Bubenechik 36).

In conclusion, Dangarembga's portrayal of Tambu illustrates the complex and multi-faceted experiences of women in colonial contexts. By portraying Tambu's educational journey and her exposure to Western education, Dangarembga demonstrates the intricate layers of oppression women are faced with. Moreover, she portrays the constant navigation of identity in light of colonialism. With colonialism on the one hand, and patriarchy on the other hand, Tambu's portrayal implies that despite women's double oppression there are countless opportunities for resistance. In this sense, Dangarembga refutes the notion of women as mere victims of patriarchal colonialism, rather showing how women are actively trying to change the dire circumstances around them.

7. 7. *I am not one of them but I am not one of you* –Hybridity in *Nervous Conditions*

In one of the critical scenes in *Nervous Conditions* Nyasha tells her parents “I am not one of them but I am not of you” (Dangarembga 294). Her poignant words find resonance with Homi Bhabha's argument that the colonial presence creates identities, the so-called *third spaces*, which are not fixed but rather in transition and are products of cultural mixes. As already noted in the theoretical part of my thesis, Bhabha elucidates that “disparate cultures are not pre-existents, but instead are an effect of historical change, specifically of colonialism and post-colonialism” (Bhabha qtd. in Huddart 66). The effects of colonialism on the emergence of hybrid identities find exemplary embodiment in Nyasha who oscillates between dual cultural identities, Shona, and English, respectively. Her early exposure to English education and return to colonial Rhodesia resulted in a constant negotiation between distinctive cultural identities. The cultural erasure of Shona identity is marked by her loss of Shona identity, impeding Tambu's identification with her cousin as illustrated by her remark that: “[she] missed the bold, ebullient companion [...] who had gone to England but not returned from there” (Dangarembga 82). Nyasha's hybridity hinders her sense of belonging, and she observes how her parents are “stuck with hybrids for children” (Dangarembga 120), a situation she feels they resent. By adopting Western behaviour her parents disapprove of Nyasha “threatens the strict ordering of a cultural and legal systems that circumscribes her existence, both as female and as African” (Hill 83). As Milena Bubenechik (23) notes, Nyasha's profound cultural hybridity is shaped unconsciously by her early exposure to English socialisation, resulting in the inability to assume her Shona identity since her hybridity is beyond her control. Unlike Tambu whose uninterrupted childhood on the homestead provided her with great personal stability, “Nyasha has become a hybrid almost against her wishes” (Gorle 186). In a conversation with her cousin Nyasha says:

Actually we were frightened that day. And confused. You know, it's easy to forget things when you're that young. We had forgotten what home was like. I mean really forgotten – what it looked like, what it smelt like, all the things to do and say and not do and say. It was all strange and new. Not like anything we were used to. It was a real shock! (Dangarembga 119)

This passage clearly illustrates the effects of hybridity on Nyasha's identity; her return from England results in a profound sense of alienation and underscores a constant negotiation of cultural boundaries where traditional notions of identity are continuously contested. On the one hand, Nyasha adopts Western mannerisms and beauty standards, dresses in an evidently "English way", and is disliked by her classmates who think that "she's white" (Dangarembga 142). However, she is also deeply aware of the colonial power discourses and criticises the very same values she adopts, saying to Tambu how "It's bad enough...when a country gets colonized, but when the people do as well! That's the end, really, that's the end" (Dangarembga 218). This aligns with Miki Flockemann's argument that Nyasha is "deeply critical of the very values she has assimilated" (Flockemann qtd. in Gorle 189). In the words of Gilian Gorle, Nyasha "carries her hybrid identity like a burden, her femaleness a difficult puzzle which she cannot solve" (Gorle 189). Although Nyasha is vocal in her critique of colonialism she "has no connections to protect her when she does speaks [sic] out because "she has no other culture to relate to" (Sizemore qtd. in Bubenechik 24). This lack of cultural ties complicates Nyasha's identity formation who, unlike Tambu, has no foundational base to construct her identity (Bubenechik 24). By portraying Nyasha's hybridity, Dangarembga demonstrates how the appropriation of Western modes of individual autonomy results in the fragmentation of the African notion of identity (Bubenechik 17). Moreover, the novel demonstrates "how cultural hybridity causes the individual to be pulled in multiple directions, adopting identities which may differ from each other" (Eslemieh qtd. in Bubenechik 17). Belonging to the *Third Space*, characterized by contradiction and ambivalence, Nyasha explains to her cousin:

They do not like my language, my English, because it is authentic and my Shona, because it is not! They think that I am a snob, that I think I am superior to them because I do not feel that I am inferior to men. [...] I very much would like to belong, Tambu, but I find I do not. (Dangarembga 288)

Nyasha's observation brings to the fore how hybridity is a "concept that confronts and problematises boundaries and always implies an unsettling of identities" (Ang 8). Indeed, Nyasha is constantly torn between Western and Shona culture, tradition, and modernity.

Although she returned home, she “can never be at home as long as her society continues its ancient tradition of assuming male superiority and female submissiveness” (Gorle 188). As Gorle notes, “her linguistic exile is inextricably bound up with her female exile, for it is her English schooling that has given her the tools with which to challenge the patriarchal assumptions of Shona culture” (Gorle 188). Her hybridity results in an unsettling of identities because two dual cultures coexist within her, of which she is neither the one nor the other. Hybridity as described through Nyasha, therefore, brings about its disempowering effects, most poignantly expressed in her own words: “You get so comfortable and used to the way things are. Look at me now. I was comfortable in England but now I’m a whore with dirty habits” (Dangarembga 174). Torn between two different cultures and confined in the *third place*, Dangarembga foregrounds how rather than fixed, postcolonial identities, are fluid and laden with contradictions. By portraying Nyasha’s navigation between two dual cultural identities, Dangarembga, quite in Bhabha’s sense, suggests how the identities of colonizer and colonized are intertwined rather than separate.

Furthermore, Homi Bhabha’s notion of mimicry, explored in the theoretical section of my thesis, is also applicable to Nyasha. Created by the colonial system, colonial mimicry results in “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject [...] that is almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 126). “Due to Nyasha’s early relocation, her mimicry of English culture is produced quite unconsciously as she internalizes and repeats implicitly [its] values” (Godiwala qtd. in Bubenechik 23). As noted by Godiwala, according to Bhabha, the anglicization of a colonial subject makes them familiar and at the same time highlights the differences from the English subject, ultimately mocking the authority of the latter (Godiwala qtd. in Bubenechik 23). Therefore, Nyasha’s anglicisation brings to the fore “the construction of a politically conscious, unified revolutionary Self, standing in unmitigated opposition to the oppressor” (Gandhi qtd. in Bubenechik 23). Confined to the *third space* in which she is “almost the same, but not quite”, Nyasha’s mimicry demonstrates that a paradox lies at the heart of every colonial discourse. It, therefore, “locates a crack in the certainty of colonial dominance, an uncertainty in its control of the behavior of the colonized” (Ashcroft 125).

Nyasha is not the only character in *Nervous Conditions* embodying the concept of hybridity. Tambu’s transition from the homestead, mission, and convent leads her into a metropolitan transitional sphere, where she, as a woman of colour, cannot escape her hybrid identity (Eslamieh 9). This illustrates how “colonialism was the precursor to the emergence of

multinational societies where Western ideology dominated culture and identity” (Eslamieh 9). At the beginning of the novel, Tambu idealizes Western education, viewing it as a way to escape abject poverty. Unlike her mother who harbours deep fears that Western education leads to cultural erasure, Tambu sees it as a path to freedom, stating that “the further we left the old ways behind the closer we came to progress” (Dangarembga 218). This highlights how Tambu’s exposure to Western education gradually alters her views on her native culture and values (Zulfiqar 131). As Zulfiqar notes, Tambu views her aspiration for Sacred Heart as “only natural”; however this “natural” desire is, in fact, a “cultivated” desire; a direct result of British imperialism” (Zulfiqar 131). “The image of Sacred Heart as a school that “manufactured guaranteed young ladies” suggests the idea of school as factory, training the girls to become model young women befitting the prevailing British mores, through carefully rehearsed artifice—a production line of unquestioning young ladies, programmed to accept the colonisers’ culture through a colonial education” (Zulfiqar 131). It is the materially comfortable environment of Sacred Heart that has alienated Tambu from the world to which she truly belongs (Zulfiqar 132). Tambu’s alienation becomes apparent in her deteriorating relationship with her parents whom she views as obstacles to her educational journey. Her estrangement from her parents intensifies when she leaves for a mission; her father becomes “insignificant” and her mother “superfluous, an obstacle in the path of [her] departure” (Dangarembga qtd. in Bubenechik 58). However, as Tambu’s narrative unfolds her exposure to Western education culminates in her nervous condition. The colonial education enabling Tambu to escape poverty at the homestead now becomes the source of her nervous condition (Zulfiqar 116). As already stated in the previous chapter, Tambu views her “relocation to the mission as a distressing experience and self-alienation” (Bubenechik 21). This is most palpably illustrated in the wedding scene I already discussed in the previous chapter which makes Tambu aware of the “Manichaeism of the colonial world”. Though initially idealizing Western education, the close of the novel reveals Tambu’s understanding of colonial domination as illustrated by her words that she could “no longer could [...] accept Sacred Heart and what it represented” (Dangarembga 298). Ultimately, “Tambu finds a way in-between, a key to her survival in a changing society and a path for resistance to the obliteration of her African identity” (Bubenechik 36).

8. Conclusion

This thesis examined the concept of double oppression and resistance within Tsitsi Dangarembga's path-breaking novel, *Nervous Conditions*. Through an analysis of key thematic elements and female characters, I argued that women disproportionately bore the brunt of colonialism, contending with both patriarchal and colonial domination. A central demonstration of this dual oppression was seen in the unequal access to education favouring men, which endorses the rigid gender binaries inherent in colonial Rhodesia.

Furthermore, the depiction of characters like Mainini and Maiguru vividly illustrated the complexities of women's struggles within the colonial context, transcending class distinctions. I showed that colonial and patriarchal oppression of female characters intersects, with colonialism reinforcing indigenous patriarchy and thereby complicating women's resistance efforts. Through closely examining Fanon's notion of colonial violence manifested in the bodily symptoms, this thesis also explored the profound psychological impact of colonialism. I showed that women bear multiple burdens within colonial contexts as they are faced with both colonial and patriarchal constraints. In this regard, this work complemented Fanon's oversight of the nuanced levels of oppression that uniquely affect Black women.

Moreover, employing Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity, I analysed how colonial presence shapes identities that are not fixed but are in transition, particularly evident in the analysis of Nyasha's negotiation of dual cultural identities. Despite the manifold oppression faced by women, this thesis shifts the narrative away from portraying them solely as victims. Instead, by highlighting their assertiveness, defiance, and steadfast rebellion, I demonstrated that women are active agents of change, adeptly navigating societal constraints. This re-evaluation is exemplified notably in the portrayal of Lucia, whose defiance, assertiveness, and nonconformity to traditional gender roles deconstruct entrenched stereotypes pervasive in African male literary tradition. Furthermore, Lucia's representation underscores female solidarity, independence, and capacity to articulate her own opinions in defiance of male disapproval, thereby disrupting perceptions of women as passive victims. Additionally, the analysis illustrates how the female body becomes a site of resistance, as depicted in the characters of Nyasha and Tambu respectively.

Despite being published over three decades ago, *Nervous Conditions* remains pertinent today, particularly in its exploration of women's identities and their ongoing struggle for autonomy amidst the various forces of oppression. Women in many parts of the world are still faced with intersecting forms of discrimination, attempting to silence their voices. Ultimately, as demonstrated in this intricate piece of literature, women continuously resist and confront oppressive systems, affirming their active role as agents of change whose voices cannot be suppressed.

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10. Appendix

10.1. English Abstract

This thesis revisits Tsitsi Dangarembga's groundbreaking novel *Nervous Conditions* through the lens of postcolonial feminist theories, elucidating the multifaceted ways in which women struggle against the double oppression of sexism and colonialism. It delineates the multiple dimensions of women's identity and their quest for autonomy amidst the intertwined forces of patriarchy and colonial domination. Despite the manifold oppression they face, this work refutes the notion of women as mere victims. By highlighting their assertiveness, defiance, and steadfast rebellion, this thesis shifts the narrative away from viewing women as victims, entrenched in the male literary tradition, to recognizing them as active agents of change.

Keywords: Tsitsi Dangarembga, African women's writing, patriarchy, colonialism, hybridity, postcolonial literature, identity construction, gender

10.2. German Abstract

Die vorliegende Masterarbeit beleuchtet Tsitsi Dangarembgas bahnbrechenden Roman *Nervous Conditions* durch die Linse postkolonialer, feministischer Theorien und verdeutlicht die unterschiedlichen Arten, wie Frauen gegen die Unterdrückung durch Sexismus und Kolonialismus kämpfen. Sie skizziert die verschiedenen Dimensionen der weiblichen Identität und ihr Streben nach Autonomie angesichts der verflochtenen Kräfte von Patriarchat und kolonialer Herrschaft. Trotz der vielfältigen Unterdrückung, welcher Frauen ausgesetzt sind, widersetzt sich diese Arbeit der Darstellung von Frauen als bloße Opfer, wie sie in der männlichen Literaturtradition verankert ist. Stattdessen verschiebt die vorliegende Masterarbeit dieses Narrativ durch Hervorhebung der weiblichen Durchsetzungsfähigkeit, des Widerstands

und anhaltender Rebellion der Frauen hin zu ihrer Anerkennung als aktive Trägerinnen des Wandels.

Schlagwörter: Tsitsi Dangarembga, Afrikanische Frauenliteratur, Patriarchat, Kolonialismus, Hybridität, Postkoloniale Literatur, Identitätskonstruktion, Gender