

THE FEMINISATION OF POVERTY AND VICTIMHOOD IN DANGAREMBGA'S  
PRINT OEUVRE: CYCLICAL EVOCATIONS OF NERVOUS CONDITIONS,  
SURVIVAL, AND AGENCY

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## ABSTRACT

Feminisation of poverty is a term that was coined by Diana Pearce in 1976 after observing an increased concentration of income poverty among women in America (Peterson, 1987). This term was applied in the analysis of Tsitsi Dangarembga's oeuvre, mainly focusing on the victimhood, cyclical evocations of nervous conditions, survival strategies and agency that Zimbabwean women experienced and are still experiencing. This dissertation employed a qualitative desktop literary in the examination of four novels, *Nervous Conditions* (1988), *The Book of Not* (2006), *This Mournable Body* (2018) – which make up a trilogy spanning up to 30 years; and *She No Longer Weeps* (1987). The researcher employed Africana Womanism, STIWANISM, and Nego-feminism literary theories to underpin this study, from examining the complex position that African women face in the light of detrimental effects of colonisation and its impact and legacy as it integrates with traditional patriarchal structures as articulated in Dangarembga's novels. Africana Womanism as a concept was used so as to accommodate the characteristics of the African society which are unique and different because of its cultural, political, historical and social backgrounds, as other feminisms are peculiar to their place of origin. STIWANISM understands the female struggle from the perspective of African feminism which is entirely dependent on the commitment from both sexes, and not a woman affair as emphasised by other feminisms. Nego-feminism places both genders side by side as men and women to try and negotiate their places in life and establish a harmonious co-existence, with the negative patriarchal structures melting away. The study analysed how the author used the novels to expose issues related to post-colonial conditions, gender inequalities, cultural limitations, female self-definition and struggle for survival. The study found that the women in the Shona society are presented diversely depending on the socio-cultural background. Dangarembga strategically captured a world before and after independent Zimbabwe (1980s), where her main theme were her two protagonists' struggles to reshape

women's heterosexuality and femininity in a religiously conservative society adopted in a colonial era. The shared themes of womanhood that are depicted in all the texts are the need for a shift of women from the margins of the society to becoming priorities economically, socially, and culturally. This is the recurring theme whether the setting is in the 1980s or the 2000s, rural or urban; Shona women are still victims of the nervous conditions surrounding them.

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Above all, I thank the Almighty God, to Him, be the glory.

## **DEDICATION**

To my loving and caring grandparents, parents, and siblings, but most of all to my father, this one is for you. Thank you so much for standing by me. May God continue to bless you for me.

## **DECLARATION**

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

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

#### 1. Background of the study

Tsitsi Dangarembga is a female Zimbabwean filmmaker and writer whose novel (which was partially an autobiographical work) *Nervous Conditions* (1988) has become a modern African classic and the novel was awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1989 (Flood & Cain, 2020). Dangarembga has dealt in her works with the oppressive nature of the patriarchal family structure and a woman's coming of age (Wilkinson, 1992). African women's literature is the motive of resistance, positivity, triumph quests for a better life, and emancipation from poverty, societal constraints, culture, tradition and patriarchy. According to Mbatha (2009) when in crisis, many women do not just fold their arms in tears and self-pity but often seek liberation from subjugation through writing. African women writers explore ideal and actual issues concerning African women using autobiography and other literary forms. Their literature is postcolonial in that it explores new relationships and identities within societies that have recently acquired liberation from oppressive colonialists. However, their work is not only confined to this period, but also explores pre-colonial and neo-colonial life in Africa (Mbatha, 2009). The international recognition that *Nervous Conditions* received did not only demonstrate the validity of her feminist approach in an African context but also encouraged other Zimbabwean writers to tackle the issues of gender inequality as well (Wilkinson, 1992). With *Nervous Conditions* (1988) being named by the BCC as one of the 100 stories that shaped the world, Dangarembga continued to write about her protagonist's (Tambu) struggles in society in two more books, "*The Book of Not*" (2006) and "*This Mournable Body*" (2018) which make it a trilogy spanning a 30-year period.

Tsitsi Dangarembga's oeuvre is made up of novels that share many of the preoccupations of African women's autobiographical writing. A single narrator speaks throughout all the three novels, which may be defined as the narrative voice of the texts. The narrator is an internal participant of the story, and a seemingly reliable one since the rendering of the story and its commentary affords the reader the opportunity to accept it as an authoritative account of non-fictional truth (Rimmon- Kenan, 1987, p. 87). The occurrences that are described in the novels were already experienced and endured by the narrator. The protagonist is a young woman who tries to overcome hardships and develop herself to the fullest. However, because she is a woman, she is undermined and deemed inferior; this subordination is further influenced by cultural ideologies that give men a higher status than women. Dangarembga has spent a long living with two characters, the protagonist Tambu, a young woman who strives to obtain an education in her post-Rhodesian society and her cousin, Nyasha. However, Dangarembga's most autobiographical character in this trilogy is not Tambu, but her cousin Nyasha whose educational background and work closely resembles Dangarembga's (Miller, 2018). The literary texts explore how a Shona woman being oppressed by cultural norms, patriarchy and race had minimal chances for social advancement. Another of Dangarembga's works is, "*She No Longer Weeps*" (1987), a play written after the author's realisation of the women's involvement in the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe. The play has a daughter who directly battles with her parents for a social morality in a new independent Zimbabwe.

Diana Pearce first used the term "feminization of poverty" in 1976 following her observation of the increased concentration of income poverty among women in America (Peterson, 1987). Diana Pearce observed that two thirds of the poor were women over the age of 16 and an increasingly large number were from the economically disadvantaged groups (Strahan, 1993). Feminisation of poverty refers to a change in the levels of poverty biased against women or

female headed households. More specifically, it is an increase in the difference in the levels of poverty among women and men or among female versus male headed households (Pearce, 1978). According to Peterson (1987), women and economic development are at the core of the discourse on feminisation of poverty. A study on the Victorian ideology and the discourse of gender revealed that the notion that poverty has only recently been feminised has been challenged on the grounds that traditionally women have always been poorer than men but that they have been ignored for decades (Payne, 1991). Furthermore, another study of the feminisation of poverty revealed that women, for centuries, from culture to culture, have been consistently treated with ambivalence, misogyny and subordination (Chant, 2007). They have suffered denigration and subjugation in virtually all cultures where man is the carer of the family. In a patriarchal culture, men define the female just as they define nearly everything else (Chant, 2007). Male-identified ideals of women are premised on the basic assumption that women are and ought to be completely defined and understood within their biological capacities, sexual and reproductive (Yeseibo, 2018). Feminisation of poverty has been identified as major factor informing the state of poverty and victimhood amongst women in Zimbabwe and many parts of Africa (Kaka, 2013; McFerson, 2010; Robertson, 1988).

The study thus aims to explore the complex position that African women face in light of the detrimental effects of colonisation and its impact and legacy as it integrates with traditional patriarchal structures as articulated in Dangarembga's print oeuvre. According to Rodgers (2013), Tsitsi Dangarembga deals with the unique circumstances of girls and women in Southern African countries dealing with nervous conditions as well as the aftermaths of their freedom struggles, using the struggles of black women as an exceptional metaphor for the evolving identities of these freshly independent nations. The issues of post-colonial conditions, gender inequalities, cultural limitations, female self-definition and struggle for survival are exposed, challenged and discussed in the following work by Tsitsi Dangarembga: "*She No*

*Longer Weeps*” (1987), *“Nervous Conditions”* (1988), *“The Book of Not”* (2006) and *“This Mournable Body”* (2018), through the use of Africana womanism, Social Transformation Including Women in Africa (STIWANISM) and Nego-feminism.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

A plethora of gender and poverty studies have been conducted over the years (Chant, 2007; Nishimwe-Niyimbanira, 2013; McPherson, 2010), which shows the critical significance and urgency of this phenomenon, yet scant attention has been paid to Dangarembga’s print oeuvre despite her significant representational efforts on the cyclical nature of feminisation of poverty and victimhood. Over 60 studies from Latin America, Africa and Asia concluding that two-thirds of cases, female-headed households were poorer than male-headed households (Buvinic & Gupta, 1997), and most of references have been dominantly about why women are considered poorer than men or why poverty is assumed to be higher among female-headed households. Consequently, limited research has focused on the actual struggles women face, their nervous conditions, survival strategies and agency. The interrogation of the feminisation of poverty can be seen taking backstage. One can safely say that no research has focused on the holistic presentation by Dangarembga on the struggles that women face, their ‘nervous conditions’, survival strategies and agency. Thus, women’s issues have become fertile ground for scholarly reflections.

In literature, Zimbabwean writers like Tsitsi Dangarembga engage in issues of cultural construction of Zimbabwean women. It is in view of this trend that this study investigates how oppressive cultural practices, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and patriarchy leave women at the bottom of the society. The study also reflects on the strategies that women have adopted to ensure their survival in the face of patriarchy.

The central problem in this study was therefore exploring Dangarembga's representation of the complex pressures militating against women as well as, the cultural and societal beliefs that may influence one's perception of gender differences and inequalities that result from it.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

This study sought to explore the fictionalisation of feminisation of poverty and victimhood as it answered the following questions:

- 1.3.1 How does Dangarembga use fiction to represent the cyclical nature of a suffering woman and her coping strategies?
- 1.3.2 How do the selected literary texts participate in representing and reflecting the feminisation of poverty and victimhood?
- 1.3.3 In what ways does the author present the cyclical and constant causes of gender related challenges?
- 1.3.4 How effective are the Africana womanism, STIWANISM and Nego-feminism theoretical lenses in the analysis and examination of the impact of the feminisation of poverty on the Zimbabwean society?
- 1.3.5 What sort of theoretical concept can be developed to explain the cyclical evocations of nervous conditions, survival strategies and agency in African societies?

### **1.4 Significance of the study**

This study contributes to the critical concept of the dissemination of knowledge regarding feminisation of poverty in post- colonial Zimbabwe, in particular, as well as other African countries through works of literature. The purpose of this study was to examine and analyse how Dangarembga sensitises readers about the gender prejudices perpetuated by the societal and cultural constraints in post- colonial Zimbabwe. The study examined and analysed

Dangarembga's concerns and perspectives about the "nervous conditions" the women of the Zimbabwean society face as they are reflected in four of her post-colonial literary texts. Through analysing the four literary texts, Dangarembga's concerns and perspectives about gender prejudices in African societies will be made known to those who will access this research, as well as, enlighten the general public from different cultures in our societies, other women facing the same or similar injustices, and also academics studying African literature on gender prejudices in particular.

### **1.5 Limitations of the study**

The study focused only on four literary texts by Tsitsi Dangarembga, written after the independence of Zimbabwe. It is likely that some important information on the "nervous conditions" faced by women in other literary texts by other authors that were not selected might be left out. Secondly, the study was based on literary fiction and will be content analysed; that is, theoretical support for the arguments that were presented in this study were drawn from the three theoretical lenses, the Africana feminism theory, STIWANISM and Nego-feminism theories. Lastly, the study primarily focused on Dangarembga's English literary texts and not all other literary texts in English by other female authors after Zimbabwe's independence.

### **1.6 Delimitations**

The scope of the study was limited to the analysis of four of Tsitsi Dangarembga's literary works: namely *She No Longer Weeps* (1987); *Nervous Conditions* (1988); *The Book of Not* (2006); and *This Mournable Body* (2018). This was so as to cater for research manageability. There are many female writers in Africa who have written against gender inequality, but this study was limited to four books, which are set in Zimbabwe, Africa. The findings and conclusions of this study were based on the literary representation of the characters and the



environment specifically in the selected literary works and may not necessarily be universal to other literary texts of similar thematic concerns.

## **1.7 Research methodology**

This section presents the method that has been used to conduct this research.

### **1.7.1 Research design**

In this study, a qualitative research approach has been used where Tsitsi Dangarembga's literary texts *She No Longer Weeps* (1987); *Nervous Conditions* (1988); *The Book of Not* (2006); and *This Mournable Body* (2018) were analysed. This study was primarily a qualitative, desk top research where contemporary fiction set in Zimbabwe has been the central nerve of the study. The relevance of qualitative research in this study lies in its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of the characters' experiences as represented in fiction. In addition, qualitative research provides information about the "human" side of an issue like the survival and coping strategies which are under scrutiny in this study. Creswell (2014) defines a qualitative research study design as "an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problems, based on building a complex, or holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of respondents or informants, and or contacted in a natural setting." Therefore, since a qualitative method was used in this research, there was no fieldwork, but rather a literary analysis of contemporary fiction. This was a desktop study where already published sources were used to substantiate the arguments presented in this study. Mason (2002, p. 1) asserts that through qualitative research scholars can explore a wide array of dimensions of the social world, including the texture and weave of everyday life, understanding, experiences and imaginings of their research participants, the ways that social processes, institutions, discourses, co-relationships work, and the significance of meanings that they generate. This can be undertaken qualitatively by using methodologies that celebrate richness, depth, nuance,

context, multidimensionality and complexity rather than being embarrassed by them or inconvenienced by them.

Based on the above understanding of the tenets of a qualitative design, it was deemed a suitable approach which was used to conduct this study in order to investigate the phenomenon of feminisation of poverty and victimhood in the four female-authored texts. Content analysis allowed the researcher to analyse the literary texts, draw interpretations and make informed conclusions in relation to the position of the female figure as they unfold in the selected texts. This was achieved by unravelling the background, culture, and societal expectations which shape and mould the female character as these aspects determine the ‘nervous conditions’, struggles and survival strategies they face in their society. Masson (2002) further asserts that the qualitative research design is interpretative. Therefore, it is this aspect that shows that the design is concerned with the interpretation of the social world and it is applicable to novels as they are based on fictional social works.

Three African centred feminisms: Africana Womanism, STIWANISM, and Nego-feminism were suitable for the study as they sought to interrogate the position of women in relation to men. African feminisms positioned the female figures under a microscopic lens and unravelled the way they are depicted in the literary texts. The female figure is often shaped by background, culture, and expectations of society. The study examined how these female characters play out in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s literary texts. Works by literary critics, book reviews, journals, scholars’ research papers, academic presentations on the feminisation of poverty and victimhood were used in this study. These facilitated a close and critical analysis of the texts in order to understand and accommodate emerging themes.

### **1.7.2 Procedure**

As a desk top literary study, the data was collected through a critical reading and analysis of the selected novels through applying the specified theories of literature. The major theoretical frameworks which were employed to explore this research are Africana Womanism, STIWANISM, and Nego-feminism. All the novels were critically examined, informed by literary theory, and then consigned in terms of the themes and characters in as much as they relate to the nervous conditions, agency and survival strategies.

### **1.7.3 Data analysis**

Data of this qualitative study was analysed using thematic content analysis. The data of the proposed research is presented in emerging themes and subthemes informed by the literature review, as according to Bhattacharjee (2012), each text should be divided into segments or “chunks” that can be treated as separate units of analysis. This study has used thematic content analysis as it examines the presentation of feminisation of poverty and victimhood in, *She No Longer Weeps*; *Nervous Conditions*; *The Book of Not*; and *This Mournable Body* by Tsitsi Dangarembga. Leedy and Ormrod (2005, p. 142) synthesise content analysis as “a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of material for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes, or biases.” They further explain that it is used on forms of human communications which include books, newspapers, movies, or even transcripts of conversations.

The content was interrogated using the research questions of the study and themes which stem from the research topic. The researcher critically examined each novel to identify the female characters and their circumstances as they play various roles as daughters, sisters, aunts, wives, and workers in the working environment. The periods in which the literary works are set were considered in order to determine the shaping of the emerged women. Finally, the data was then translated through the lenses of the Africana womanism, STIWANISM as well as Nego-feminism as a supporting theory.

#### **1.7.4 Research ethics**

According to Bhattacharjee (2012, p.137), research “ethics is defined as conformance to the standards of conduct of a given profession or group.” The research is based on works of fiction whose characters are fictional and/or imaginative creations. Therefore, the literary criticism was hinged on the precept that references to real people, events, places, establishments, and organisations in the source material are used fictitiously, thereby enabling the researcher to observe literary research ethics. The researcher sought for written permission before the research commenced from the University of Namibia’s Research Ethics and Committee.

#### **1.7.5 Outline of chapters**

This study consists of eight chapters which are divided into titles and subtitles. Chapter One is the introduction which contains the background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives, significances, limitations, delimitations, methodology and research ethics of the study.

Chapter Two reviews the literature related to the feminisation of poverty and victimhood, nervous conditions and survival strategies and incorporates the theoretical frameworks (Africana womanism, STIWANISM and Nego- feminism) of the study.

Chapter Three examines and analyses the feminisation of poverty and victimhood in the selected literary text, *Nervous Conditions*. The chapter pays attention to the influence of patriarchy, culture and colonialism on women subjugation. It also presents the agency of challenging patriarchy, culture and colonialism, how women embrace sisterhood to attain freedom from patriarchy, culture and colonialism.

Chapter Four presents an analysis of the nervous *The Book of Not*, survival strategies and agency that the female characters in the selected literary works endure. It examines the

women's interventions to question patriarchy, culture and colonialism the empowerment gained from education and inclusivity of all gender as a way to attain equality.

Chapter Five presents an analysis of the final novel of the trilogy, *This Mournable Body*. It explores the relevance of the second person narrative as well as, the depiction of the female characters' sufferings and the after effects of post-independence. The chapter also touches on the metamorphosis of African women and how they empower themselves as a survival strategy.

Chapter Six is an analysis of the fourth text, *She No Longer Weeps*. The chapter pays attention to gender stereotypes and the socio-cultural limitations women endure. The chapter provides a deeper analysis of the female characters through the application of the three theories, Africana womanism, STIWANISM, and Nego-feminism.

Chapter Seven is a discussion based on the findings from all the analyses of the four selected literary texts, all analyses are grouped into one wholesome analysis.

Chapter Eight is the Conclusion and recommendations. The chapter addresses the conclusions and recommendations based on this study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This section reviews the literature that is related to the research topic – feminisation of poverty and victimhood as presented in semi-autobiographical postcolonial novels by Tsitsi Dangarembga. The aim is to show what is already known in literature about the nervous conditions, survival strategies and, agency that the Zimbabwean women face in their societies and the importance of the literary works, as well as the gaps in knowledge which exist and how this study seeks to fill up this gap and complement what is already known. The chapter also reviews the salient tenets of the three theoretical frameworks in detail; Africana womanism, STIWANISM and Nego-feminism as the magnifying lenses which position both men and women on the stage of literary works.

#### **2.2 Feminisation of poverty and victimhood: Cyclical evocations of nervous conditions, survival strategies and agency**

##### **2.2.1 Defining feminisation of poverty**

According to Veeran (2000), poverty is a national and an international social impediment, however, women tend to be most vulnerable to poverty. The term “feminisation of poverty” was coined by Diana Pearce in 1976, this was following her observation of women among women in America. Strahan’s article (1993), revealed that two thirds of the poor were women over the age of sixteen and an increasingly large number were from the economically disadvantaged groups. Donald (2012) asserts that the feminisation of poverty is now an undeniable reality worldwide, and women are more likely to be poor, unemployed, low-paid labour, and less likely to have access to land, credit or education. Being female and poor

subjects one to unique forms of stigma and control, as well as forcing one to bear the brunt of supposedly gender-neutral policies, which is evident in Dangarembga's literary works, through the female characters such as Tambu, Nyasha, Martha. Donald (2012) further states that the gender-specific and demeaning measures of control as well as containment that is applied to women overwhelmingly focuses on their bodies and reproductive capacity.

In the selected novels, feminisation of poverty and victimhood is presented throughout; it is hidden behind the terms patriarchy, culture, colonialism, marriage and education. In the depiction of African women in literary texts it is very important that they are not seen as mere appendages to men or perpetual victims. Each society is different and it would be unfair and not an artistic truth to view the African society through a foreign world view (Donald, 2012). Society evolves and develops, at times it is influenced by foreign elements like the European values from the West as a result of being colonised by a Western power – England, or it adapts to change in order to survive –for instance; the preferred education of boys so they could work in towns and farms for the colonial masters who needed menial but literate labour whilst the girls were nurtured more to be the defenders of the home, culture and nurturers of the family.

When Zimbabwe attained its independence in 1980, its literacy rate was quite low compared to the present day, which is almost 100%, this was because back then, Africans had little access to education since it was expensive and only those who were outstandingly brilliant or very lucky managed to further their education (Berndt, 2005). The education system for the Africans was designed to be bottleneck; only the best went further with their education.

“...but only two places were on offer, two places for all the African Grade Seven girls in the country. The effect was drastic and dangerous. We stopped liking each other as much as we used to in case the other was offered the place and we had to suffer the pangs of jealousy while she rose in status and esteem...” (Dangarembga, 1988, p.178)

This is a quotation from *Nervous Conditions* when Tambu is about to sit for her Grade seven examinations and was awarded a scholarship to attend school at Sacred Heart, the boarding school. The selection system was divisive and bred resentment in those not chosen and a superiority complex in those chosen. This accounts for the attitude of Tambu in *The Book of Not* when she perceives herself as better than her peers. Colonialism was divisive and thrived on playing off Africans against each other with petty divisions and pseudo promotions to a better life.

Families during the colonial period preferred to educate boys, not necessarily because they were a superior gender but out of economic common sense and it was also the prevailing social trend given the influence of European values promoted by the colonial regime (Windel, 2008). Boys stood a better chance of getting employment, were less vulnerable to rape and sexual abuse and the culture had always acknowledged women as the defenders of the home front. It was therefore more practical for men to go seek employment in the cities whilst the women subsidised their men's meagre city income by working in the fields and attended to the home. Windel, (2008) further states that in the African culture a man was expected to provide for his family and protect them as best as he could. The constant harassment over Land Tax, Hut Tax and Cattle Tax by the settler regime forced men to leave their homes to seek employment and pay these taxes for the sake of their families.

As much as this may have been the situation many years ago, these societal issues that were brought by the colonial regime still haunt many African women to this day. The lack of education is a major limitation on its own, one cannot get employed if they are not educated, even with the required qualifications, a man is most likely to get hired than a woman (Aegerter, 1996). In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu's mother preferred her daughter to learn how to take care of the family rather than focusing on school because she had to prepare herself for her future husband. One can say this was because of a lack of education, poverty as well as cultural



beliefs, had Tambu's mother been exposed to a completely different environment and education, she would have had a different mind-set. According to Aegerter (1996), It is the many factors that the Shona community has endured and adopted over the years that are contributing to the feminisation of poverty and victimhood against the Zimbabwean women.

### **2.2.2 Cyclical evocations of nervous conditions, survival and agency**

The cyclical evocations in the case of this study are the recurring memories or feelings to the conscious mind, the nervous conditions, survival strategies and agency that the Zimbabwean women have faced as depicted in the four selected literary texts. These memories or experiences are from when the female characters were little girls and now they are grown women, it is as though these women's struggles are stuck with them from birth till death. All their lives, they have had to endure all kinds of hardships and even when they try to escape or actually escape it all, they are labelled as outcasts or their societies will not accept their accomplishments. Dangarembga uses her literary work to expose how the Zimbabwean women try to liberate themselves from the influences of colonial rule, and how they are fighting the effects of patriarchy and culture (Aegerter, 1996). Her mission is to find her voice as well as other women's voices in a male dominated world.

In the case of "Nervous Conditions" it is both a theme and the name of one of Tsitsi Dangarembga's novels that will be used in this study. As a theme, it refers to the effects and struggles that the Zimbabwean women face as a result of colonialism, patriarchy, cultural limitations, gender inequalities and education. Furthermore, Nervous Conditions is also a title that was taken from the introduction by Jean-Paul Sartre to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. It refers to a psychological state of mind. The title of Dangarembga's novel alludes to the effect of colonisation on the minds of her characters (Plasa, 2000).

The 'nervous condition' can be understood as explaining the position of the native who feels as though she or he occupies multiple identities, some of which contradict other identities. The coloniser who imposes ideas of 'other' and its subordinate position upon the native creates this feeling for him or her (Eslamieh, 2005). The distinction lies between having the nervous condition, meaning truly possessing it, and consenting to the nervous condition, meaning unknowingly accepting the coloniser's 'diagnosis' and not having the faculties with which to rebel against this diagnosis. Eslamieh (2005) further states that though the colonised may be diagnosed as having a nervous condition, what both the coloniser and the colonised sense is multinational hybridity, without knowing how to interpret it. The novel's title, *Nervous Conditions*, implies that individuals cannot escape the categorisations that have been drawn up to identify them. Once something has been named, it cannot be erased from consciousness; therefore, Dangarembga embraces the term 'nervous conditions' as having a positive meaning, a meaning of hybridity which defines the identities of her people rather than one which suggests her people are lacking wholeness (Eslamieh, 2005). Furthermore, as with Sartre's claim that the colonised can only discover himself or herself "by thrusting out the settler through force of arms", (Fanon, 2001), Dangarembga's narrative calls on the colonised to make a statement about the 'consent' they are providing, asking them, as she did, to use the re-defined idea to speak against a defined state of being and a defined history. According to Eslamieh (2005), the varying factors which make up her identity are now a nervous condition that she can grasp and define in her own terms through her own writing. The native must first duel with the issue of being colonised in order to embrace it, thus discovering that the self is a solitary space that is in fact a composite of multiple spaces. In this sense, *Nervous Conditions* functions as a mirror for other young African women, as well as the changing global culture. It serves as a political piece of writing which can affect ideologies about postcolonial politics.

### **2.3 Why a female writer?**

According to Nyamubaya (1986), it has been long acknowledged that African women are at a disadvantage to their male counterparts in society. In today's African societies, African women struggle to retain their places and roles in society, which often goes unnoticed in a patriarchal world and capitalist economy. These women's nervous conditions are further worsened by the negative or inaccurate images of them in historical or present-day literature. This is usually done by the Western writers who do not understand the African culture and ways, as well as by patriarchal defensively conservative writers who depict Africa as a male dominated continent (Nyamubaya, 1986). Sadly, it is also done by African writers who mean well, but were educated by a racist colonial system and are consciously spreading and teaching the Eurocentric ideals.

The portrayal of characters in the works of African writers reveals a preference for male characters as protagonists while the female characters are usually depicted as supporting characters. Kumah (2000) stated that because of the male- dominated literary tradition, many depictions of the African women are reductive, and they perpetuate popular myths of female subordination. Kumah (2000) further asserted that female characters in male- authored works are rarely granted primary status, their roles are usually trivialised to multiple degrees and they are portrayed as silent and submissive in nature.

Furthermore, Kaplan (1985) revealed that the images of women in the works of female authors are a reflection on the ways in which traditional practices perpetuate women's oppression. However, the female writers' own absorption of patriarchal values might result in them to create female characters who fulfil society's stereotypes of women. McElDowney (1999) examined the influence of male domination in the literary world and asserted that because African literature has more male writers, a publishing world that is dominated by males, male

critics; this tends to disadvantage female writers. Because male writers dominate African literature, female writers often struggle to achieve fairness.

Furthermore, African scholars agree on the theory that there is a difference between African feminism and Western feminism, and that the marginalisation of African women dates back to colonialism. Some scholars like Arndt (2002) and Afisi (2010) have provided different solutions to the problem but their prognosis remains the same; colonialism and the Western patriarchal values played and still play a major role in silencing the traditional role of the African woman, to the extent that she herself might even be unaware of it in today's society. Stratton (2002) referring to contemporary African literature, stated, "African female writers and their works have been rendered invisible in literary criticism." Stratton (2002) highlighted Ogunديpe-Leslie's observation that the experience of marginalisation "is reflected in the thematic preoccupations of African's women's literature, whereas men's literature is usually full of valorisations of the status quo of male domination."

According to McEldowney (1999), Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel, *Nervous Conditions* was rejected by four publishers for portraying black females negatively. Literature is said to mirror societies, therefore, the portrayal of women in African literature has to be a realistic picture of society in the era that it reflects.

Any form of literature is powerful as it empowers or disempowers anyone who has access to it. Patriarchal writing that is conscious or unconscious usually results in two main things, that is, women subjugation and placing the male figure at the apex of stratification. Afisi (2010) asserts that African countries and societies have not always been like this, in Africa, a patriarchal system has always been followed but women also had leadership roles in society, mainly the survival of the family unit, preservation of society's morals and ethics, they also had a legal voice. Gender used to be role based and not gender based, every single individual

had an important role in society. The rule of responsibility indirectly started the subjugation of one gender and promoted another, therefore, promoting resentments in societies. Afisi (2010) affirms that the coming of colonialism and absorption of different cultures made women become inferior and not complementary to her male counterparts. Colonialism thrived on discrimination and divisionism. It is through the colonial system that African women were placed at the bottom of the social stratification.

Tiffin (1995) agrees that the colonial systems the black governments adopted during independence were unfair to the girl child, these systems marginalised her and displaced her. Therefore, it is not surprising that African women do not seem to know of their own power, influence and rights in their societies. Stone (2006) writes, “Under colonialism, female storytellers were excluded from the few powerful positions the British system of colonization allowed in Rhodesia,” which suggests that the place for female writers was also suppressed by colonisers. Only women seem to be concerned about revealing the internal pressures of postcolonial Zimbabwe. However, these hidden pressures are causing “nervous conditions” in Dangarembga’s novel. A female character (protagonist) narrates a story about women, bearing the light to women’s struggles and agency to themselves within a conservative and constraining society.

Tsitsi Dangarembga may have had a privileged background but it was her exposure to different cultures that made her return to her own (other women) in her own country (Viet-Wild, 1993). According to Rodger (2013), Dangarembga’s writing is a mixture of informative and satirical, yet clearly exposing a problem in today’s societies. Her writing awakens strong reactions and responses, but mostly educates. Sisimayi (2017) asserts that Dangarembga writes to force change and switches from one form of feminism to another in order to suit her purpose. In her first novel, *Nervous Conditions* (1988) she presents women as their own saviour; in *The Book*

*of Not* (2006) warns people about colonialism and the third part of the trilogy; *This Mournable Body* (2018) exposes how the potential and hope of a young girl can easily change and become a bitter struggle for survival. Another of Dangarembga's novels, *She No Longer Weeps* (1987) is based on the Shona (African) culture where she exposes patriarchy, suggesting that women have been side-lined for too long in literary texts and it is time for them to become the focus in African literature, especially writings that are authored by female writers (Vambe & Khan, 2013).

## **2.4 Rationale for combining four novels by the same author**

Critics such as (Aegerter, (1996), Aninakwa, (2015), Ayebanoa, (2009), Broekman, (1999), and Mabura, (2010)) have analysed Tsitsi Dangarembga's imaginative writings before but her work has either been studied individually or has been studied together with other contemporary female Zimbabwean writers Yvonne Vera or Petina Gappah, as well as other female African writers. Dangarembga's works have never been holistically studied with the aim of exploring the complex position that African women face in light of the detrimental effects of colonisation and its impact and legacy as it integrates with traditional patriarchal structures. Not only does focusing on the social features that historically bind Tsitsi Dangarembga within Zimbabwean social emancipation allows the researcher to combine and study four of her literary novels together, but it allows the researcher to explore and examine issues of oppression, domination, marginalization, victimization and silencing of women by social and colonial structures and ideologies, which are written from an African woman's perspective.

The combining of four of her fictional novels, *Nervous Conditions* (1988), *The Book of Not* (2006), *This Mournable Body* (2018) and *She No Longer Weeps* (1987) is mainly inspired by the fact the author is a postcolonial black female writer and the novels have the same social and historical settings from an African perspective that exposes the factors that oppress black

women. Dangarembga also explores the nervous conditions that the Zimbabwean women have faced or are still battling with as well as their survival strategies they use to tackle these challenges. Furthermore, as much as Dangarembga acknowledges that it is necessary to focus on sexual domination, she believes this focus should also include socio-economic realities and women emancipation in the society if total emancipation for women is to be achieved.

Dangarembga protests against oppressive ideologies and all kinds of injustices that women succumb to and have to deal with. Kolawole (1997) asserts that much of African women's literature is about change and that change is effected through literary creativity. Dangarembga makes use of her imaginative writing to question and expose systems and structures that oppress women and challenges the oppressive structures and ideologies for the voiceless women in her society. Her objectives and vision are advanced by the Africana womanism, STIWANISM, and Nego-feminism theories which I included in the fiction of this Zimbabwean female writer in this study. The author's work is also combined as all the four novels share the same vision in their literary projects of bringing an end to all forms of female oppression, domination and reclaiming their roles and places in the society by speaking up in the form of writing and teaching other women to do the same.

The four novels by Dangarembga are critiqued in this study because it is an African woman who articulated the subject of women oppression and emancipation from an African perspective within the framework of African womanism, STIWANISM and Nego-feminism theoretical frameworks. Literature by African women was pioneered by the first crop of African writers such as Flora Nwapa, Mariama Ba and Buchi Emecheta, to mention but just a few. African authors have used their voice to raise important issues that affect Black women (Collins 2001). It is these issues that Dangarembga exposes in the four novels that I analysed for this study.

## 2.5 Gaps identified

There appears to be little or no research on the proposed topic particularly with regards to the selected literary texts under study, though there are multiple studies on feminisation of poverty that do not focus on literary studies (Kang'ethe & Munzara, 2017; Villinger, 2005; Moghadam, 2005; and Chant, 2007). Kang'ethe and Munzara (2017) focused on the relationship between the feminisation of poverty and feminisation of HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe and indicated that the two phenomena bear an extricable relationship, with both mutually and reciprocally reinforcing one another. Moreover, Villinger (2005) proffers that there is a wide gap between the rich and poor women in the United States. In addition to these studies, Moghadam's (2005) central focus was on the cross regional variation in the economic status of female-headed households, based partly on the social policy or political regime, and on women's access to employment and property; whilst Chant (2007) worked on ways to aggregate gender indices in relation to feminisation of poverty. Thus, the literature does not interrogate the issues of feminisation of poverty and victimhood, particularly from a literary perspective using the proposed texts, thus demonstrating a gap for the present study.

According to Cornwall (2004), African gender studies emerged in the wake of the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. Literary criticism sheds more light into a given culture's ideology and belief systems as supported by Gaidzanwa (1985), who asserts that, "Literature is an important part of this experience because it mirrors and interprets the society from the points of view of those who write about it." Mabura (2010) focused on how black Zimbabwean women in Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and its sequel find prospect, refuge, and voice in their ancestral landscapes; whereas, Aegerter (1996); concentrated on a dialectic of autonomy and community in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. However, this proposed study endeavours to explore the cyclical evocations of nervous conditions, survival strategies and agency as presented in the selected



texts as this is an area that has largely been unexplored and such a gap in literary criticism calls for stern considerations.

Chant (2014) explored the links between a revisionist view of the feminisation of poverty in developing countries, and women's work and home-based enterprise in urban slums in The Gambia, Philippines and Costa Rica. A similar study focused on the structural roots of feminisation of poverty, paying particular attention to the sexual division of labour, notion of dependency and deservingness in the American society (Minkler, 1985). In contrast, a supporting study was conducted but it focused the American women's human rights (Moghadam, 2005). Furthermore, even though the selected novels have been studied in various ways, there is no research that has focused on feminisation of poverty and victimhood in Zimbabwe and making use of a female Zimbabwean author's oeuvre to investigate that which causes poverty and victimisation amongst women in Zimbabwe and similar African societies, it is upon this premise my study aims to expose this deficit.

According to Stratton (2002), feminist narratives in Africa serve the purpose of "using writing as weapons to invade the battlefields that had been previously occupied by male writers by way of rewriting and questioning the traditional oppressive conditions specific to their post-colonial heritage in a constantly changing post-colonial context," (p. 67). Martin-Shaw (2007) examined the influences Tsitsi Dangarembga's thinking which discerned from the continuities and changes between *Nervous Conditions* and *She No Longer Weeps*, regarding Dangarembga's engagement of the postcolonial politics, representation of feminist consciousness, and female ambivalence towards sexuality. In contrast, Mucheke and Vhutuza (2017) confronted scenarios in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *She No Longer Weeps*, thus, leaving a gap to explore the feminisation of poverty and victimhood in the selected literary texts, which the present study intends on exploring. However, there seems to be little research done by scholars on the issue of feminisation of poverty as presented in the selected novels by Tsitsi

Dangarembga. A third part of the trilogy, called *This Mournable Body* (2018), which focused on the obstacles Zimbabwean women are facing has not been researched to date, therefore, the author's works seem not to have been extensively explored altogether in order to fully understand the cyclical evocations of the nervous conditions, survival strategies and agency the women face. This creates a possible gap for this proposed study.

Broekman (1999) demonstrated that African female writers often go through a lot of challenges mainly because of their social and economic situation in their countries, and this has led to writers like Tsitsi Dangarembga to adopt unusual literary strategies just so their voices or cries are heard in the literary arena, as well as in their communities. Most African women are subjects of patriarchal systems and previously were subjects of oppressive colonial systems, which meant that they were faced with sexual discrimination in virtually every aspect of life. Therefore, Broekman (1999) focused on briefly describing the influence of these oppressive factors on African female writers and examined the influence they have had on Tsitsi Dangarembga's choice of narrative strategies when writing one of her novels, *Nervous Conditions*.

Musvoto (2004) also conducted a study on the exploration of the social vision of three Shona female writers with regard to their Zimbabwean society, at the same time attempting to ascertain whether this vision is entrenched in the post-independence context or has been shaped by the whole canvas of colonization and its impact on Shona society. In order to conduct this study Musvoto (2004) made use of three novels by different writers, that is, Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Yvonne Vera's collection of short stories *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* (1992) and Freedom Nyamubaya's poetry in *Dusk of Dawn* (1994) and this leaves a gap for another study as this study did not make use of Tsitsi Dangarembga's novels only. Therefore, this study's results will not provide the complete story from before and after colonisation or independence.

Moyana (1996) focused on the gender issues between the men and women in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and *She No Longer Weeps*. According to Moyana (1996), the portrayal of women in these two novels is complex but the one main thing that stands out is that women must deal squarely with their social problems and young girls must also struggle for their advancement, it be educationally or socially. Furthermore, these two novels portray the female characters differently from early Zimbabwean literature that was written in English. Some novels portray men and women in such glaring antagonism ending with women being the ones with an upperhand. Moyana (1996) asserts that in Dangarembga's novels, gender issues are dealt with controversially.

According to Rafapa et al. (2014), Tsitsi Dangarembga has not received enough critical attention, despite her making a distinct and worthy contribution towards an unbiased depiction of the plight of women on the African literary scene. Rafapa et al. (2014) conducted a study on negotiating social change in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. The findings from their study revealed that Dangarembga's portrayal of realistic and positive female characters has questioned the tangential and stereotypical place the African women have often been assigned. Dangarembga's work, together with that of other African female writers may be considered as synecdochical for the life of African women who have so often been misrepresented or ignored in works of most male writers.

Rodgers' (2013) study on the representations of women, identity and education in the novels of Tsitsi Dangarembga and Kopano Matlwa focused on how African women are represented in the texts taking place at particular socio-historical moments, including implications and interpretations of the literal and cultural shift from the indigenous, rural or segregated environments to Western, urban and racially mixed ones. Excluding Kopano Matlwa's novels, this study made use of two of Dangarembga's novels (*Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*) which will be used in this study as well. Rodgers (2013) concludes that the representation

of women in the novels varies, leaving few successful role models for navigating workable identities for the characters as mothers, wives, and autonomous individuals. The novels offer interesting imaginaries for the future of their respective countries. Moreover, the texts promote education tempered with a respect for home cultures and racial reconciliation

Another study was conducted on a critical analysis of representations of gender violence and resistance to such violence in selected novels by Zimbabwean women writers, Yvonne Vera and Tsitsi Dangarembga (Naidoo, 2016). The study analysed the Zimbabwean female writers' literary contributions to discourses on gender-based violence and explored how female characters have embraced the concept of agency to recreate their identities and to introduce a new gender ethos into the contexts of lives that are often shaped by severe restrictions and oppression.

Pasi (2017) investigated the relationship between humans and the nonhuman world or natural environment in selected literary works by black female writers in colonial and post-colonial Namibia and Zimbabwe. This study focused on how African literary feminist studies have not attracted much mainstream attention yet mainly to raise some issues concerning ecologically oriented literary criticism and writing. This study may have used two novels (*Nervous Conditions*, 1988 and *The Book of Not*, 2006) that will be explored and analysed in this study but its findings cannot be linked to this study as it focuses on the feminisation of poverty and victimhood. Therefore, this leaves a gap for a study.

In a patriarchal culture, men define the female just as they define nearly everything else. All male-identified ideals of women are premised on the basic assumption that women are and ought to be completely defined and understood within their biological capacities, sexual and reproductive. Yeseibo (2018) conducted a study on female self-definition and determination in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *She No Longer Weeps* (1987). According to Yeseibo (2018), women

have for centuries been exploited by retrograde elements in our culture and Dangarembga is a feminist who seeks equality of the sexes by passionately attacking the relegation of women to a lower status.

Moslehuddin's (2011) study on the emancipation of women using *Nervous Conditions* (1988) revealed that the portrayal of the woman in this novel is a striking reminder that African women are under a yoke when it comes to making their voices heard. And changing the unequal balance of decision-making power and control between men and women – in the household, in the workplace, in communities, in government and in the international arena - will lead to women's empowerment and their emancipation.

Ouahmiche and Boughouas (2016) focused on gender and its upshot on marginalising women and strengthening the knot of racism. It tackles gender roles and the respective sociocultural dictations of rights and duties of African men and women. According to Ouahmiche and Boughouas (2016), when all the circumstances join forces against them, the female characters opt for two alternatives. Either they concede and accept their victimised position as fated by destiny or they revolutionize to usher in change and adjustment. The concept of change has been attached due heed throughout the story, however, it was not made clear till the end of the novel. It can be said that *Nervous Conditions* (1988) is indeed all about the struggle for positive transformation that cannot end with what has been planned for.

Moreover, in relation to Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Marima (2011) focused on the multiple figurations of femininity challenging traditional Zimbabwean values are articulated in the representations of womanhood, motherhood and sexuality in the writing of Tsitsi Dangarembga (1959-) and Yvonne Vera (1964-2005). Marima (2011) notes that the writing expresses a willingness to challenge old assumptions and account for the complex identities of femininity and this thesis has drawn on a range of cognitive tools with which to

make sense of these depictions and to offer a new, provocative way of imagining womanhood in Zimbabwean and African literary discourses.

According to Mbatha (2009), African women's literature is of significance for feminist theory because it focuses mainly on issues from women's perspectives and experiences such as sexism, gender relationships, marriage, politics, education and employment. In essence, African women's literature portrays their quest for emancipation from male dominance. Mbatha's (2009) study explored the gender, race, class and cultural experiences of black African women. It also analysed *Nervous Conditions* (1988) from a feminist point of view of women's subjugation. The main argument of this study was based on the notion that even though gender oppression against women is widely discouraged and is in the process of being eradicated, unequal power relations between the sexes still lingers. Mbatha (2009) concluded women may share certain experiences of sexism and domestic responsibility and may differ in ethnic origin, class or culture, but what unites most of them is their consciousness that it is other people who set the agenda. Thus, what serves to link powerless social groups are their experiences of 'otherness' and exclusion from the sites of power and meaning making.

Khader (2013) focused on culture, unhomeliness, and the politics of expansion in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988). Khader (2013) adds that *Nervous Conditions* stages the production of African women's estimated subjectivities through an interrogation of the tactic of unhomeliness. In Dangarembga's narrative of displacing, unhomeliness is articulated through a negotiation of both the dominant structures of Englishness, or whiteness, which was imposed on native children through the missionary educational system, and the affiliative structures of kinship and belonging that are embodied in the female Shona characters' relationships with their mothers.

Moreover, Sisimayi's (2017) study on the representation of marginalised voices and trauma in the selected fiction of Tsitsi Dangarembga and Yvonne Vera, focuses on *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and its sequel *The Book of Not* (2006). This study analyses the selected novels for my study from the feminist/womanist, gender and postcolonial literary models, which leaves a gap for a study, as my study will be making use of Africana womanism, STIWANISM and Neco-feminism theoretical lenses.

Another study on a feminist analysis of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* was conducted by Moyana (1994). According to Moyana (1994), we can say that both men and women suffer at the hands of the patriarchal system in this novel and both sexes also suffer from the effects of colonialism. However, women suffer more at the hands of the men as they are often abused and denigrated. Even Chido, Nyasha's brother, denigrates women implicitly in the one statement he utters when he says, "I hope Nyasha has made my cake," and when assured she has, he continues, "Good. Because you never know with Nyasha." (Dangarembga 1988, p. 88).

Another research was conducted by Ayebanoa (2019), who explored the effect of colonialism in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, the study investigates the negative and positive effects of imperialism on Dangarembga's fictional characters and by extension the Zimbabwean society, using the postcolonial critical approach. According to Nyanhango's (2011) study, *Nervous Conditions* (1988) depicts some of the ways in which traditional assumptions regarding of the role of women in Zimbabwean societies can serve to confine and oppress women, limiting their options in life:

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 early, 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, 1988, p. 16)

Women should not be hindered in their efforts to attain empowerment. The drum must keep on beating until we are satisfied from within, because social transformation is not possible until individual transformation first takes place (Nyanhango, 2011).

One of the major challenges in the writing and analysis of African women's literature has been lack of an acceptable theoretical focus. So much of the writing and analysis of this literature has been influenced by the Feminist paradigm, and which largely operates within the walls of Western thinking. There is need for an African – Centred paradigm and theoretical framework. According to Mangena's (2013), study that focuses on the relevance of the Africana Womanist Theory to the writing and analysis of Zimbabwean literature, one of the major challenges in the writing and analysis of African women's literature has been lack of an acceptable theoretical focus. Mangena (2013) concluded that in as much as Africana Womanism is global in its approach to an understanding of Africana women's realities, it is weakened because of the diversity of localised realities, particularly inherent in the African continent. Therefore, this allows the researcher to develop a theoretical concept that can fully explain the cyclical evocations of nervous conditions, survival strategies and agency in African societies.

According to Miller (2018), in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, the most evident colonial power structure is the education system. Education occupies a paradoxical position; it both promotes the values of the dominant culture and uncovers injustices of the culture toward



its victims. The mixed benefits and downfalls of systematic colonial education are split distinctly between Dangarembga's characters Tambu and Nyasha. It almost seems that the novel offers Nyasha as a warning against an overly heightened self-awareness and noncompliance. While Dangarembga has initially used the stark contrast between the girls to simplify a complicated issue, the characters grow more complex and intermingled over the course of the novel, resulting in mixed and perhaps irreconcilable feelings for readers. Tambu preserves her identity and Nyasha destroys hers, but self-preservation and self-destruction are not categories. They are outcomes of the same institution, an institution that leaves a tragic paradox of growth and ruin in its wake (Miller, 2018).

Sinclair (2012) carried out a study on the disempowerment of women in Middle Eastern and African literature, making use of *Nervous Conditions* as one of the novels for analysis. Women all over the world struggle every minute with a culture or religion that imparts its harsh realities on them. There are those bound by patriarchy to the point that any rebellion will result in death. Many are also overpowered by men who are only mimicking what colonisation has shown them. Their lives are unsecured and oppressed. They live voiceless yet still with a tinge of hope that liberation will come to their rescue as a result of their perseverance and determination. Sinclair (2012) suggests that women were created for more than the inferiority to which they often submit. Being cognizant of the progression they have made as well as the victimisation that remains to be resolved are significant in leading all women to establish their intended identity. When women can identify themselves apart from their disempowerment and use that oppression to nurture their determination, they can be victorious.

More so, Rine (2011) concentrated on presence of *unhu*, a process of becoming and remaining human through community ties, in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*. According to Rine (2011), Dangarembga interrogates corrupt versions of community by creating positive examples of *unhu* that alternatively foster community building. Utilising eco-

critical, utopian, and postcolonial methodologies, this thesis postulates that these novels stress the importance of retaining a traditional concept like *unhu* while also acknowledging the need to adjust it over time to ensure its vitality. Both novels depict the creativity and resilience of *unhu* amid toxic surroundings.

Vambe and Khan (2013) wrote an article on decolonising the epistemic decolonial turn in women's fiction, based on Tsitsi Dangarembga's *She No Longer Weeps* (1987) and Federico Garcia Lorca's *Dona Rosita the Spinster* (2008). The aim of this article was to participate in a debate on the epistemic decolonial turn that is popularised in Latin America, and has found succour in some African universities despite the fact that its origin is in Western Europe.

In addition, another study on feminisms in the works of African female playwrights was conducted by Selasi (2015). The writings of African women go a long way to reflect on the identity of an African woman and her conditions. According to Selasi (2015), Tsitsi Dangarembga and Tracie Chima Utoh- Ezeajugh are two such African female writers, some of whose work is truly tells the situation of African women. This study examined Utoh- Ezeajugh's *Nneoma: An African Doll's House* and Dangarembga's *She No Longer Weeps* to ascertain how women are portrayed for the purpose of social stereotypes and contrasts. The study highlights the meaning of womanhood and stereotypical notions attached to women in specific African contexts and its place in the changing world.

Tayengwa (2018) set out to explore how victims of family disintegration adopt to their quandary as presented in the literary works of Dangarembga and Vera in *She No Longer Weeps* and *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals*. The research investigated how the victims of family integration, due to divorce, intra-family conflict, war, violence, abuse, work, colonisation and urbanisation survive or adopt to the rigorous circumstances befalling them.

Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) depicts the struggle that women endured in a colonised Rhodesia. The patriarchal system of the Shona community has prevented women from emancipating and becoming more than only hardworking and obedient wives to their husbands. Women who deviate from this norm often become outcasts of their communities (Osmani, 2019). The essay by Osmani (2019) examines how the factors that inspire Tambudzai and Nyasha to counter the patriarchy are portrayed and how these factors contribute to the formation of hybrid identities among the younger generation of women in *Nervous Conditions*.

Aninakwa (2015) discusses female emancipation as depicted in three novels by African women- *The Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta, *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga and *Changes* by Ama Ata Aidoo. Aninakwa's (2015) study reveals that cultures all over the world perceive the female gender as inferior to the male. The biological make-up of a woman has over the years given a certain stereotypical notion of the nature of the female gender all over the world. For a long time, women have been labelled mothers, child bearers, wives and home keepers, with kitchen as their office and everything weak has been ascribed to the female.

This is also mentioned in Sheila Ruth's *Issues in Feminism* when she writes:

No "real man" may tolerate (within himself at least) the tender qualities. He must deny himself any tendency toward them, any personal experience of them. Instead, these traits must be projected outward. The compliment of his masculine character is settled on his sexual complement, woman: "I am man; she is woman. I am strong; she is weak. I am tough; she is tender. I am self- sufficient; she is needful (Ruth, 1998)

In contrast, Kackery (2009) concentrated on the voices of resistances, a relocation of Fanon through the works of Tsitsi Dangarembga. This study confronts the external and internal manifestations of racism and sexism as perpetuated by colonialism (past, neo, and post) and

patriarchy. According to Kackery (2009), Dangarembga's rhetorical creations of *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not* express a humanist interrogation of the effects of colonisation and patriarchy. Fanon pushes for national, as well as psychological, liberation and colonial rule through fighting, intellectually and physically. Dangarembga's texts further exemplify a humanist positioning of Fanon's works by exploring themes of national consciousness and psychoanalysis within the narrative voice.

This literature review mostly comprises of information that was gathered on three of the four selected novels that will guide this study. These three novels are *Nervous Conditions* (1988), *She No Longer Weeps* (1987), and *The Book of Not* (2006). The fourth novel, *This Mournable Body* (2018) recently published, so there were no studies based on the novel at the time of conducting the present study. However, the available literature does not explore feminisation of poverty and victimhood in the selected novels, nor does it examine the nervous conditions, survival strategies and agency of the female characters presented in the novels. The literature also does not suggest the development of a theoretical concept that explains the cyclical evocations of nervous conditions, survival strategies and agency in African societies. Therefore, this demonstrates a gap for the present study.

## **2.6 Theoretical frameworks of the study**

Due to its broad nature, the study adopted three main theories. The research adopted the African feminism theory, STIWANISM and Neco-feminism theory. These theories serve to acquaint the researcher to prevailing data on the topic of the study as well as to permit the reader to critically evaluate the existing knowledge.

### **2.6.1 Africana womanism**

The study uses Africana womanism in order to accommodate the characteristics of the African society which are unique and different because of its cultural, political, historical and social

backgrounds, as other feminisms are peculiar to their place of origin (Hudson- Weems, 1994). Feminism differs from setting to setting and even from one woman to the next. As much as the underlying concerns are the same; (removing the yoke of patriarchy), but the approach is determined by the background of the situation.

Africana womanism is a term that was coined by Clenora Hudson-Weems in the 1980s, intended as an ideology applicable to all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture and Afrocentrism and focuses on the experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of African women of the African diaspora (Ntiri, 2001). It distinguishes itself from Western/ mainstream feminism. The nature and agenda of western feminisms seem not to particularly consider the African woman's situation whereby she is burdened by and buried under a two-tier oppression; colonisation and patriarchy. Africana womanism pays more attention to and focuses more on the realities and the injustices in society in regard to race (Ntiri, 2001). Africana womanism is geared to be absolutely African- centred. Hudson-Weems (1994) is of the belief that the creation of the ideology, Africana womanism, separates African women's accomplishments from African male scholars, feminism, and black feminism. According to Gilliam (2013), the terminology Africana Womanism appropriately fits Africana woman, who is both Self-Namer and Self-Definer ("I have to know who I am"). Such realities include the diverse struggles and experiences, as well as needs of Africana women. The Africana womanism consists of 18 characteristics of The Africana womanist, including self-naming, self- defining, family- centred, flexible, wholeness, adaptability, authenticity, black- female sisterhood, struggling with males against oppression, male compatibility, recognition, ambition, nurturing, strength, respect for elders, respect, mothering, and spirituality (Alexander- Floyd & Simien, 2006). This theory is distinguishable from all other female based theories because of its insistence upon the prioritizing of race, class, and gender in that order. Ntiri (2001) made use of the Africana womanism theory as a literary theory, this proposed

study will analyse four African literary works according to the principles set forth in Hudson-Weems' *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*.

According to Alexander-Floyd and Simien (2006), each of the principle mentioned above has a meaning. According to Hudson-Weems (1994), the first principle *Self-Naming* discusses the importance of self-identifying as an African woman in society. The Africana identification is distinguishable from feminism and black variants. Self-naming is the period of recognizing the need for an Africana movement with its own name. Alexander-Floyd and Simien (2006) assert that his second principle, *Self-Definition*, describes the realities that African women face, through a Pan-African lens. The Pan-African movement attempts to create a sense of brotherhood among all people of African descent, regardless of whether or not they live on the continent of Africa (Hudson-Weems, (1994). Self-definition explores gender inequalities and stereotypes in the modern patriarchy. Self-naming and self-definition are the first two characteristics of Africana womanism. The term "nommo" is given to the idea of self-naming, which is important because in order for one to exist it has to be given a correct name. There is an increasing need for self-naming, self-defining, and self-identity for Black people and self-defining helps to discover one's identity through their own point of view of their world that goes against that of the dominant culture (Alexander-Floyd & Simien, 2006).

The second grouping of characteristics includes Family-Centeredness, Wholeness, Authenticity, Role Flexibility, Adaptability, in Concert with Men, and Genuine Sisterhood. The principle of family-centeredness focuses on the entire black family unit. The interest in the success of the black community as a whole maintains a sense of wholeness (Alexander-Floyd & Simien, 2006). Any important outcomes are shared as overarching closeness of the black community and are enforced by the women in society. The commitment to immediate and extended family is of crucial importance to African women, as it shapes the third principle outlined by Clenora Hudson-Weems 1994). The principle of *Wholeness* describes the

importance of self-sufficiency that an African woman must have in order to upkeep her household. Wholeness also stresses the required self-esteem that emanates from within an African woman who must be strong for not only herself, but for her family and community as a whole. *Completeness*, going hand in hand with *Wholeness*, is defined as the unbroken unity that an African woman is responsible for upholding inside the home and out (Hudson-Weems, 1994).

The first five components all emphasise the commitment to family that is of major importance to African women. There is a high interest in success of the group and collective outcomes that maintains a sense of wholeness. Alexander-Floyd, et al. (2006) state that there is a balance of putting the family first, which would be wholeness, without neglecting the career of the women. *Role flexibility* and *adaptability* are also important parts of family-centeredness because of their roots in the history of black women. Furthermore, Alexander-Floyd et al. (2006) assert that the *Role Flexibility* principle acknowledges and discusses the fact that the African woman has never been a subjugate. African women are active in the workforce, take part in leadership opportunities presented, and do not need to be domestic. According to Waddell (2013), history indicates that African women experienced flexible gender roles meaning that African women not only had experience working outside of home along with men but all within the home. For *adaptability*, African women not only adapted to different work environments but also to the lack of luxuries that were experienced by white women and feminists. Alexander-Floyd et al. (2006) add that for struggling with African men against oppression and African female sisterhood, African womanist see that there is a fight against oppression that is being fought by African men and see themselves fighting on the same team as African men. Sisterhood in African womanism has to be genuine and is genuine through the fact that African women go through the same experience of oppression and can therefore empathise with one another (Alexander-Floyd, et al. 2006). Due to these conditions, African women were forced to

experience while under white domination, African women developed an extreme ability to be adaptable. Women were forced to sacrifice their own goods and desires for the sake of often times, their safety. African women were often forced to compromise their dignity, as well as their ambition. Lastly, there are in *Concert with Men* and *Genuine Sisterhood* (Alexander-Floyd, et al. 2006). In concert with men is the African women's push to develop strong relationships with like-minded men in the struggle for overarching African liberation and the eventually African women's liberation. Alexander-Floyd et al. (2006) further assert that the concept of *Genuine Sisterhood*, which is one of the eighteen characteristics of Africana Womanism, is integral for the survival of women in a male-dominated society. The foundation of female relationships is violated by the habitual behaviour in that women treat each other with disrespect and cruelty.

The third and last clustering of characteristics are strength, male compatibility, respect, recognition, respect for elders, ambition, mothering, nurturing, and spirituality. Historically, African women always had psychological and physical strengthen especially with what happened with slavery (Alexander-Floyd, et al. 2006). Hudson-Weems (2000) asserts that African men's and African women's bond helps to maintain the race. African women are physically and mentally strong (Hudson-Weems, 2000). The principle of *Strength* is often the one that is attacked by non-Africana oppressors because their goal is to force submission upon the powerful group that is Africana women. Hudson-Weems (2000) asserts that African men's as well as African women's bond helps to maintain the race. Therefore, the principle of male compatibility is based upon mutually beneficial relationships between a well-respected African woman and a supportive, like-minded man (Hudson-Weems, 2000). Respect and recognition go together that is necessary for a healthy respect for Africana womanists and it helps them relate to others. Respect and recognition also contribute to the self-love and admiration, and respect for elders or older members in the African community. *Respect* refers to reverence an



African woman has for herself, absent of the colonised standards. Determining one's worth, while ignoring politics, is crucial to becoming a confident African woman. The pillar of *Recognition* refers to the acknowledgement of humanity, capability, and power of African women. Recognition plays a large role in keeping communal peace and ensuring the African women's effectiveness in the struggle for equality (Hudson-Weems, 1994).

The principles that outline the caring nature of the Africana womanist are, *Respect for Elders*, defined as an extension of the historical African tradition of ancestral reverence. Ancestral reverence is the habitual act of caring for elders, and eventual ancestors, within a community or society. Once the elders become ancestors, they will be responsible for providing wisdom and guidance which is highly valued. The *Nurturer* and *Mother* are both described as a call for all community members to play an active role in the rearing of the community and propaganda of the race through care. It is an African woman's duty to not only care and nourish her family, but to provide the care and nourishment for her race as a whole. By fostering and guiding fellow women, the Africana Movement is advanced. The initiative taken to further the public's appreciation and education about the Africana Movement exemplifies the principle of *Ambition* (Hudson-Weems, 2001).

Finally, the principle of *Spirituality*, stresses on the importance of the reverence for traditional African spiritual systems. These spiritual systems call for a collection of the principles including Ancestral Reverence, Oneness with oneself, and with nature as well. Africana womanist are also very spiritual and believe in a higher power and their mothering and nurturing is tradition. (Alexander- Floyd, et al. 2006).

With the above tenets in mind, the researcher used them as a benchmark for the true identity of the African woman. Western Feminism is too radical to be used to define the role of African woman as their circumstances, history and culture are different. It is noted that Hudson-Weems

is a woman of African-American descent; she however gets her inspiration from Africa where she did a lot of her research, and she uses this to fight racism in America and help define Africana Womanism more clearly.

The Africana Womanism theory is applicable for this study as it does not only isolate Africana women from the rest of the woman category, but allows women of African descent an opportunity to link with each other and build strength from their shared conditions in exploring the links that bind them, leading into international solidarity. This is the case because the theory refers to the realities of African women in the continent as well as in its diaspora. The term and discipline Africana Womanism “fills a void created by the disassociation of Africana women from movements that foster inequality and keep them languishing on the fringes of the white world” (Ntiri, 2001, p. 45).

In *Nervous Conditions*, the battle for black women in a colonial state has two dimensions. Like men, they suffer the colonial burden but over and above that, they have to deal with patriarchal domination. Some of the beliefs contested in *Nervous Conditions* include the belief that did not prioritise the educating girls. The animosity in the Tambudzai – Nhamo’s relationship is a result of this belief. Tambudzai was not sorry when her brother Nhamo died because he was an impediment to her education. The novel is generally “a stark critique of both the patriarchal beliefs of the black community and against the racist structures under which this community must live.” In *She No Longer Weeps*, Dangarembga interrogates what it means to become a woman in the Zimbabwean post independent context. On the attainment of independence, women were promised emancipation. This was meant to give women the right to contract their own marriages, represent themselves in court, and be guardians of their children. Since most of the promises were not seriously honoured with the attainment of independence, in *She No Longer Weeps* we witness a daughter's struggle to define her own identity as a woman, independent of her father and the confines of constricted cultural codes. The struggle reflects

the broader effort by women in the independent Zimbabwean society to assert their own understanding of adulthood.

Zimbabwean women have peculiar elements of oppression that affect them and that the women writers are forced to protest against in their writings. Primarily, Zimbabwean women writers write against patriarchal dominance and history that glosses over women existence and sensibilities. Unacknowledged women experience is a result of silence imposed upon them by patriarchal domination. The enforced silence is broken when women writers write about issues that affect them and are particularly conceived as taboo. Nevertheless, in addition to this, they protest against the oppressions that affect the generality of Zimbabwean people.

Hudson-Weems (2004, p. 35) further asserts that:

The African woman, her role and opinions are critical to the overall community.... The African woman has not been inactive, irrelevant and silent. Rather African tradition has seen the wisdom of a healthy social system where all its citizens are seen to be vital channels for a healthy harmonious society (2004, p. 35)

Dangarembga's literary texts, *Nervous Conditions* (1988), *The Book of Not* (2006), *This Mournable Body* (2018) and *She No Longer Weeps* (1987) are feminist texts that deal with patriarchy and its effects of the family unit. Therefore, the issues that are raised in the novels about family have a direct link to the theory of Africana Womanism. Africana womanism opens the focal lens of how women name and define themselves in an African context. The theory will also establish how African women relate to their environment in the face of many challenges including male chauvinism. The injustices women encounter are also examined.

#### **2.6.2. STIWANISM**

It is against the background of negotiating the turns and twists in the African setup that STIWANISM was born; an acronym standing for Social Transformation Including Women in Africa (Nkealah, 2016). Ogundipe-Leslie (2011), the proponent of STIWANISM understands the female struggle from the perspective of African feminism which is absolutely dependent on the commitment from both sexes, and not a woman affair as emphasised by other feminisms. Therefore, its birth is a direct response in trying to move away from defining feminism and feminisms in relation to Euro-American feminisms which seem to exclude men in the gender equation. Ogundipe-Leslie (2011) affirms that the transformation of the African society can only be realised when both men and women take responsibility and commitment to change their status quo. The theory will be able to examine how female and male genders relate to each other in order to achieve a co-existence which brings about societal transformation. According to Ezenwa- Ohaeto (2015), STIWANISM as a perspective and lens will enable the analysis to place men and women side by side in quest for their wellbeing and interest.

In an interview, Ogundipe-Leslie states that African women need to focus on areas of concern socially and geographically,

We give birth to men, we raise them too, (sometimes and unfortunately oppress the woman), we marry them and are related by blood to them, so it is pointless to seek to hate them. ...we are indissolubly linked with men; therefore, we have to work out ways of co-existing harmoniously and effectively if not joyously, with them. (Ogundipe-Leslie, 2011, p. 6)

Ogundipe-Leslie's perspective hinges on the intrinsic bond between male and female genders; hence she argues that be it a theory or an idea which occurred or practised elsewhere in Euro-America, it must be steered by a conscious need of what is beneficial to a human being. If gender issues are to be resolved, it is imperative to transform the continent structurally within states and within families; and that, needs the engagement and collaboration of both men and

women. The theory should be agile and adept to fit the history, experiences, and cultural needs of the peculiar African context. Nnameka (as cited in Akin-Aina, 2011) corroborates with the idea that there is need for a feminism which is flexible to address the issues which arise in a complex African setup; “for African women, feminism is an act that evokes the dynamism and shifts of a process as opposed to the stability and reification of a construct or framework ... Feminism is structured by cultural imperatives and modulated by ever-shifting local and global exigencies” (p. 1). The African society has a complex background steeped in culture, colonialism and other global aspects; these are the issues the two writers selected for this study grapple with.

Ogundipe-Leslie (2011) qualifies the uniqueness of the African society setup by exemplifying it by the unique setting of the Yoruba culture before some alterations by the western Christian influence; where a Yoruba woman had more private and public spaces and respected roles than pre-feminist American middle-class woman. Ogundipe-Leslie posits that there were dignifying and structurally important roles for women in the Yoruba culture, even within its patriarchal assumptions as recorded in divination poetry. The argument by Ogundipe-Leslie (2011) is that women were weighted equally with men as human beings, but they had to defer to men in certain contexts, while men deferred in others (Ogundipe-Leslie, 2011). Such a culture must still have some remnants of some of those practices, hence there is a need of moving away from the dichotomous evaluation of the female’s identity as completely opposite to a male’s and that can be sensed in some feminist studies on gender and through the selected novels in this study. Such views will further be interrogated and clarified. Ogunyemi (as cited Lunga, 2010, p. 30) observes that radical feminism, for example Western/European/White feminism, Africana womanism, Afro-American womanism; are not suitable models for African women writers because these feminisms ‘overlook African peculiarities.’ In response to that need,

Ogundipe-Leslie thus finds more refined perceptive and analytical tools in the expression of STIWANISM.

The African society has a complex background steeped in culture, colonialism and other global aspects, therefore, the analytical tools in the expression of STIWANISM used to analyse this background in the selected literary works.

### **2.6.3. Nego-Feminism**

Supporting the Africana womanism and STIWANISM theories will be Nego-feminism. In Africa men and women have a strong connection based on cultural practices which makes the societies unique, hence there is need to establish a harmonious co-existence of both genders. According to Maduka (2009), African feminism considers the African philosophy of life which stresses marriage as a social institution. Consequently, there is need to find ways of men and women to complement each other. The tenets of nego-feminism pave away of approaching the relationship which exists between men and women. Moreover, “African Feminist movement is characterised by an on-going process of self-definition and re-definition; a broad-based membership resistance to the distortion and misrepresentations by Western global feminism” (Akin-Aina, 2011 p. 65). Nnaemeka, (2013, p. 247) the founding theorist of nego-feminism defines it as “the feminism of negotiations; no ego feminism.” Nnaemeka (2013) actually takes the African feminism a step further than the other forms of feminisms; Motherism, STIWANISM and Womanism. According to Nnaemeka (2013), ‘negotiation’ means “give and take/exchange and cope with successfully/go around (Nnaemeka, 2013, p. 378). This is to say, the principles of African feminism deal with negative elements in a patriarchal entrenched society through compromise and negotiations based on the shared values in many African cultures. The theory becomes the shorthand of possibilities; surrounding issues of peace, conflict management and resolution, negotiation, complementarity give and take, and

collaboration (Nnameka, 2013). Nego-feminism becomes a guide dealing with feminist struggles that occur on the continent and it considers the implications of patriarchal traditions and customs, and it aims to dismantle and negotiate around these; and these principles shed light to the presentation of many characters in the selected novels. Nnameka (2013) proposes that while male chauvinism vanishes, it is not replaced by a role reversal, or by feminist ego, but negotiates the coming together of men and women for a harmonious existence where there is no victim or victor.

Nnaemeka (2004) briefly explains the “no ego” idea when she metaphorically says, “it knows when, where and how to denote patriarchal landmines, it also knows when and where and how to go around patriarchal landmines.” It explains exactly how nego-feminism paves ways of negotiating with or negotiating around patriarchy in different contexts. According to Zhuwarara (2016) it explains how the idea of how Nego-feminism paves ways of negotiating with or negotiating around patriarchy in different contexts. Butau (2020) supports this by stating that the principles of African feminism deal with the negative elements in patriarchal societies through compromising and negotiating based on the shared values of African cultures. Oyemuru (as quoted in Akin-Aina, 2011, p. 5), agrees with the idea as illustrated in the following quote:

... understanding of the social construction of gender as means by which all women are oppressed universally and across the world does not take into account variations in histories, world views and social organization across the globe

Nnaemeka (2004) tries to correct this idea by theorising position of women in an African context through nego-feminism and how they can employ feminism for themselves and for others.

Nnameka views the patterns of feminism as something that developed from an idea that considers human life from a total, rather than dichotomous and exclusive perspective. This is why Nnaemeka quotes Steady (1981):

... for women, the male is not 'the other' but part of the same human. Each gender constitutes the critical half that makes the human whole. Neither sex is totally complete in itself. Each has and needs a complement despite the possession of unique features of its own- (as cited in Nnaemeka, 2004, pp. 379-380)

The theory includes the idea that African women are more inclined to reach out and work with their counterparts to achieve any set goals; for wifehood, sisterhood and motherhood remain important representation of African womanhood. Nnaemeka (2004) premised her theory of nego-feminism on the idea that African feminism should be rooted on the realities of the indigenous contexts as they are, as they ought to be or even as they might be. Nnameka further argues that, that is the only way significant advance to development of Africa can be reached (Nnaemeka, 2004), and the selected novels when read from this perspective further get clarified. Nego-feminism is able to mirror the male and female genders as they negotiate for their spaces to achieve a complementary existence in society in the selected texts. The idea of developing alternatives in order to ease gender injustices can find expression in the choices of what kind of a world both genders decide to live in.

## **2.7 Chapter summary**

This chapter reviewed literature related to the feminisation of poverty and relevant scholarly views, including criticisms to account for the gaps to be filled by the research. The chapter also discussed the three theoretical lenses, which informed this study: Africana womanism, STIWANISM, and Nego-feminism, and how they are applied as theoretical frameworks for this study. Additionally, other studies that employed the three theories were highlighted and



served as basis for which the selected novels *Nervous Conditions* (1988), *The Book of Not* (2006), *This Mournable Body* (2018), and *She No Longer Weeps* (1987) were explored.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE NATURE OF NERVOUS CONDITIONS IN DANGAREMBGA'S *NERVOUS CONDITIONS*

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how Tsitsi Dangarembga exposes the disadvantages of colonialism, as well as, its contribution to the oppressive nature of the patriarchal family structure, and a woman's coming of age in a Zimbabwean society, which will also be further explored in question 5 in Chapter Eight. *Nervous Conditions* deals with the unique circumstances of the Shona girls and women face in the heights as well as the aftermaths of their freedom struggles. Dangarembga uses the struggles of these young girls and women as a metaphor for the evolving identities of the freshly independent country. The researcher examined how these struggles are presented in the selected novel, primarily through the detrimental effects of colonisation and its impact and legacy, as it assimilates with traditional patriarchal structures. The novel offers an insight into the struggles of the women moving away from the cultural norms or dealing with the side effects of colonisation, particularly in academic and domestic settings. The story is particularly relevant to the problems women face in African societies today as gender roles are being redefined and cultural assimilation and cohesion continue to create difficult problems. Problems surrounding the frustrating and challenging issues of the feminisation of poverty and victimhood in the Shona society are the central topic in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*.

Most if not all ethnic groups in Africa have their beliefs concerning gender roles, and most are based on the premise that women are less important, or do not deserve to have so much power as compared to men (Magubane, 2003). Many traditional social organisations in Africa are male dominated. In *Nervous Conditions*, male dominance is accepted as a way of life, this will be revealed in the analysis. The novel also examines the unequal power relations between the

Shona men and women. The female characters in the selected novel (Nyasha, Lucia, Tambu, and Maiguru) challenge the practices of male domination in several ways, and they come out unsuccessful. All these women question some of the decisions and rules that were the prerogative of the patriarch. The women also attempt to break out the role of domesticity and servility to the surprise of men. Dangarembga focuses particularly on a group of women who are voiceless and are struggling to succeed in their societies that try to silence and control them. In as much as these women are successful in their struggles, their victories are not as grand. They fail to challenge the status quo openly, topple repressive systems, or change certain behaviours and ways of thinking. Instead, their success is rooted in their unshakeable desire to succeed where others have failed.

*Nervous Conditions* exposes the hidden facets of patriarchal rule that regards women as the secondary gender group whose victimhood benefits the male group. Because of their dominance, men control everything, including the gender roles of the women in their lives. This results in the arousal of conflicts between both parties and women end up looking for ways to escape the grips of this oppression. When one reads the novel, the reader can feel that it is a lived through experience, Tsitsi Dangarembga not only reflects upon the characters' fictional context, but also makes it clear that she was fully absorbed by the scenes of the story. The title of the novel, *Nervous Conditions*, was borrowed from Frantz Fanon's introduction in the *Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon (2001) affirms that the status of the native people is more of a nervous condition that was preserved and retained by the colonisers (Plasa, 2000). The title of the novel serves as a shortcut of what is still to come in the novel. As much as Dangarembga seems to be aware of the presence of the colonial ideology and its effects on the indigenous people, she makes use of another way of confrontation, one that fuels gender struggle and depicts the Zimbabwean society in such a way that it does not have a detrimental effect of losing the effect of external interventionism (Rodgers, 2013).

Drifting from the colonial opposition, the novel also defied the unacknowledged borders of male and female roles that are brought about by their flaws and struggles. Dangarembga also refers to the black females of the African continent whose lives were and have been determined by colonialism for many years. Several forms of female subjugation are treated in African women's literature as understood and experienced by African women. In many African families, there is relatively a strong influence of patriarchy and male dominance, whereby the family is usually male-headed or the male children are preferred to female children, mainly because the male children will maintain the patriarchal system. According to Uchem (2014), women subordination is quite evident in different situations, an example being irrespective of personal talents, females are usually not called to be heads of committees or chairpersons of social events. Fundamental to African women's literature are the motives of resistance, positivity, triumph, quests for better lives, and emancipation from sexism, racism and poverty. For most women, instead of folding their arms crying and drowning themselves in self-pity, they often seek for an escape from subjugation through writing.

Female African writers focus on the actual issues that are affecting other African women by making use of autobiographical and other literary forms. Their literature is post-colonial as it explores new relationships and identities within societies that have recently gained their freedom from the oppressive colonialists. Nonetheless, it is not only confined to this period, but also touches on pre-colonial and colonial times in Africa. According to Gueye (2017), female writers have experienced quite a number of sad experiences in their lives and works. Buchi Emecheta and Tsitsi Dangarembga are examples of female writers whose literary tradition of their countries, Nigeria and Zimbabwe, has gone through different stages marked by male predominance and women's exclusion that was and still is grounded in sociocultural mores.

The narrator in *Nervous Conditions* is a woman who has experienced the occurrences that are described in the literary text, and the protagonist is a young woman who is fighting the hardships that are coming her way and striving to develop herself. But, because she is female, she is belittled and considered inferior. This inferior status is influenced by cultural ideologies that place men at the top of a social stratification or give them a higher status than women. The novel is based on how Shona women are being oppressed by cultural norms, patriarchy, and race had minimal chances for social advancement.

*Nervous Conditions* demonstrates how colonial and patriarchal constraints make it impossible for women to speak out because speaking out means resisting the dominant social order. The fact that women are subjugated and seen as inferior is often demonstrated by the way women are presented by the dominant male literary tradition, and these distorted representations contribute to the continuation of women subjugation. According to Nnaemeka (2013), women lack the courage to portray female characters differently because of prejudice and bias in the critical arena. Nnaemeka (2013) also claims that the African female writers are aware of the gaze of the reader or critic (usually male), and this gaze restrains them and compels them to “negotiate” the creation of their fictional characters.

Nnaemeka believes that this has led to:

“...the marginalisation of radical female characters in (their novels). By limiting women to ‘little happenings’ and family matters, many African female writers have restricted themselves to what I would call ‘domestic literature’ or more specifically ‘motherhood literature.’ (Nnaemeka, p. 150)

Dangarembga (1988) therefore effectively makes use of unusual narrative strategies to deliver powerful social and political narrations on the affairs in her country, and ensures that her voice is heard in African literary arena. In the next section of this chapter, an analysis is made on

how Dangarembga presents education, gender inequalities, and subjugation of women, gender oppression, resistance, women liberation and Africana womanism in *Nervous Conditions*.

### **3.2 Education and gender inequalities**

In order to explain the victimhood and cyclical evocations of the nervous conditions, struggle and agency of the female characters in *Nervous Conditions*, it is critical to explore education and gender inequalities and how this affected the characters. The selected novel is based on a colonised clan, the Sigauke clan (part of the Shona people) in the then Rhodesia during the 1960s. The novel explores how the clan reacts to westernisation in numerous ways. Dangarembga reveals that colonialism brought an emphasis on education and democracy, but it also challenges African patriarchy. On the other side, colonial education also detaches the indigenous people from their culture and leaves them with detrimental psychological consequences. *Nervous Conditions* begins with a sentence affirmed by the protagonist, Tambu. The novel is not only about Tambu's ambition to educate and develop herself but also about her cousin, Nyasha, who is isolated from her clan because of her "Englishness." Social injustices consort against her to the extent that she suffers a "nervous condition." Another character is Ma'Shingayi, a traditionalist who is content with her status quo and could not stand women who were against it. Lucia is another character who gate-crashed the patriarchs meeting. Lastly, there is Maiguru who was stuck between two conflicting cultures to the dismay of her daughter on one side and her in-laws on the other. This is why Dangarembga reveals her intention of writing this novel in the opening lines:

"My story is not after all about death, but about my escape and Lucia's; about my mother's and Maiguru's entrapment; and about Nyasha's rebellion- Nyasha, far minded and isolated, my uncle's daughter, whose rebellion may not in the end have been successful." (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 1)

Therefore, the story is about the entrapment of five women and their efforts at improving their nervous conditions. African cultural practices and traditions perpetuate the illiteracy of women (including girls), making women economically dependent on others, especially their husbands. Illiteracy limits women from getting involved in the formal economic sphere and leadership positions. Dangarembga presents this in her novel.

In the novel, Tambu is denied access to education because she is a girl. Her father's refusal for her to continue with her education was influenced by cultural beliefs, which consider education to be for the males. Tambu is supposed to stay home and serve her family, which is presented in her father's reply after she questioned him as to why she cannot be educated too:

“Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables.” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 15)

Being a man in an African society, Tambu's father is of the belief that women are born to do household work and they are not allowed to have jobs or study, leaving the house, the only time they go outside is when they are going to help the men in the fields. Even though Tambu lives in a male dominated society, she has a strong desire to be educated like her brother, Nhamo. Tambu is disadvantaged by the fact that she was born a girl, and tradition dictates that the eldest male child is deemed the future head of the family. Therefore, all the family resources are poured into developing his abilities and preparing him lead and provide for his clan. Nhamo's death is devastating because he was the only male child in the family, leaving no replacement. This left Tambu to take over as the future provider even though the role came with prejudice and limitations that shackled most African girls of her age. Tambu's struggle for an education and a better life is aggravated by her gender. Dangarembga exposes inequality as a crippling attitude that destroys women's spirits and discourages them from supporting and encouraging other women and future generations.

Tambu is bound both by the laws of her culture and the social stratification of colonialism. Tambu's gender will never allow her to be looked at or seen as more than just a possession of the men in her family. According to Marcuse (1976), in patriarchal societies, women have been subject to a certain kind of repression and their mental and physical development has been set in a specific direction. That is why, when she complains to her mother about her education, as a Shona woman in an African society, she responds:

“This business of womanhood is a heavy burden,” as she knows about the condition of the woman. Again, she says, “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.” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 16)

According to Sweetman (1995), many Zimbabwean women state that it is “cultural” for women to be subordinate to men.

*Nervous Conditions*, also depicts Tambu's mother (Ma'Shingayi) and her aunt (Maiguru) who sacrifice their lives for their husbands, families, and children but receive nothing in return. Ma'Shingayi is portrayed as a woman who is hard-working and trying to make a living from ploughing the land. Having had several pregnancies, only four of her children survive till the end of the novel. Tambu's father (Jeremiah) took her when she was fifteen and did not formalise a wedding, which is an issue that was to come up fifteen years later. Ma'Shingayi's submissive life completely represents an oppressed woman's passivity. Because she has no control of her own life, she fails to visualise a life or an identity for her daughter outside marriage. Being dependent, powerless, and dealing with hard domestic work for nineteen years of her life has taught her to accept and live through what she cannot change. The society has compelled her into assuming a passive role in a patriarchy dominated environment. It is this



role that she expected her daughters to follow. “Women are part and parcel of the social fabric; they deserve equal rights and should be treated as fully-fledged members of societies. They need to be empowered psychologically in order to resist patriarchy and colonial rule” (Gueye, 2017)

Maiguru’s case is seemingly different from Ma’Shingayi. Both of them suffer for being female in their homes. Tambu could not imagine Maiguru also suffering because in her eyes, she had it all, that is money, education and decency. Tambu looked up to Maiguru, she was obedient and loyal to her husband up until her depression made her rebel against her husband. Maiguru had grown tired of being submissive to her husband’s family. She even stood up to her husband and said:

“I am sick of it Babawa Chido. Let me tell you I have had enough! 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 anymore in this house.” (Dangarembga, 1988, pp. 174-175)

The fact that Maiguru is educated, makes her grow more resentful of her entrapment. Despite being educated, she was still subjected to the demands of her husband and the men in her society, she could not spend the money she had earned for herself but had to give it away for her family’s benefit. In a conversation with Tambu, she utters:

“Your uncle wouldn’t be able to do half the things he does if I didn’t work as well.”  
(Dangarembga, 1988, p. 103)

It is at this point that Dangarembga shows that Babamukuru (Maiguru’s husband) also suffers at the hands of colonial patriarchy. Babamukuru controls his wife’s income as he is the head of the house, he is also obliged to educate, feed, and house his extended family, as well as intervene at every opportunity to ensure that things go his way. Babamukuru’s attitude towards his wife and daughter (Nyasha) presents him as a traditional husband and father, even though

he is the headmaster of the mission. When Tambu witnesses Babamukuru strike Nyasha during a quarrel between a father and daughter, condemning her to whoredom, this makes her feel like she is a victim of her femaleness, just like she felt when she was home with her brother Nhamo going to school and growing maize. So, whether one is poor or rich, or literate or illiterate, the situation remains the same. Gender inequality forms a backdrop of all the female characters' lives. It is depicted in a conversation between Tambu and Maiguru when the latter speaks about their own conditions by their own men:

“Sometimes I feel I’m trapped by that man, just like she is.” She continues: “It’s not really him, you know. I mean not really the person. It’s everything, it’s everywhere. So where do you break out to? You’re just one person and it’s everywhere.”  
(Dangarembga, 1988, p. 176)

A father is the main decision maker of the family in African societies and women are expected to be submissive. Maiguru may manage her family but her position as a wife does not permit her to act against her husband. Maiguru and Nyasha may belong to an educated family but they have to be submissive in front of Babamukuru.

It is quite evident in *Nervous Conditions* that education occupies a paradoxical position, whereby, it both promotes the values of the dominant culture and exposes the injustices of the culture towards its victims. The coexisting but contradictory “nervous condition” of oppression and freedom through education is made clear by splitting the two outcomes between two characters, Tambu and Nyasha. The benefits of colonial education are shown through Tambu’s character, whereas Nyasha’s character is used to show its dangers and serves as a tragic example of resistance.

Tambu views the oppressive western values of the educational system as a motivation for self-empowerment. She learns quickly that education is not a realm of equal opportunity. Gueye

(2017) asserts that Dangarembga uses her mouthpiece, Tambu, to maintain that children, especially girls, are discriminated against education, boys are unique profiteers, at the expense of girls. Preferential treatment Nhamo benefitted from schooling is a perfect example of such a discrimination. The Shona tradition considers the boy's education to be of utmost importance and is given top priority (Gueye, 2017). The family's limited resources are given to Nhamo for his school fees and not to Tambu because she is a girl, like Nhamo tells her:

“You are a girl” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 21)

As much as Tambu's realisation of gender preference towards males is frustrating, it motivates her to work hard at growing her maize so she can pay for her education

listen to your child. She is asking for seed. That we can give. Let her try. Let her see for herself that some things cannot be done. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 17)

Tambu does not question whether or not she really wants and will gain anything from the education she so seeks, but she sees it as a necessity worth her daily sacrifices. The attitude she has towards her education is optimistic. The very same system that awakens determination in Tambu disempowers Nyasha, creating a rift between her and her family. After acquiring her education for five years at a British school, and communicating in English for so long, she returns with most of her Shona gone.

They don't understand Shona very well anymore,” her mother explained. “They have been speaking English for so long that most of their Shona has gone. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 42)

Nyasha's dilemma warns the reader of the imminent separation from cultural roots that Tambu ignores in order for her to acquire her education. Because the girls chose to have an essential academic experience, a negative outcome resulted from it, a language barrier developed from it. The contrast between Nyasha and Tambu can be seen as a way of differentiating the

otherwise irresolvable paradox of language and education in colonial contexts. The two girls are mostly exposed to the English language through reading. Tambu prefers to read fictional stories that have pleasant resolutions, thus, her reading results in optimism. Tambu uses these stories to link up her new academic experiences under the Western influence with her heritage as member of her Rhodesian family. These stories show that the merging of Tambu's new and old identity create a cohesive whole. Acquiring her education is not really ripping her out of Rhodesia by the roots. There is a place for her in the colonial world that she feels she can fit in. Whereas, Nyasha prefers literature that is non-fictional, writing that explores violence, challenge, and international oppression, this reveals a more threatened state of existence. Dangarembga revealed to the readers that Nyasha read:

“about Nazis and Japanese and Hiroshima and Nagasaki” and “had nightmares about these things ... but she carried on reading all the same” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 95)

Nyasha is not comfortable in the world of oppression just like hers as well, that she is getting to know of through her education. Nyasha is experiencing the negative effects of her infused desire to get an education. She is frightened. Education does not only bring opportunities for Nyasha, but comes with uncertainty. Nyasha teaches Tambu to read critically but she struggles to understand how to question the way her cousin does it. Tambu still uses words such as “enjoy” to describe her progress to some of the more realistic books Nyasha recommends. Tambu can balance the dangers and the benefits of her education, whilst Nyasha faces the worst effects of a colonial education that tempers and destroys one's identity and creates anguish and resistance.

Tambu's compliance and Nyasha's resistance are presented in their attitudes towards Babamukuru. Tambu is grateful and respectful towards her uncle, his success impresses her just like “the great extent of the sacrifice he had made” (p. 88). However, Nyasha, is rebellious

and resentful of the education in Britain that her father Babamukuru not just provided but imposed upon her. She fights his authority verbally and even physically. Dangarembga writes:

“They went down on to the floor, Babamukuru alternately punching Nyasha’s head and banging it against the floor” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 117)

Babamukuru is unhappy with Nyasha’s independent mind despite his role in its development, and Nyasha is constantly questioning herself and her unstable position between her English education and her life in Rhodesia. She explains to Tambu:

“I know ... it’s not England anymore and I ought to adjust. But when you’ve seen different things you want to be sure you’re adjusting to the right thing” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 119)

Nyasha haunted by the British influence that threatens her place amongst her fellow Shona people. Tambu eventually adopts Nyasha’s rebellious ways by refusing to attend her parents’ wedding even when Babamukuru insisted. One can say this is when Tambu’s consciousness, just like Nyasha is split “into two disconnected entities that had long, frightening arguments with each other” (p. 169). This is because of the wedding that Babamukuru attempts to Christianise but there is an already established union.

Tambu’s education leads her to getting recognised and obtains a scholarship to Sacred Heart College. Despite her anger for participating in acquiring colonial education, Tambu celebrates that:

“All the things that I wanted were tying themselves up into a neat package which presented itself to me with a flourish” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 195)

Tambu is proud of her accomplishments and her focus on her studies that she “hardly noticed the omission” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 199) when her cousin Nyasha continues to postpone her promised visit. According to Gueye (2017), Tambu is aware of the effect of gender inequality

on education; thus, she gives it her all and uses it as a tool for her emancipation and way out of poverty and nervous conditions. Tambu is becoming more independent and more westernised, but at a distractingly quick pace. She does not possess the painful self-awareness Nyasha possesses. The more Nyasha progresses with her education, her knowledge and critical thinking make her uneasy. Instead of being excited and looking for opportunities, it only causes more suffering for her. As a result of Tambu's absence, Nyasha's split identity sets her back to the extent that her situation becomes pathological. Tambu comes back to find that Nyasha "had grown skeletal" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 202) due to anorexia. Nyasha wanted to destroy the colonial power and British education that had become deeply rooted in her, so she felt she had to destroy herself. Nyasha expresses her

ultimate inability to reconcile her education and her identity, proclaiming:

"I'm not one of them but I'm not one of you" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 205)

Nyasha and Tambu may be working against the same system, but they do not share the same degree of success. Nyasha's tragic attempt to decolonise her body is one behaviour that Tambu does not imitate, it is the barrier between the loving cousins who, in so many ways, have grown and become educated together. The mixed advantages and disadvantages of systematic colonial education are split between Dangarembga's characters Tambu and Nyasha. It almost seems that the novel offers Nyasha as a warning against an overly heightened self-awareness and noncompliance.

Even as a child, Tambu was always aware of patriarchal injustices between her brother and herself. When money ran low, Nhamo would continue with school whilst Tambu helped support him by working in the fields. Nhamo knew of his responsibilities as an educated son:

"Nhamo knew a lot of things in those days. He knew more than he did when he died... He knew that it would be up to him to make sure that his younger sisters were educated" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 15)

The more time Nhamo spend in school, the more he forgot about this, including his Shona language. Education may be a way out of poverty but it can also create rifts within families. Nyasha knows of these problems but it takes Tambu a bit longer for her to figure it out, but she is aware of the problems of poverty and womanhood. Just like her mother tells her:

"This business of womanhood is a heavy burden," and the "poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 16)

The older Tambu becomes, she has plenty of opportunity to see the disadvantages of being a woman. In her family, her father is boss. When Doris the white woman offers the ten pounds for her school fees, Mr. Matimba wisely gives the money to the headmaster for safekeeping, rather than sending it home with Tambu. Her father is unhappy:

"Then you have taken my money," my father told the headmaster. "That money belongs to me. Tambudzai is my daughter, is she not? So isn't it my money?" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 30)

Even with the headmaster's explanation that Tambu's education will bring back far more than just these ten pounds, her father still complains:

"She will meet a young man and I will have lost everything" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 30).

When Babamukuru comes back from England, and reminds the family of how he had sent money for the children's school fees:

"we were very pleased to hear that you were able to send both children back to school as a result of receiving that money we had sent" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 45)

Tambu's father responds by merely agreeing that "Things were tough." No-one mentions anything about Doris and the ten pounds. Even the narrator does not mention it, because the facts are already there. The same way Tambu's father takes credit for the roof that had just been re-thatched by Tambu and her very pregnant aunt Lucia. When Babamukuru arrives, he compliments him on the thatching. The narrator does not have to comment because the irony is quite clear:

"Ha! Ya, Mukoma," agreed my father. "There was a job there! You should have seen us! Up here with strips of bark and the fertiliser bags, and tying the plastic over the holes. Ha! There was a big job there, a big job." Lucia and I could not hide our smiles. "See, Jeremiah," praised Babamukuru, pleased with my father's labour, "even your daughter is pleased when you have done a good job." (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 154)

Tambu only sees the problem mainly in male female terms, but Nyasha notices the effects of colonialism. Babamukuru is a product of the colonial education system, a system that educates some of the natives the most promising ones in the hopes of co-opting them into the colonial system. Babamukuru, who's "cultivable," is seen as a "good African," and "good Africans bred good African children who also thought about nothing except serving their communities. In accordance with Gueye (2017), Babamukuru considers education to be fundamental in everyone's life, it is a tool to fight poverty and that children's education should be taken into consideration. He may symbolise patriarchy, but he strongly believes that education, especially a boy's education is the best investment one can make to fight poverty.

Moreover, Babamukuru's education does help his family:



"Aren't we all benefiting from Babamukuru's education?" Tambu's mother says when Babamukuru finds Lucia a job, and she kneels down "worshipping" him (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 159)

Others can benefit from one family member's education, but it is the effects of such a trickle-down that Nyasha is against. Babamukuru, being the one family member who was allowed to get an education, has the responsibility to take care of the rest of the family that sacrificed for him, however, he also uses his education prop up his own traditional patriarchal privileges, as well as imposing an exaggerated version of English norms and morality on his family.

Education plays a vital role in each of the character's lives and it casts light on interconnected issues class and gender, showing that education is a form of power and control used by many, both the colonial authorities and the males in Shona culture. Tambu only gets to know of the questionable aspects of the education she receives as time goes by. The limitations of education are highlighted as we see the damage and problems it created for Babamukuru and his family. Nonetheless, Tambu requires to have an education for her to escape the poverty that surrounds her and for her to do something better with her life. Despite the problematic nature of education, those who do not have any form of education or lack education, they suffer from poverty, particularly characters such as Jeremiah, Takesure and Mainini.

The hardships they endure are as a result of lacking an education, but also significantly from the economic and material deprivation caused by colonialism, which results in reduced economic possibilities and disempowerment and dependency, and most of all, the feminisation of poverty, these women are victims of patriarchy. This does not only cause physical hardship but also psychological disturbances, the "nervous condition" to which the title of the book alludes. Tambu's growth to independence and maturity is characterised in part by her ability to evaluate the education she receives more critically, and also by the way in which she begins to

question her uncle who is providing her with a good education. In the beginning, Tambu regarded her uncle with a great deal of respect, but as time went by, she began to see that Babamukuru endorses forms of gender oppression and sex-role stereotyping and submits too readily to the will of colonial authorities. Acknowledging this and being able to challenge Babamukuru becomes an important stage in her personal development.

Dangarembga not only depicts Tambu's journey of escape towards freedom in the face of considerable odds, but she also shows the readers the struggles of diverse women in pre-independence Zimbabwe. These women's struggles are similar in some respects, as all the women, regardless of class, have to contend with the oppressive and authoritarian nature of patriarchy and colonial forms of authority. However, this also gives rise to some key differences, in that educated women do not have to carry the double burden of gender and class, which Tambu's mother, describes in the text. Education is, thus, the main road for survival, especially for the most ambitious women. Dangarembga gives particular attention to girls' education, since they are victims of cyclical nervous conditions and struggling. The next section focuses on the forms of subjugation the female characters in *Nervous Conditions* endured.

### **3.3 Cultural, patriarchal and colonial subjugation of women (and girls)**

Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* can also be situated within Africana Womanism in that it affirms the importance of African culture, whilst demonstrating that women suffer under patriarchal authority (Aegerter, 1996). Tambu becomes aware of gender oppression as a result of her social circumstances, in part because this is imposed on the women around her, and also as a result of her first-hand experiences of the oppression that is inflicted upon her.

Tambu's society is a colonial one and because of this, colonialism also contributes to the forms of oppression that she and other women experience in the text. Readers can see that Tambu's

awareness of this is growing when she resists both the patriarchal and colonial control by objecting to Babamukuru's desire to please the colonial authorities by making her parents a western-style wedding. This event incited her to challenge Babamukuru and to also question the forms of patriarchal and colonial authority from which her uncle procures his power.

Moreover, economic factors generated by colonialism come into play here, as Mainini laments:

“And these days it is worse, with the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other. Aiwa!” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 16)

By presenting Tambu's family's situation, Dangarembga exposes the major contrasts, divisions, as well as the imbalances that arise from economic oppression. This is linked to the way people are subjugated as a result of their gender.

The African men who view themselves as superior to African women are often afflicted with poverty due to the fact that education, which was the key to economic empowerment at that time, was only granted to a few lucky ones, many of whom were destined for the civil servant class (Nyanhongo, 2011). Thus, they are disempowered and rendered subservient to others. This is another indication of the womanist aspects of the novel in that through her focus on colonialism, Dangarembga not only draws attention to African women's sufferings, but emphasizes the way in which African men were oppressed by the colonial system too. Men such as Jeremiah and Takesure are disempowered, in that they feel they need to “grovel” to Babamukuru, their social superior and the head of the family, for money, security and his acceptance. These two men never manage to beat their “nervous condition” of physical poverty, laziness and the forms of psychological disempowerment this generates, always exercising their routine of begging from Babamukuru and accepting whatever he says, without thinking for themselves. Thus, they do not consider how badly they are treating women in their lives,

because they feel deprived and disempowered as poverty-stricken colonized people and this erodes their capacities to show consideration for those around them.

The disharmony and discontent in Tambu's family and the conflict between Nyasha and her father Babamukuru, all of which arise from the above-outlined situation, is a clear example of how colonialism has disrupted the social order, not only at a community but also at a family level, thereby aggravating the situation of women (Nyanhongo, 2011). When Tambu accepts the opportunity of missionary schooling, it offers her more insight into her uncle's family, and the extent to which colonialism has affected their family dynamics and way of life. To some extent, this leaves one realising that the unity and harmony that might have existed in Tambu's extended family has been damaged as a result of the influence of the British colonial culture. Were it not for the divisions and discord generated by the colonial authorities, there could have been certain problems stemming from patriarchal forms of authority, but perhaps in a considerably reduced form. Nyasha points out to Tambu that her father abases himself before the white men and how he humiliates himself in the process. Tambu is made aware of the effect this has on Nyasha and her family. Nyasha also draws attention to the way colonialism has created divisions within the family, and disruption and damage at an individual psychological level:

“Do you see what they've done? They've taken us away. Lucia. Takesure. All of us. They've deprived you of you, him of him, ourselves of each other. We're grovelling. Lucia for a job, Jeremiah for money. Daddy grovels to them. We grovel to him”  
(Dangarembga, 1988, p. 200)

The word “grovelling” indicates the extent of desperation of the black people in the Shona society, and the extent to which they are forced to abase themselves in order to survive, and receive that which they value in life, such as education and a career. In the above passage,

Nyasha describes the divisions and tensions between the members of her family, created by colonialism. She also states that colonialism has violated their relationships with one another, “depriving them of each other”. Thus, there is a lack of solidarity amongst family members and also in the community at large. In part, this is because in terms of the colonial ethos, the individual is prioritised at the cost of the communal. Thus, a privileged few benefit, while many are exploited. Nyasha refuses to “grovel” before the colonisers, by refusing to submit to her father’s authority. Nyasha refuses to do what her father expects of her, since he requires her to conform not only to the colonial ethos, but also to traditional patriarchal ideals of the African woman as obedient and submissive to all forms of male authority. She questions that upon which his authority is based, such as the limited amount of privilege and influence he is granted by the colonizers, provided he submits to them.

Thus, colonialism gives rise to diverse forms of gender oppression, in that women are expected to abase themselves not only before colonial authorities but also before the men in their lives, in a way perpetuating the feminisation of poverty. It has also disrupted the order of things for many people, both women and men, have to abase themselves, and beg for that which they need, therefore becoming dependent on others. For example, Lucia needs a job and has to ask Babamukuru to assist her; Jeremiah, a good-for-nothing man, who pleads with Babamukuru for money at every possible opportunity.

This creates further divisions amongst other family members such as Mainini who does not relate well to her sister-in-law, because she feels side-lined, especially when she compares her status with that of Maiguru. This provides further evidence of the way the colonial system disempowers African women, inflicting forms of tension and suffering upon them, proving the existence of cyclical nervous conditions and victimhood amongst the women in the Shona society. Maiguru and Mainini both face the same the same obstacle: that of patriarchal oppression, but Maiguru’s status as the headmaster’s wife and the fact that she is a professional

woman who earns her own salary, privileges attained by means of colonialism, establishes a class difference between herself and Mainini. To an extent, this adds to their problems, creating such animosity between them that Mainini even accuses Maiguru of killing her son when he dies while he is in her and Babamukuru's care.

“except that Maiguru is not decent, because first she killed my son and now she has taken Tambudzai away from me” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 140)

Mainini feels inferior to Maiguru not only on account of their class differences, but also because Maiguru is also educated, which sets her apart from other women in the Sigauke family. All the women feel obliged to listen to her because of her status, acquired through the colonial educational system. Mainini says:

“Because Maiguru is educated. That's why you kept quiet. Because she is rich and comes here and flashes her money around, so you listen to her as though you want to eat the words that come out of her mouth” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 140)

This indicates that because Maiguru is rich, many other African people around her feel inferior to her, her family included, and this also highlights the fact that various economically deprived Africans tend to abase themselves before wealthy people. For instance, in the above extract, Mainini points out “that's why you kept quiet because she is rich.” The damaging effects of colonialism extend through Tambu's family. Dangarembga uses Mai Tambu to expose the victimhood that women like her are enduring. For example, in various significant respects, Tambu's mother is also trapped in a situation that she does not know how to change as a result of colonialism. For instance, she is against the idea of undergoing a white wedding. This was Babamukuru's idea, for he wishes Mainini and Jeremiah to be married in the church, so as to legitimise their union in the eyes of the colonisers. Thus, Babamukuru attempts to bestow a sense of western respectability upon his family so that the missionaries, as representatives of

white colonial authority, will approve of them. On the other hand, Mainini and Jeremiah will be made aware of their inferior position, as the black people who need vindication from the white colonisers. Tambu feels this undermines their culture and tradition, so being obliged to go through a charade of this nature degrades them in various respects, functioning as a form of “othering.” On the other hand, Babamukuru also views this as a way of redeeming the family from a series of misfortunes that it had been experiencing. Most importantly, Babamukuru wants the white wedding to serve as proof of his submission to colonial authority and thus as a token of his obedience. In addition, Babamukuru’s plan for a wedding of this nature is a way of demonstrating Babamukuru’s patriarchal authority. As a head of the extended family, he expects family members to obey his commands, however unreasonable they may be.

Consequently, Babamukuru’s “bad nerves” are a part of the “nervous condition,” generated by his desire to please the white missionaries, as a result of which he suffers forms of psychological entrapment. Tambu states:

“Maiguru said Babamukuru’s nerves were bad. His nerves were bad because he was so busy” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 102)

As a result of this state of affairs, Babamukuru is constantly trapped working in his office till late hours, as he had proved to be as “cultivable” as the white man wanted him to be. Ironically, even the privileges Babamukuru receives from the colonisers disempowers him further, not only by stunting his emotional and psychological growth, but also by depriving him of certain life skills. As a result, Babamukuru is inclined to behave in an autocratic, dictatorial way, especially towards the women of the family, as indicated below:

“He was a rigid, imposing perfectionist, steely enough in character to function in the puritanical way that he expected, or rather insisted, that the rest of the world should function. Luckily, or maybe unluckily for him, throughout his life Babamukuru had

found himself- as eldest child and son, an early educated African, as headmaster, as husband and father, as provider to many- in positions that enabled him to organize his immediate world and its contents as he wished” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 87)

On account of this state of affairs, Babamukuru believes that there is no reason why he should not impose a western-style white wedding upon an unwilling participant, Mainini. He duplicates the ways of the white man and enforces them upon his family, insisting that the rest of the world should function in the way that he expects. In part, the “nervous condition” he experiences is evidence that African men are also victimised, since they suffer at the hands of the colonisers.

Dangarembga, shows a certain amount of sympathy for Babamukuru, despite his heavy-handed, autocratic patriarchal behaviour. Driven by forces to which he feels duty bound to submit, Babamukuru imposes his solutions upon others, in a bid to reassert his authority in order to boost his ego and to impose the will of the colonisers on his family. As a result of her disapproval of the white wedding, Mainini eventually suffers from grief and depression and develops deep resentment towards Babamukuru, which she is reluctant to express openly. Thus, she represses her feelings, and as a result, a depth of anger and resentment builds up inside her, giving rise to the “nervous condition” from which she suffers. This is evident when she laments:

“To wear a veil, at my age, to wear a veil! Just imagine- to wear a veil. If I were a witch I would enfeeble his mind, truly I would do it, and then we would see how his education and his money helped him” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 184)

Mainini’s repetition of “to wear a veil” reveals the depth of bitterness and the pain that she experiences when she feels compelled to participate in an event that is humiliating to her. The degree of her bitterness is shown in the way she wishes that she were a witch who could



“enfeeble Babamukuru’s mind” in order to exact her revenge. It is worth noting that, in *The Book of Not*, a sequel to *Nervous Conditions*, the suppressed anger within Mainini leads her to exact vengeance on Babamukuru by informing the Big Brothers (the freedom fighters) that Babamukuru was in association with the white men. This becomes Mainini’s alternative to “enfeebling” his mind, because then Babamukuru is beaten and narrowly escapes death. Tambu describes this saying Mainini was

“breathing in catches of satisfaction like a woman who has not been gratified for too long, caressed upon untouched places” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 14)

The extent of Mainini’s deprivation from dignity and sensual satisfaction is still evident here. She is “satisfied” because according to her, Babamukuru is receiving punishment for the way he had treated her.

The divisions caused by colonialism continue to have cyclical detrimental effects on women. For instance, Mainini views Maiguru as a woman who has no firm roots in her Shona culture, not only because she has a successful professional woman, but also because she and her family seem too deeply attached to western culture and she and cannot guide her children according to societal expectations, which is an example of the “cycle of the nervous conditions”:

“she steals other women’s children because she could only produce two of her own, and you can’t call those two people. They’re a disgrace to decent parents, except that Maiguru is not decent” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 140)

Colonialism disrupts families in other ways, separating Tambu’s family from Nyasha’s, as they leave to study abroad and return affected by the “Englishness” (Dangarembga, p. 203). Tambu cannot understand why her cousins have changed so much after their return from England:

“I had not expected my cousins to have changed, certainly not so radically, simply because they had been away for a while” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 42)

This continues to alienate Maiguru and her children from the rest of the family. It is also worth noting that Mainini blames much of the suffering in the family on this. Tambu reveals that Maiguru cannot really cope well with the way colonialism is affecting her family:

“They are too Anglicized,” explained Maiguru, with a little laugh so that it is was difficult to tell whether she was censoring Nyasha for her Anglicized habits or me for my lack of them” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 74)

Maiguru is aware that it is a problem for her children “to be too Anglicized” but she does not know how to deal with it. The words “with a little laugh” display that Maiguru feels embarrassed and awkward, but believes that the situation is beyond her control. Meanwhile, Nyasha strives for independence and the right to self-expression, but she is also aware that there are too many different influences at work in her life. She is a hybrid and this impedes her capacity to attain a sense of complete selfhood which would aid her in her struggle to express herself effectively.

Nyasha searches for that to which she can cling, but she fails, and this results in her breakdown. Although she tries to combine both sides of her nature as a western-educated African person, she feels that she does not really truly belong to either of the two cultures She tells Tambu:

“I’m not one of them but I’m not one of you” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 201)

Nyasha might have the privilege of possessing most of the things that she needs, such as access to a good education and a decent meal each day, but this is at the cost of her own sense of rootedness and belonging. This corroborates with Goodman’s (2012) claim on the dangers of binary thinking and the influence of colonial approaches. For instance, she points out to Tambu that her parents should not have gone with them to England as it had alienated her from her culture:

“Now they’re stuck with hybrids for children. And they don’t like it at all. It offends them. I can’t help having been there and grown into the me that has been there. But it offends them- I offend them” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 78)

Nyasha is aware that her “nervous condition” has been caused by colonialism and in the above extract, we are made aware of the negative hybridity discussed earlier. Consequently, Nyasha’s sense of self is eroded so she finds it difficult to base her resistance on a solid sense of who she is. Thus, often interconnected forms of colonial and gender oppression exercise a particularly damaging effect on her.

The author presents us with a patriarchal system that has some similarities with those discussed in the preceding two primary texts, but also differs from them in certain significant respects. As this indicates, patriarchal domination is a system of control that varies from place to place within the African continent, affected by various contextual factors (Nyanhongo, 2011). In this context, Babamukuru, the family patriarch is influenced by the colonial situation. As we have already seen, African men are emasculated by the white colonial authorities and left powerless in various significant respects. To compensate for the loss of status, the colonised men attempt to subjugate women and treat them in the same heavy-handed way in which they are treated by the white authorities. Babamukuru reacts in a heavy-handed authoritarian way when he thinks that Nyasha and Tambu are challenging him. Babamukuru feels that he has to enforce his patriarchal authority within his family circle; otherwise, he feels his masculinity will be impaired. Consequently, Babamukuru feels anger and resentment when he thinks that Nyasha is not respecting him enough as she ought to do. For instance, he says to Nyasha:

“You must respect me. I am your father... We cannot have two men in the house”  
(Dangarembga, 1988, pp. 113; 115)

Accordingly, Nyasha wants to break free from her father's control as well as the control of the colonialists and the two become interconnected in the figure of her father. According to Gueye (2017), "female 'inferiority' primarily takes place at the private level at the hands of the persons they trust and identify the most with, their parents, especially their mothers, before it reaches and is reinforced at the community level." The education that Babamukuru has acquired makes him a widely respected figure. Thus, he is in an especially strong position to exert patriarchal control and to further socialisation of this kind. The difference between Babamukuru and the other Shona men in the novel testifies to his privileged upbringing, and as a result of this, his view of women differs from theirs in various respects. A view of his kind enables Tambu to receive the opportunity to continue with her education. However, although Babamukuru extols education, he tells the whole family that it makes a woman better equipped to carry out her socially ordained role. This is evident when he tells Tambu how lucky she had been to receive the opportunity to further her education, saying:

"At the mission I would not only go to school but learn ways and habits that would make my parents proud of me. I was an intelligent girl but I had also to develop into a good woman, he said, stressing both qualities equally and not seeing any contradiction in this" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 88)

The above citation also shows how women are viewed in terms of traditional patriarchal Shona culture, and why, in terms of such perceptions, it is deemed advantageous for Tambu to be given an opportunity to acquire an education. Babamukuru has been able to progress further in life as a result of education and consequently he believes that it is only education that can enable a person to realize their potential. However, he wants Tambu to be educated primarily in order for her to be of benefit to her family. Furthermore, he assumes that as a "good" woman, she is destined to be married, after which she will serve the needs of another family (Dangarembga, p. 56).

Besides enabling Babamukuru to take charge of the homestead, his education sets him apart, as an influential patriarchal figure in his extended family. His decisions are not necessarily in the interests of those upon whom he seeks to impose them, and this can have problematic implications for some women of the family, such as Mainini. For instance, we have seen that he exercises his authority by insisting that a belated wedding for Jeremiah and Mainini will cleanse the family of all their misfortunes, such as the death of Nhamo. Moreover, Mainini is hardly ever consulted concerning the welfare of her children's lives; and the family meetings are always held in the dining room, whilst the women are relegated to the kitchen. This indicates that even though women in diverse African societies may strive for the particular well-being of every member of the family, it does not mean that they will be allowed to make important decisions regarding the future of their children.

This situation also reveals that, in terms of traditional patriarchal perspectives in Tambu's society, it is a woman's duty to produce children and care for them, but the men decide what should be done with them. When Tambu obtains the opportunity to go to Sacred Heart, Mainini is bewildered and even more distressed and she cries:

“I've had enough of that man dividing me from my children ... and ruling my life. He says this and we jump” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 184)

Mainini's exclusion is one of the reasons for her depression because she fears that she will lose her daughter to the “Englishness” caused by western colonial influences, just as she believes she lost her son. Therefore, as a woman she is deprived of a say over the lives of her children. Tambu describes this in the following way:

“My mother's anxiety was real. By the time I left she was so haggard and gaunt she could hardly walk to the fields, let alone work in them” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 57)

From the above, it shows that women in Shona society tend to be left to suffer from the unilateral decisions that are made by men. The only way that women can express their feelings is through succumbing to “nervous conditions” by further withdrawing into themselves or allowing sickness to take the best out of them, as does Tambu’s mother. She feels that she is being robbed of her womanhood by giving birth to children and yet being deprived of the opportunity to enjoy her motherhood sufficiently. The way Tambu’s mother withdraws into herself shows the bitterness of insecure mother who feels robbed because she is prevented from taking care of her family because of her poverty, and also as a result of her lowly status as a woman.

Thus, despite their subordinate position, women in *Nervous Conditions* are responsible for taking care of the children and serving the needs of everyone in the household. This is also applying to many other African societies, including the societies depicted in *Nervous Conditions* and the other two primary texts. Women’s only areas of responsibility are the household tasks, and the domestic space is the only place which they fully regard as their own. However, when Tambu goes to Babamukuru’s home, she immediately notices the striking differences between the places that are meant for women and those that are meant for men. For instance, when she enters the house through the back door that leads to the kitchen, it is clear that it is neglected because it is for women:

“I remember that the cooker had only three plates, none of which was a ring; that the kettle was not electric; that the refrigerator was a bulky paraffin-powered affair. The linoleum was old, its blue and white pattern fading to patches of red where the paint had worn off and patches of black where feet had scuffed up the old flooring at its seams and water had dripped from hands and vegetables and crockery to create a stubborn black scum. The kitchen window was not curtained; a pane of glass was missing (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 67)

Tambu's observation shows the extent to which the kitchen had become dilapidated due to poor maintenance. Initially, she finds it impressive, but as she grows older, she begins to understand why the kitchen had been allowed to fall into this state. Also, she notices that it is not as "sophisticated" (Dangarembga, p. 67) as it first appeared. This is because Babamukuru paid no attention to such matters, as he was hardly ever in the kitchen and therefore did not notice its state. Even if he had noticed, he probably would have not cared that the place was in need of serious repairs. Maiguru expresses displeasure that the men in the house never had time to "fix" the place (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 67). The fact that Babamukuru has no time for such matters highlights the extent to which, in terms of traditional perceptions, women's spaces in the household, in which they were expected to carry out many of their duties, were viewed as places of little importance. This is in contrast to the living room, the place in which Babamukuru usually spends his time. Tambu notices that the living room is more elegant than the kitchen, so she says:

"Babamukuru's taste was excellent, so that where he could afford to indulge it, the results were striking. The opulence of his living-room was very strong stuff, overwhelming .... Comfortable it was, but overwhelming nevertheless" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 69)

The words "strong stuff" refers to the way Babamukuru likes to appear to those around him, and likewise, he wants "overwhelming" control over his family. This could be related to Tambu's perception of the mission house as a "heaven" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 70) but it also reinforces the way in which Babamukuru imposes his authority on his household as if he is some sort of domestic god. Instead of the peace that should characterize heaven, it is a place of discord and frustration. Bosman goes on to say that, unlike the vast space in the dining room, there is insufficient space in the kitchen for women's voices and presences. It transpires that this kind of heaven does not have enough room for everybody, but it is a narrow, congested,

threatening and saddening place, especially when the women have to talk in hushed voices because of Babamukuru's bad nerves (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 101). The vastness of the sitting room is indicative of the way in which Babamukuru wishes his authority to be conspicuous and all-encompassing within his domestic space and does not want his authority to be undermined. This is evident in the way in which he responds to Nyasha, when she challenges him. He feels threatened and he says:

“She has dared to challenge me. Me! Her father. I am telling you today she will not live” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 115)

In this way, Babamukuru emphasises that his ego has been hurt and to make matters worse, it has been challenged by a woman. Then, Babamukuru inflicts physical and verbal abuse upon Nyasha, declaring that she “deserves to die” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 115). This is indicative of the extent to which he cannot deal with challenge to his “sacred” authority. Nyasha challenges her father's authority by hitting him back, not only because she cannot submit to his patriarchal authority, but also because she is influenced by western notions of independence and the right to self-expression, and believes she has the right to retaliate when physical violence is inflicted upon her.

Maiguru is also oppressed by patriarchal dominion and cannot achieve what she would have accomplished had she been a man. She has the same educational qualifications as Babamukuru, but because she is a woman her education is not acknowledged in the way that his is. Nonetheless, she is prepared to accept this, showing her inability to break free from deeply entrenched gender roles. Tambu is startled to learn that Maiguru has a postgraduate degree. It is evident that in the Shona patriarchal society women can never be expected to achieve anything equal to that of a man, and thus no one ever mentions Maiguru's achievements. It is only Babamukuru who receives all the praise for being an educated and knowledgeable man,



while Maiguru is merely viewed as a good African woman who had gone to South Africa and England to care for her husband. Moreover, Maiguru's efforts and contribution are not recognized, as people are not aware that a significant part of the financial support they receive from Babamukuru derives from Maiguru's salary. Maiguru is aware that she is being oppressed. But, as will be discussed in the next section, she chooses security rather than self-actualisation. She fears that she would lose not only material security and the safety of her role as wife and mother but also a secure place in her society if she were to challenge this state of affairs. As a result, although Maiguru is aware of the unfairness of her situation and the forms of gender oppression imposed upon her, she simply feels that she has no option but to submit to them. This extract does not only depict the evils of patriarchy in the Shona society, but it also shows how colonial policies contributed to the oppression of women in this society. Firstly, as already been noted, only a few black men had the opportunity to acquire an education and the colonizers made it as difficult as possible for the Africans to acquire this. Furthermore, we have already seen how both traditional patriarchal and colonial constraints made it much harder for women to obtain an education. Maiguru had managed to transcend all these limitations, but simply because she is a woman, she could not be awarded the respect that is due to her because of all that she has achieved.

Having noted the effects of colonialism and patriarchal control and the ways in which these factors influence not only the lives of the women but also the relationships between men and women, the reasons why some women like Maiguru chose to live in this way and are unable to break free of that which confines them will be examined in the next sections

### **3.4 The weights of gender oppression on the female characters**

*Nervous Conditions* is a text that it depicts some of the cultural practices which need to be revised in order for the girl child to be valued in the same way as the male child. Girls are only

considered to be important if they serve in the interests of the patriarchal societies in which they are brought up. This means that certain types of upbringings tend to disempower young girls. Tambu's sister, Netsai, can serve as an example, she is disempowered to an extent that her ambitions are limited and her life is geared towards the service of men. Moreover, young men who see girls being brought up in this way will be influenced to mistreat their wives, daughters and sisters, this is evident in Tambu's brother's behaviour. Tambu and Nhamo's relationship shows the way female children are regarded inferior. Nhamo is always unnecessarily emphasizing his importance and maleness.

This is illustrated in one of the many things that makes Tambu detest her brother. She says that:

“knowing that he did not need help, that he only wanted to demonstrate to us and himself that he had the power, the authority to make us do things for him, I hated fetching my brother's luggage” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 10)

This is what drives Tambu to making it her mission to establish her identity as a significant person, and not as someone who is treated like a nobody. What shows Tambu's inferiority is the way Nhamo avoids some of the tasks at the homestead, namely harvesting the fields because he finds it demanding. He uses the excuse of being busy with his studies, so that Tambu and her mother do all the work on their own.

“During the April and August holidays Nhamo refused to come home, saying it was necessary to read his books ceaselessly in order to pass his examinations at the end of each year. This was a good argument. It enabled him to avoid the uncomfortable tasks of pulling down and stacking the maize and stripping the cobs of their leaves” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 6)

Tambu takes note of this saying:

“Perhaps I am making it seem as though Nhamo simply decided to be obnoxious and turned out to be good at it, when in reality that was not the case; when in reality he was doing no more than behave, perhaps extremely, in the expected manner” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 12)

It is evident that Nhamo feels and thinks that he can order his sisters to fetch his luggage, he takes advantage of his status as a male. Thus, he has many advantages over his sisters. Tambu realised that Nhamo’s inconsiderate behaviour was due to his maleness and his arrogant male behaviour of this nature had become socially acceptable because it is perceived as an expression of male authority. In *Nervous Conditions*, the male child is always prioritised, in death as well as in life. The depth of distress mothers go through at the loss of their male children is indicative of this. For example, Tambu’s mother refuses to be comforted by Maiguru after Nhamo’s death, accusing her of bewitching her son (p. 54). When the money is not enough for school fees, Tambu is the one who leaves school so Nhamo can continue going to school. Because of this, Tambu is unhappy with her brother and she confesses that the needs of the women in her family are not considered, hence the delay in her education.

Dangarembga uses this situation to draw the reader’s attention to the contrasting positions of male and female children in the Shona society. Tambu is withdrawn from school so the brother could continue going to school. Many women are denied education because of the economic and gender oppression resulting from colonialism, which worsens their positions in society. Moreover, the desires, needs and feelings of women were not considered, and this indicates the extent to which the female child is denigrated. Nhamo reminds Tambu of who he is when he says:

“Babamukuru wants a clever person, somebody who deserves the chance. That’s why he wants me. He knows I’ve been doing very well at school. Who else is there for him to take?” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 47)

When Nhamo tells Tambu this, he emphasizes his status as a special male child and because he is made aware of how highly valued he is, so he feels he can tell lies with impunity. He lies when he says no one else in his family deserves an education, despite the fact that Tambu has performed better at school than he has. The quote above shows that Nhamo tries to display his importance to Tambu, as well as degrade her by saying she is a female and does not deserve to be educated. He goes on to further emphasise Tambu’s inferiority by saying:

“Did you ever hear of a girl being taken away to school? You are lucky you even managed to go back to Rutivi. With me it’s different. I was meant to be educated” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 49)

This statement shows that Nhamo does not really value education itself, but the superiority that it comes with as a male child. It is this type of oppression that the girls in this society are experiencing that Dangarembga indicates as an obstacle that women should overcome in their journeys towards empowerment and escaping poverty. After Nhamo’s death, Babamukuru suggests that someone else be sent to school, and Tambu was chosen out of desperation and there was no other male child. Nhamo’s death enables Tambu to live with Babamukuru. At a point Babamukuru does not remember Tambu’s name, he refers to her as:

“Er - this girl- heyo, Tambudzai” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 56)

It was as if she is not important, not worth remembering. After some time passed, Babamukuru brought up the issue of emancipating Tambu’s father’s branch of the family. Babamukuru’s words were:

“It is unfortunate,” he said, “that there is no male child to take this duty, to take this job of raising the family from hunger and need, Jeremiah” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 56)

Babamukuru mentioning that it was unfortunate that there was no male child to receive an education in order for him to take care of the family shows that the girl child is undermined to an extent of being seen as unworthy of any opportunity that may be available to her. This also serves as an indication that Babamukuru believes women are not able to handle any position of serious economic responsibility and cannot play leadership roles of any kind. Similarly, Tambu’s father emphasizes the worthlessness of educating girls when he says:

“Tambudzai’s sharpness with her books is no use because in the end it will benefit strangers” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 56)

This assertion shows the extent to which the traditional Shona patriarchal system does not endorse the education of the girl child, since it is not in keeping with their lowly position in society. Tambu’s father displays this earlier on when he asks her:

“Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 15)

This shows that Tambu is not seen as an independent person but as another man’s property. Adding on, this illustrates that women are simply regarded as family property, fit for menial tasks and destined for marriage and motherhood only. These women’s needs and desires are not considered. Women in the society in *Nervous Conditions* are also disempowered because they have many other burdens to carry. For example, Tambu’s mother tells her that

“this business of womanhood is a heavy burden”, maintaining that the only course of action available to her is to endure her sufferings in silence and learn to carry [her] burdens with strength” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 16)

Mainini believes that women should be submissive to their nervous conditions, like there is no way to escape them. The discriminatory treatment, nervous conditions, struggle for survival and victimhood female characters undergo has an acute impact on them. Through her female characters' eyes, the Zimbabwean writer digs deep in the changeable nature of patriarchy which puts masculinity and authority first. In fact, this is central in Dangarembga's writing, and many African women writers are homogenous on this score. This is understandable, as women are more affected by patriarchy prevailing in African societies.

### **3. 5 Resistance presented through the female characters**

Women writers' main concern is to bring the hardships of marginalised women to the surface and maintain that, no matter the series of social injustice, moral and physical violence women might experience, they should not go backward (Gueye, 2017). Thus, through female characterisation, they show women that always "rise from their ashes" after being trodden a thousand times. As explained in the previous chapter, they always find ways to break free of the victimhood and nervous conditions.

When in the company of in-laws, Maiguru had to sit on the floor, as is customary for women, as patriarchy is unchallengeable according to tradition. No matter how discomforting an instruction could be from a husband, a wife has to comply without any dispute. There was a time that Maiguru expressed her doubts when a lot of meat was bought during one Christmas vacation for the clan, and even with that, as Babamukuru's wife, her potential and aspirations were completely submerged in the role of being a wife and mother as prescribed by the Shona patriarchy. Because she is also the wife of the mission school's headmaster, her submission is reinforced by the Christian ideal of the dutiful and obedient wife. Maiguru hides her resentment and frustration that was brought about by her husband's control of her life.

The day before Jeremiah and Ma'Shingayi's wedding, Maiguru was hesitant in loaning out her bridal dress. She used delaying tactics such as forgetting when she was needed for a helping hand. As the wife of the head of the clan, the head who had initiated this marriage, she was expected to lead in the preparations. Maiguru's delaying tactics are a sign of subtle resistance or rebelling against the traditional role of a woman. Babamukuru was the head of the clan by virtue of birth and economic power, this means that he was powerful and influential within his clan. He was regarded as the source of knowledge. Tambu describes him as:

“He didn't need to be bold anymore because he had made himself plenty of power.

Plenty of money. A lot of education. Plenty of everything” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 50)

Babamukuru enforces his power especially when he is challenged by those around him, in this case by Maiguru and Nyasha. Maiguru also financially supports the clan, even when she resents her husband's lavish support of his family, partly from her earnings. As much as Maiguru seems like a faithful and obedient wife who understands her role as wife of the head of the clan, sometimes she would rebel against this customary order of things. She blatantly stated that:

“I am tired of my house being a hotel for your family. I am tired of being a housekeeper for them. I am tired of being nothing in a home that I am working myself sick to support.” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 72)

Maiguru abandons her family and goes to live with her brother in Salisbury, Dangarembga uses this to show how Maiguru felt about being relegated to marginalization when confronted with issues concerning her immediate family. She could handle and deal with her immediate family's problems but not the extended family's as well. Babamukuru was the one who made the decision that Chido and Nyasha move to England, and this decision was based on his desire to control their progress and development. Tambu remembers gathering information about the decision from different people, including Maiguru. However, nothing is recorded that Maiguru

had expressed her opinion on the matter. Maiguru's departure and subsequent return serves as a turning point in the order of power relations in the house. Babamukuru's decisions were no longer unchallengeable. When Babamukuru decided that the convent would have a bad influence on Tambu's character, Maiguru was the one who influenced the decision in favour of attending the Sacred Heart College. Maiguru had been integrated into passively upholding the patriarch's oppressive systems, but she explodes as the pressure mounts and reaches boiling point.

*Nervous Conditions* relates to aspects of Africana womanism in other respects, in that Tambu is daring and determined. She boldly challenges some restrictive norms and forms of authority that threaten her personal development and growth to self-awareness. For a woman to be able to acquire self-awareness in a society such as Tambu's, she has to be resolute and courageous. Tambu's aunt Lucia also displays this. In order for Tambu to acquire this ability to attain knowledge of her society, others and herself, she has to battle with the obstacles of interconnected race, class and gender oppression. For instance, when Tambu is nearly denied the opportunity to be educated on account of her family's poverty, which stems from the effects of colonialism and her gender, she tries to fight the obstacles that might prevent her from acquiring an education. Tambu is determined to earn her own money for school fees, so she grows some maize, so she sells it in order to earn enough money to continue with her education. This shows her strength of character and her independence of spirit, even at an early age. Her experiences in her society are in keeping with her name "Tambudzai," which translates to "taunt me". The meaning of her name influences the challenges she endures and the way she responds to the situation in which she finds herself. This means that sometimes she disturbs and disrupts those around her because she does not always conform to their notions of female obedience and submissiveness. She struggles against that which threatens her development and could prevent her from becoming a free woman.



When Tambu overcomes the obstacles that come her way, she manages to attain self-actualization. Hence, she affirms:

“My story is about my escape and Lucia’s” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 1)

The novel thus foregrounds the issue of entrapment versus escape, in that some characters manage to escape the grip of oppressive systems of patriarchal and colonial control, such as Tambu and her aunt Lucia, and strive for a sense of independent selfhood, whilst others remain trapped, such as Maiguru, Mainini, Ma’Shingayi and Nyasha. Nyasha is stuck between two cultures, the Shona and the British, while Tambu remains rooted in Shona culture and draws that which will be of use to her from the colonial British culture, such as education. The fact that Nyasha does not belong to either culture makes it difficult for her to speak out effectively. Nyasha is able to express her views and feelings, but the society in which she lives does not tolerate it, and thus her voice is not heard. Nyasha is unable to break free from constraints of her situation because, unlike Tambu, she lacks a solid foundation on which to base her resistance.

Moreover, there are women who manage to liberate themselves in various ways. Tambu’s escape may be the primary focus of the text, but her aunt, Lucia’s escape is just as significant. Lucia also manages to escape from the patriarchal systems of control and follows a different path, even though she is still tied to Babamukuru to some extent.

### **3.6 The quest for women liberation**

Tambu and Nyasha will be discussed simultaneously in this section as they represent the “spirit of sisterhood” in African women. Both the young ladies may be coming from different family backgrounds, but they present a united front against the issues of post-colonial conditions, gender inequalities, patriarchy and cultural limitations. Their potential for collaboration is

enriching and encouraging even when they are facing multiple oppressions, such as, indigenous African patriarchy and colonial-capitalist patriarchy.

Unlike their parents, Nyasha and Tambu have clear and well-articulated aspirations. While Tambu suffers from poverty and squalor at the rural homestead, she feels a “presence” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 84) and is motivated to get educated as a way of empowering herself and escaping poverty. When Tambu insists “but I want to go to school”, her father scornfully asks her “can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 15). This shows a common discriminatory and stereotypical view of African women. In this patriarchal society (Shona), it is not necessary to educate the girl child, only the boys are to get educated if the family can afford the fees and are also seen as superior in all ways. This is why Nhamo, Tambu’s elder brother, is sent to school. When Tambu started selling mealies in order to get money to pay for her school fees, Nhamo steals the money and mealies to share with his friends. It is only Nhamo’s death that gives Tambu an opportunity to get educated. It is, therefore, pardonable when Tambu says “I was not sorry when my brother died” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 1).

Furthermore, Tambu's mother also cautions her not to have too many aspirations when she told her, “this business of womanhood is a heavy burden . . . 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 be educated! When there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one who has to make them . . . And these days it is worse, with the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 16). Tambu believes Maiguru is free from these burdens because of her education and says, "I decided it was better to be like Maiguru, who was not poor and had not been crushed by the weight of womanhood" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 16). Tambu still decided to pursue her desire for an education, even without her father's approval or help since "There was no way of pleasing my father, nor was there any reason to. Relieved,

I set about pleasing myself, which antagonized him even further"(Dangarembga, 1988, p. 33). In this way, Tambu resists her father's patriarchal authority, exhibiting a desire not only to break out from under poverty but also from gendered constraints even before she goes to live at the mission where Nyasha's rebellion against the same forces influences her.

Just like Tambu, Nyasha is a self-assertive boot-strapper who had "taken seriously the lessons about oppression and discrimination that she had learnt first-hand in England" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 64). As seen through the eyes of Tambu, we agree that she has a "vision", a "conviction", an "experimental disposition", an "insistence on alternatives" and the "passion for transmuting the present into the possible" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 181). Nyasha told Tambu that she did not want to be "anyone's underdog" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 119). In one of her letters, she tells Tambu that "I cannot help thinking that what antagonises is the fact that I am me-hardly I admit, the ideal daughter for a hallowed headmaster, a revered patriarch" (p. 201) who puts up God-like acts. Of all the characters in this novel, only Nyasha unflinchingly stands up against the patriarchal culture, represented by her father, Babamukuru. She justifiably resists and rejects this culture in which language is ordered around an absolute word (logos) which is masculine (phallic) and the feminine is systematically denigrated, disqualified, excluded and silenced.

Nyasha can be seen as the rebellious female. She has had the benefit of a British education and knows first-hand what kind of lives women in Europe lead. She is ever aware of the difference in the way Shona women are treated compared with the treatment of British women. Unlike her mother, Nyasha has no memories of traditions and customs to silence her voice. Instead, she finds herself caught between two worlds. Her schoolmates shun her for white mannerisms and she has no Shona mannerisms to fall back on. Thus, it is the existentially different socio-economic and educational backgrounds and exposure that occasion these cousins' different

reactions and resistance to sexist, racial and colonial-capitalist oppression. Patriarchal subjection of women transcends borders, people and cultures.

In another instance, Nyasha criticises her father's solution to the irresolute, licentious Jeremiah's poverty when he (Babamukuru) suggests a Christian wedding instead of a cleansing ceremony. Tambu resists Babamukuru's patriarchal control of her life by refusing to attend the wedding. For her disobedience to patriarchal commandments, she is physically assaulted and subjected to more strenuous domestic labour without assistance. Despite her role in being a critical thinker and "escape" of her cousin, Nyasha is the one who is brutalised because she stands for the truth, her rights and herself. Just like Nhamo who hurts Tambu until blood runs down her thigh, Babamukuru assaults Nyasha so violently that her menstrual periods came nine days before the normal time, which can be seen as a way of reminding her that she is just a woman, something that both Nhamo and Babamukuru do insist on in this novel. In spite of all this being done to them, Nyasha and Tambu refuse to be subjected to patriarchy.

Nyasha's hunger strike can be seen as a symbol of final resistance to her father's oppression and rebellion against this ultimate symbol of patriarchal authority. Nyasha's breakdown is caused by a combination of colonisation and the father's desire to uphold his African traditions' patriarchal, sexist values. Her breakdown is an act of resistance to patriarchy. This is evident in her analysis of the debilitating consequences of Africans' mental, economic, political and cultural colonisation even in her moment of distress. There is, indeed, meaning and method in her madness: "It is bad enough when a country gets colonised, but when people do as well! That's the end, really, that's the end" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 150). Consequently, she goes on to comment on the dangers of assuming that British colonial ways are always progressive ways.

Nyasha says that she does not hate her father and that "they [the British colonialists] want me to, but I won't (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 201). This means that Babamukuru is but a product of

British colonialism, he is “a good boy, a good munt, a good African” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 200). Nyasha sympathetically suggests that it is not her father who should be hated but the British colonialists. The place for this war, she seems to suggest, is not only within the family, but against the white government with all its lies. Nyasha shreds her history books to pieces with her teeth; and her hunger strike can be seen as refusal to consume the British colonial lies, education and civilisation. During her mental breakdown, Nyasha is accused by a racist, white male psychiatrist of malingering. Like this white doctor, Babamukuru remains cold and insensitive to his daughter’s suffering. Despite this, as Tambu says, “Babamukuru’s moral excellence is diminished in this way by Nyasha’s perspicacity” (p. 160).

*Nervous Conditions* (1988) is written in the Afrocentric, feminist tradition. It succeeds in the depiction of women from different backgrounds dealing with and resisting oppression of gender, racism, sexism and class. It clearly exposes African patriarchy in the domination of African women and the girl child. Most importantly, through the courageous struggles of these women and girl children, particularly Tambu and Nyasha, it leaves readers with the hope and optimism that women will gradually have a voice in the development and advancement of post-colonial African societies.

Because of her mother’s constant caution to be wary of the “Englishness” and Nyasha’s sisterly solidarity, Tambu survives. She refuses to the same way as her brother and goes “somewhere he (Babamukuru) could not reach” (p. 136). In a way, Tambu refused to accept this gender apartheid from an early age, which is why she escapes. She escapes and survives to narrate and “write herself, write about women and bring women to writing” which is a liberating activity. Tambu’s irrepressible quest for liberation through literary, artistic self-expression is continued in another novel by Tsitsi Dangarembga called *The Book of Not* (2006).

### 3.7 Africana Womanism in *Nervous Conditions*

Africana women are nurturing, mothering and respected. Africana women are supposed to love and care for their children, family, and the society as a whole. Because Africana women's main concerns are the futures of those they care about, they set a good path for them to follow, at the same time she is respected for playing her role in society. This is one of the characteristics that the women in *Nervous Conditions* possess. Mai Tambu's nurturing skills are evident in her daughter, Tambu, who has been taught to be strong and to learn to bear her burdens as a woman with strength (p. 16). This is where she gets her strength and determination in her life. Tambu chose to take matters into her own hands when her father could not pay her school fees, she was taught that hard work pays off. Tambu's grandmother cements this when she tells her how Babamukuru became a successful person, "was not afraid of hard work, having grown used to it from an early age," (p. 19). Tambu indicates that she spent most of her productive time working with her grandmother in the plot (p. 19). She learnt most of the important things about life from the women around her.

Just like Nyasha also learnt household chores and read her school books in order to do well at school, because of her mother's encouragement. Mothers earn respect for their roles as mothers and nurturers as evidenced by the women in the text. Maiguru is well respected because she is an educated teacher, Mai Tambu says, "Because Maiguru is educated that is why you kept quiet" (p. 140). Maiguru is respected because she has money and her marriage to Babamukuru, as he is respected for his status in society. Mai Tambu is respected as she is the one who takes care of the home where the rest of the Sigauke family gathers during holidays and different occasions. Tete earns more respect for her patriarchal status. Tambu says, "Because of her patriarchal status my Tete could not sleep in such a public place as a living room when more private rooms were available" (p. 132). Tete, unlike the other women who had become part of

the family because of marriage was involved in decision making processes as evidenced by the Lucia and Takesure issue.

Another characteristic the female characters possess is that of genuine sisterhood, because different women share their experiences and help one another in different ways. Tambu did not give up on Nyasha, despite her wild ways. Tambu displays so much love and care towards her cousin. She says that, “I was more concerned about Nyasha, because Babamukuru had Maiguru to look after him and the solace of knowing Nyasha was wrong” (p. 118). Hudson- Weems (1994) explains how sisterhood is essential amongst African women when she says “this sisterly bond is a reciprocal one in which each gives and receives equally.” She further describes how African women support each other, “They are joined emotionally, as they embody empathic understanding of each other’s shared experiences. Everything is given out of love, criticism included...” which can be seen in Tambu and Nyasha. Tambu comforts Nyasha as she feels she needs it after she physically challenged her father. Tambu was worried about the effect the situation would have on Nyasha. Tambu criticizes Nyasha’s behaviour condemning her for not showing respect for her parents. She does this for the good of Nyasha not hers. She explains, “Even if you have been to England you should respect your mom; ... I wouldn’t speak to my mom the way I have heard you speak to Maiguru” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 78). In other words, no matter where you have been or how old you are, always respect your parents.

Nyasha was disrespectful to her parents and therefore Tambu tells her to respect them, hoping that she might change. Sisterhood is also displayed during the Christmas holiday when the Lucia and Takesure issue is discussed, women in the kitchen show dissatisfaction on how matters are handled in the Sigauke family. Tambu says that “fierce solidarity was established in the kitchen” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 137). Other women stood up and supported Lucia. Lucia also supports Mai Tambu when she gives birth to her son. Mai Tambu also gives Tambu

some support when she needs maize seeds to plant so she can get herself educated. Throughout the text women have displayed genuine sisterhood.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga portrays how African women compliment their husbands' efforts in all they do and that they are flexible role players. They display concern in the way the family is taken care of and involve themselves in economic activities so as to fend for their families. This is presented through Mai Tambu and Maiguru. When Babamukuru is in England with his family, there is scarce funding for Nhamo's education, thus she looks for the money. Tambu asserts "Fortunately my mother was determined that year. She began to boil eggs which she carried to the bus terminus and sold to the passengers passing through. (This meant that we could not eat them.) She also took vegetables- rape, onions and tomatoes - extending her garden so that there was more to sell.... In this way she scrapped enough money to keep my brother at school" (p. 15).

It is sad that at such a time, her lazy husband Jeremiah does nothing, he always expects his brother to give him money to fend for his own family and makes no effort to make some money on his own. Jeremiah's family is immersed in poverty, and it is also evident in the children's names. "Dambudzo" translates to "problem," "Tambudzai" and "Netsai" translates to "being problematic," "Nhamo" can be translated to hardship, poverty and destitution and "Rambanai" denotes "separation." One of the reasons behind their poverty is Jeremiah's laziness, this has a negative impact on his family to the extent that even when his son dies, he has no say in matters concerning his death or show any concern. Mai Tambu is unhappy and expresses her dissatisfaction. An example is when Babamukuru imposes a wedding on them, she is against it together with Tambu, but Jeremiah accepts it. Tambu asserts "I don't think my uncle's plans for my parents were something to laugh about" (p. 149).



Tambu shows that she is a flexible role player when at a tender age she comes up with a plan to raise money for her school fees and succeeds in implementing it. She states, “I will earn my fees. If you give me some seed, I will clear my own field and grow my own maize, not much, just enough for my fees” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 17). This statement shows us how determined she is to acquire her education which her family did not have the funds for and because of her femaleness, she is denied. It was believed that it was better to educate a boy child as the girl child would be a waste of money because she would get married and use her money on the family that she is married into just like the boy would. Jeremiah also echoed this.

Maiguru is also a flexible role player, she works and earns money, which she uses to provide for the family together with her husband’s (Waddell, 2013). however, she does not enjoy the privilege of receiving her own money in her hands. This reduces her to a minor. When Tambu and Lucia repair the roof of a hut in the homestead, a task usually done by men, Babamukuru applauds Jeremiah for a job well done and he replies as if he was responsible for the thatching. Babamukuru then adds that Takesure would do the rest.

According to Waddell (2013), an Africana woman is whole, authentic and a self-namer, which is depicted through Maiguru. She loves and provides for her family. Maiguru went to England with her husband to get educated, she did not leave her children, Nyasha and Chido, behind. Despite the problems that the family was facing, she still stayed with her husband and children. She desires positive male companionship, trying at all times to stay calm even though her husband does things that hurt her. There is a time when her husband upset her and she left for her brother’s home. When Babamukuru hears this, he goes there and brings her back home. A true Africana woman wants her home, her family and career and does not neglect any of them. According to Hudson Weems (1994), “in acquiring wholeness, the Africana womanist demonstrates her desire for a positive male companionship, for without her male counterpart, her life is not complete in a real sense. She needs male companionship and likewise he needs

female companionship. Both are essential for the survival of the human race.” This shows that men and women need each other for survival.

Tambudzai manages to go to school because of the efforts made by Babamukuru and those made by her teacher Mr. Matimba. Babamukuru asserts that Tambu was an intelligent girl and deserving of education as she would help the family come out of poverty. Maiguru manages to balance and divide her attention to her family, her career and her home. Maiguru cared about her family and the survival of other people as well. This is shown in Tambu’s statement, “My Maiguru was concerned about everyone, she was gentle, conscientious” (p. 79). Africana women insist on identifying themselves as mothers and companions, Hudson Weems (1994) declares that an Africana womanist is her own person, operating according to the forces in her life, and thus, her name must reflect authenticity of her activity, not that of another culture. Maiguru was in England, obtained her degree and came back home, but the way she behaves depicts that of an African woman. She is concerned about her family’s survival and the survival of other people outside her immediate family as exemplified by her concern for Tambudzai and Nhamo.

Another characteristic that the female characters possess is being respectful to (Waddell, 2013). African children are raised in such a way that they view respect as a good quality in any person. *Nervous Conditions* women are respectful to people around them except for Nyasha, who has the guts to challenge her father verbally and physically and Lucia who grabs Takesure by his ear in front of the elders of the Sigauke family. Women in the text call each other in a dignified manner for example Mai Tambu, Maiguru, Mainini Patience, Tete, and Tambu. These women are respectful to all the men, this is also exemplified by Tambu who kneels when called in by Babamukuru. When her brother, Nhamo, called their father by his name, Tambu grew angry and for once was up in arms on behalf of her father (p. 48). Tambu’s character is presented as respectful and also expects those around her to be respectful. She reprimands Nyasha to be

respectful to her parents, “even if you have been to England you should respect your parents; I told her. I wouldn’t speak to my mother the way I have heard you speak to Maiguru” (p. 78).

However, this does not change Nyasha, she continues to backchat to her parents. When confronted by her father for staying out late with boys, she becomes defensive and maintains that she was right, which led her father to beating her. When beaten she retaliates punching him as well. She screams at her father, “What do you want me to say... You want to admit I am guilty don’t you? Alright then. I was doing it, whatever you are talking about. There, I have confessed” (p. 113). Because she fails to respect her parents and listen to what they say, she fails to conform to the African ideals. Nyasha can be said to be a confused child who does not know what to do and what not to do, and this is what leads to her nervous breakdown. She cannot eat, and when forced to, she quickly gobbles up the food, and when she goes away, she throws up all the food she has eaten. This could be a clear sign of her denial of African culture. This results in her suffering from anorexia nervosa.

*Nervous Conditions* bears qualities of Africana Womanism as has been shown above and Dangarembga used it to prove that women are compatible with men, which is presented when Maiguru goes to her brother for help. However, Nyasha disapproves of her mother seeking solace in a man’s arms. In this case, Dangarembga shows that she does not deny the fact that patriarchy may be a source of conflict but it can also offer viable solutions. Dangarembga also brings to light the fact that colonialism is problematic as it makes the man look more like an enemy to the woman. Realizing patriarchal ills here and there, Tambudzai clings to her culture and tradition which saves her as compared to her cousin Nyasha. At the end of the text, it can be noted that feminism has failed as proven by Nyasha’s nervous breakdown. Anorexia and Bulimia were ailments not associated with blacks. Dangarembga’s choice of these ailments is to suggest the negative effects of western ideas on African women. Normally these ailments emanate from western ideas of beauty which at the end may prove to have tragic effects on the

mind of the African. Thus, her nervous breakdown seeks to denounce feminism as an attempt in solving the problems of a woman of African descent.

### **3.8 Chapter summary**

In *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Dangarembga depicts black women's struggles brought about by a multitude of oppressions. Tambu, the protagonist in the novel, is used to expose all the female characters' poignant experiences. She managed to break free from the voiceless cycle by putting everything on paper. Dangarembga's fiction illustrates how the oppressive nature of traditional African culture on women is used as an excuse to explain away violations of women's rights. Cultures and traditions should find ways in which they accommodate the changed economic and social circumstances. The novel also exposes the corrupt African patriarchy in the domination of African women and the girl child.

Tambu's story is used to bring out the author's argument that gender is the basis of women oppression and that all women regardless of their social class, cultural or working backgrounds, experience oppression, and are prejudiced against in the colonial and post-colonial contexts in which she writes. In this chapter I argued that colonial, patriarchal oppression and domination of women (and girls) widen and embed social inequalities, which result in intergenerational poverty in groups, in historically and socially oppressed and marginalised. Lastly, I explored the innovative ways in which Dangarembga's fiction used to advocate for women emancipation and voices. The female characters in *Nervous Condition* speak up against their oppressive situations and that of other women thereby asserting their freedom and voice, and that of other women as well.

Tambu gains social emancipation and finds her socially silenced voice through her story, and so do other female characters, namely Lucia, Nyasha, and Maiguru, who achieve self-liberation

and assertion by speaking up against the oppressive systems and structures. Tambu's story pervades hope and inspiration to women and girls in different oppressive situations.

The following chapter endeavours to elucidate the prejudices and inequalities presented in *The Book of Not*, focusing on how Dangarembga's depiction of the female characters and writing style. The chapter will also tackle trauma, colonial and racial oppression.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A PRESENTATION OF PREJUDICES AND INEQUALITIES IN *THE BOOK OF NOT*

#### 4.1 Introduction

Dangarembga's writing is made up of a mixture of informative, and satirical and it clearly exposes the problems that are present in societies at that given time. Her works awaken strong reactions and responses. In her first book, *Nervous Conditions* (1988), she made use of Africana Womanism, Nego-Feminism and STIWANISM, as she appears to have been advocating for women to speak up, for women to be there for each other, and for men and women to work together. Women and men can live together peacefully, as each other's backbones. In *The Book of Not* (2006), a sequel to *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga focuses on gender power relations. The female characters are the main protagonists, which suggests that women have been side-lined for too long in literary texts and it is time for them to speak up, find their voices through African writings, especially those that are female-authored.

The previous chapter showed how education and gender inequalities affected the girl child and the women in the Shona society. This chapter also demonstrates the forms of subjugation women endured and are still enduring, as well as gender oppression, resistance and women's liberation. It concludes by exploring Africana womanism that was applied in the novel. The feminisation of poverty and victimhood and nervous conditions have been in existence since before independence and the effects are still evident in today's societies, therefore this chapter continues with the exploration of the reasons behind these cyclical societal issues.

*The Book of Not* (2006) takes up from where *Nervous Conditions* (1988) ended. It is in 1975, and the Liberation War is at its full swing. Tambu is 15 years old and she is asked to attend a *Pungwe* alongside Babamukuru. Mai Tambu has morphed into a vengeful, bitter, angry and

petty woman, who is jealous and intimidated by her own daughter, including Babamukuru and his family. By this, Dangarembga could have been pointing out that women are not as one dimensional as they are usually perceived to be in society. They can feel resentment and ruthlessly plot revenge along with the men. Mai Tambu is angry and jealous of Babamukuru and his wife, and still bitter at him for the death of her son, Nhamo. She blames him for the alienation of Tambu - who she feels is now Maiguru's child not hers – thus she claims Babamukuru “stole” her children. Mai Tambu or Mai as she is known in the novel arranges a kangaroo court at the Pungwe through Netsai's boyfriend, the Guerrilla in charge of the territory, claiming Babamukuru is a sell-out and hoping to scare Tambu into dropping her Eurocentric mannerisms and superiority complex and become once more the daughter she recognises.

“I did not have the heart to return three times a year to fetching water from the river, the juddering paraffin lamp light, and *sadza* with only one, extremely small portion of relish. There was in addition to that, my mother's constant innuendo, Oh you *wekuchirungu!* Do you still like *matumbu*, Tambudzai!” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 7)

Mai Tambu reprimanded Tambu in a deriding way, which created a rift between the two of them. This also makes Tambu align herself with the family at the Mission where she is pampered and smiled at. Mai Tambu should have treated Tambu like a child and not mocked into change like an adult. Referring to Tambu as *murungu* backfires and Tambu has a split identity because of her colonial education.

Babamukuru is made aware of his crimes and beaten at the *Pungwe*. Tambu is also threatened, terrified and traumatised. Netsai's boyfriend intervened to stop what could have resulted in murder, maybe because he had other interests in the matter or did not agree with Mai Tambu –

she was being petty about Babamukuru's crimes. Of which his main crime was not fencing the homestead like Samhungu's:

“look at the way Samhungu has put a fence around his place” .... In spite of all that money of his” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 7)

Netsai who is also an armed guerrilla follows her boyfriend out to the *Pungwe* from their hideout and ends up stepping on a landmine that blows her leg off to the horror of all at the *Pungwe*. Ironically, Babamukuru who is barely alive, the English accented Tambu, along with Maiguru are the ones who drive Netsai back to Umtali for treatment. Netsai was given the first aid that was available as Babamukuru would drive first thing in the morning.

It was decided that Netsai would be given what first aid was available while Babamukuru would drive away first thing in the morning...They said I had to go in the car with her, so that I could speak in my English accent if I was asked, proving allegiance and providing camouflage, also so that I would know (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 18).

Mai Tambu is saddened and hurt because her plans failed to work out at the *Pungwe*, even the spirits invoked by the level of anguish refused to fully manifest and help at the *Pungwe*.

Arrive, our dear grandmother! You who are in the winds, come to your home! Intoned *sekuru* Benjamin.

No!” said my mother in an offended man's voice. Our stomachs turned cold and we knew that the death that hovered over us that night had invited unknown patently evil spirits. “I shall not arrive! (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 16)

The reason behind Tambu calling them “evil” may be because of the conditioning from her catholic education. It deemed African spiritual facets evil with no explanation or much



research. Netsai's situation can be interpreted as her ancestors (maternal parents' side) fought for her, she was not going to die. Hence, a man's voice spoke through Mai Tambu, the maternal spirit that had been summoned was that of a man. They were not pleased with what had transpired at the *Pungwe*, as the correct protocol for handling offences had not been followed. Which resulted in an innocent person being injured. *Pungwes* were created to strengthen and unify Africans to keep agitating and fighting for liberation. Instead, the Sigaukes were framing one another and almost lost two family members. That is the sweetest child and the breadwinner.

“she was a sweet child, the type that will make a sweet sad wife” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 10)

After being almost beaten to death, Babamukuru goes back to Umtali and continues to educate Tambu despite her mother's deceit. Tambu returned to school traumatised and confused. Other black girls and her were token black students, who lived in the less luxurious part of the hostel. The six girls were constantly blamed for any fault with the school ablutions. Tambu yearns for the approval and acceptance of her white colleagues, she is also fiercely competitive with her classmates. Tambu fails to fit in with other African students who are friendly and supportive of each other, because she is not friendly; she is disconnected as she feels she is better than them. The African girls are resigned to the racism and bullying from the other students and staff, they proudly ignore it and retain their dignity. This is unlike Tambu, who is so alienated, brainwashed and mentally colonised to the extent that she volunteers to knit for the Rhodesian Forces, including the white students. What she did not realise was they respected her less for being disloyal to her own race, and the black girls also disliked her for her insensitivity as well as disrespect to the cause of independence.

Tambu manages to obtain the highest O-level results at the school but this is unacknowledged; the honour is given to a white girl. Babamukuru is proud of her. She returned for A'level but does not perform well as she had taken a subject combination where Africans could not be tutored. Tambu furthers her education at the University of Zimbabwe, but she has a bitter mindset from feeling like she is a failure. Eventually she becomes a teacher in a high-density area. But she is discontented with her work and ironically racist and repulsed by her black students. She changes her job and ends up working at an advertising firm owned by white people. Her work is often plagiarised, unacknowledged, there are no signs of promotions and the salary is low. Tambu is too oppressed and afraid of offending the whites that she never stands up for herself, but eventually quits. Tambu only quit her job after her mother called and threatened to visit her in a white dominated hostel with her lame sister, Netsai.

The following section of the chapter will focus on the depiction of the female characters and it will explore Dangarembga's writing style. Trauma, colonial and racial oppression will also be tackled, followed by the representation of women, identities and education.

#### **4.2 The depiction of female characters and writing style in *The Book of Not***

*The Book of Not* demonstrates prejudice, gender inequalities and revolution in the Zimbabwean society, as well as in the mind of a black person (split personality which leads to *othering*). According to Powell and Menedian (2016), "othering" refers to a set of dynamics, processes and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality across any of the full range of human differences based on group identities. Dimensions of othering may include, but not entirely limited to, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status (class), race, and skin tone. In other words, it is a process of creating an "us" and a "them" with a result of making oneself more superior to them. In the novel, Tambu "others" the African girls. She has more economic

advantages from her background of exposure of life at the mission, living in town with Babamukuru and Maiguru. Tambu also went to Boarding school with more luxuries than them.

The fools who couldn't use a decent sewerage system! If they'd only shown they were conversant with those contrivances. I was sure they wouldn't have been any bans- not on anyone from any bathrooms! Had these people that I was forced to identify with been more able, those bathrooms would have been open to all. No one would have been standing here in this humiliation. Now I had to be here when I had received proper training at my Uncle's! Oh I felt yet another surge of dislike for the other girls in my dormitory. (Dangarembga, 2006, pp. 70-71)

Tambu internalised and accepted racism around her, that was aimed at black people. In turn she practised it on other girls and anyone who she felt was inferior to her. Tambu also believed that it was the black girls who had blocked the toilets as they do not know how to use them, unlike herself who had learnt how to use them at the mission. When Tambu practised the same racism that she had internalised and accepted on the black girls, it became cyclical racism, a form of "nervous condition" that she normalised. Her naivety is displayed through her belief that black people deserve all the discrimination they endure and that the white establishments are never wrong or biased. Something which is also evident in Babamukuru, he will not hear or accept any negative criticism or reports against the school. His attitude colours Tambu.

Dangarembga criticises the irresponsible patriarchal society that is represented by both male and female characters of the novel. Both the colonial system and education were inherited at independence and these perpetuated split personalities amongst people. These include Babamukuru, the family patriarch, who no one dared to confront out rightly, Mai Tambu who was defiant and angry, Nyasha medicated into resigned acceptance of her world, Tambu forever trying to please the white authorities and loses herself in the midst of it all, and Maiguru who

is determined to save her marriage, she creates her world around her husband. All these characters are ruthlessly pursuing their own agendas, they lost they sense of *ubuntu*. The society and family break down into a war zone.

The female characters in this novel drag each other down, as a result they fail to unite, they lack the spirit of sisterhood, which is something that is advocated for by Africana womanism and STIWANISM. The reason behind this is, none of them were economically independent or were able to function alone socially. Even though Mai Tambu constantly mocks Tambu, she is still with her irresponsible husband, barely fertile soil to do her gardening, several children to take care of and a paralysed daughter, who is no longer marriageable or able to help her with the house chores. Similarly, Maiguru has to take care of her mentally fragile daughter, an egocentric husband and Tambu, who goes to an expensive school. None of them can vent out their frustration. Therefore, this results in a mental war, with each of them provoking one another, this is also fuelled by jealousy, insecurities, resentment and miscommunication, instead of working together and helping each other, they will turn against each other.

Mai our mother fell down. She did not get up.... I was the eldest girl...I was expected to perform an appropriate action...holding down my head to summon the peace that comes with not seeing...Again at sixteen; I had nothing that Mai wanted. It was all too much for me. So I just stood watching her, arms folded, rigid and taking care to be aloof and I didn't look at the *mutamba* tree anymore. (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 4)

The quote above is from a scene where Netsai's leg is blown off. Before that, Babamukuru had been beaten to a pulp. In this scene, the Sigauke women are depicted as disorganised, each of them dealing with their own issues. Tambu may have been brought up by both Mai Tambu and Maiguru, but she fails to show some humanity. She could not run to help her little sister, Netsai's friend had to be the one to try and stop the bleeding. Tambu also fails to comfort her

mother or shield her little sister, Rambanai. Instead, she is frozen with her arms crossed, her body language can be interpreted as not wanting to be involved. Maiguru who was justifiably upset about her husband's beating, may be excused for not doing anything to help Netsai. Tambu can also be said to be too traumatised and shocked to help. In this case, it can also be said that she lacks *unhu* and the quality of genuine sisterhood. As an African woman who is educated and compassionate about family, and also fully aware that life is precious, she could have helped her sister or comforted her mother. As for Babamukuru, she could have not done anything as she had been warned before and she also feared that she could have been beaten too.

Dangarembga's intention in the novel is to communicate that without women to anchor a society, it produces decadent and directionless individuals. No man is an island complete of itself. Maiguru in thinking she was too educated or put upon by her husband's family, makes them resent her and scheme against her. This is also evident in *Nervous Conditions* when she stops her children from dancing the traditional dances, she raises her children abroad in a way that allows them to forget their mother tongue, and her refusal to participate in protesting against the ill-treatment Lucia was enduring from the Sigaukes after she fell pregnant. In *The Book of Not*, Maiguru is a very mature individual, her only downfall is her isolation from the family, as is Tambu who looked up to her as her role model. Western feminism can only be applied in the West but not in Africa. In order to survive in Africa, one needs *unhu*.

In this state, it did not help very much when I tried to learn how to progress further by applying the general, hitherto useful concepts of *unhu*. The thing about *unhu* was that you couldn't go against the grain on your own. You weren't a clan, a people with a poem of praise, or a boast of war that petrified enemies.... What *unhu* prescribed for one who was moving against the larger current was to come to one's senses, realise the

sovereignty of the group and work to make up for the disappointment. Then you would become somebody as more *unhu* would accrue. (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 164)

Furthermore, Tambu contemplates on how she was going to go on with her normal academic life after the crushing disappointment of not being acknowledged for obtaining the best results at the school. She goes back to the notions of *unhu* but this is something she cannot show to the white people as they do not live by the principles of *unhu* or understand them. Tambu cannot practise *unhu* because she has no community and she shuns the other African girls. Ntombi offers to accompany Tambu to the headmistress and enquire why she had not been acknowledged for Honour roll, so her concept of *unhu* falls flat.

As Tracey returned to her place, Ntombizethu twisted around, as though to have her gaze touch me.

She had taken to staring at me mournfully with some reproach, as though she had some claim on my actions in spite of which I had failed her in some significant attribute.

The reproach gradually transformed into pity as if she wished to protect me. But I smelt something terrible and destroyed in her too, that she was trying to discard in this fashion. (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 162)

This excerpt shows how down cast Tambu felt as her prize and acknowledgement were given to Tracy, a white girl. Out of *unhu*, Ntombi offers to help Tambu fight the system for a logical explanation by addressing the matter with the headmistress. Ntombi appears to be more mature, hence she is not afraid to fight the system and demand respect, an explanation or a fitting apology. They may not be friends with Tambu, but they are the same race, and whatever that diminishes Tambu, diminishes her too. As an African woman, sisterhood exists in Ntombi. Her instinctive needs to protect and be there for Tambu at her lowest, displays the qualities of an

Africana woman. It is unfortunate that Tambu had become distant from her African girl identity, as she was hell bent on performing well in her studies and not offending the school, as well as being acknowledged and accepted by the whites, she could not fight for herself. Tambu's downfall began the moment she accepted to be passed over, academically abused and ignored. Probably, if she had learnt to fight for her rights, conquer her fears at school, her professional world would have been better. Colonialism and irresponsible patriarchy caused the women in the novel to break down and therefore, there is no hope for the children or their families. A fifteen-year-old Tambu, sees her mother as a pathetic person.

It was the nothingness upon which she stood as upon the summit of her life, from which she clawed about for gleanings from other people's husbands, such as Babamukuru....What could make a woman so avaricious and hollow? (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 9)

Mai Tambu's twisted and resentful character can be interpreted as symbolising how society belittles rural, uneducated country women. Mai Tambu's actions are not worse than any other character's in the novel, but one cringes every time she is in the picture. The rural-urban dichotomy is subtly raised. One common conception is the assumption that town women are the corrupt and precarious ones. The ones who challenge societal values and norms because of their exposure to the European values. On the contrary, Maiguru is humble and quieter than Mai Tambu and her cunning ways. She suddenly turned into a wildfire that could not be contained, it is pathetic because people owe her a lot. For example, if Mai Tambu was not taking care of the rural home, Babamukuru would have nothing to go back to and look down on with his Eurocentric ways, including his diluted Christian values he uses to subdue people.

One is identified as an African if one should have a rural home to go back to, to hail from a certain part of a country of birth. This is why the land was so important to Africans that they

were prepared to go to war for liberation, so as to rule it on their own. For an African, land and identity are intertwined. Tambu owes her dedicated loyalty to her village. When Maiguru travels back to the village, she arrives at a well taken care of homestead, not just a place she assumes the role of a bountiful lady with the groceries she brings. She owes Mai Tambu solidarity as women who are married into the same family. It is also fair to assume that Maiguru paid all her dues and Mai Tambu was being highly petty with her continuous envy or jealousy that was disguised as hatred. Perhaps, had Maiguru learnt to allow Mai Tambu to run and rule the rural homestead in a way that she preferred, the hostility would have never begun. Mai Tambu felt belittled by the educated, perfumed and well-provided for Maiguru. Maiguru seizes authority in Mai Tambu's home, she also usurps Tambu's love and respect and overshadows her own hard-earned achievements. Because Maiguru has had more advantages than the other women in the novel did not have, and by refusing to stand up for the other women and choosing to be a submissive wife, she let down the sisterhood, she answers for that. Her ways are also depicted in Tambu, who refuses to associate herself with her hostel mates and not break rules by speaking in Shona.

I was not going to identify with a group that spoke in the only language, out of all the ones that were known at the school, which was forbidden. (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 169)

Dangarembga goes on to further point out the subtle art of "othering." Because of her distorted sense of identity, Tambu was indifferent and was unable to connect with other black people. Tambu looked at them as the "others" because she considered them to be poorer, less informed and less sensitive than herself. Babamukuru who was also warped and had a split identity, was Tambu's hero. The colonial school system that suppresses her natural and instinctive rebellion on the unfair social structure and order with religion, as well as, good grades, does not nurture or accept her. When Tambu is at the boarding school, she is brought up by white Roman Catholic nuns who have a malicious influence on her psyche. As an adult, Tambu loathes her



skin, her kin, and her achievements. She gleefully quashes any black person who tries to make something better out of himself or herself, or tries to rise up. This is depicted in how she treats Pedzi, the receptionist:

“No, I had no desire to encourage” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 213)

“I was gratified to see she was sufficiently upset” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 215)

Tambu can be assumed to be a product of the classic conditioning. She unconsciously accepts that she is black and evil, and for that reason, anyone like her will only progress to a certain extent. Tambu lacks enough courage and confidence to push through boundaries and claim what belongs to her, in this case, her trophy, her copy right for her adverts and credit for doing the most work. She allows the white people to constantly exploit her.

*The Book of Not* (2006) depicts African women as individuals who no longer know their identity or strength as women. The issues of race, ethnicity, education and economic superiority contributed to this and also blocked them from uniting and bringing up their children, and thus society as one voice. In Tambu’s case, her mother turned to her to provide for her and also mocks her instead of encouraging her. As for Nyasha, her progress is sacrificed to please her father’s ego. Nyasha dies spiritually as she was constantly frustrated. The warrior spirit in her is crushed and sedated.

Dangarembga highlights and gives a voice to some of the unacknowledged challenges African women face as wives, mothers, daughters, professionals and friends. African societies have evolved and in as much as it is noble and right for them to know where they stand in society and claim it, forces that are bigger than them have combined to make it more practical to have compromises. Tambu became isolated and anglicised with the wrong perception of everything and anything African. Maiguru and Mai Tambu are both her mothers, Tambu should have carefully and respectfully picked the best elements from both of them, as well as, from Nyasha. That

would have transformed her into a more solid individual. In the end, Mai Tambu started a profitable garden and worked hard enough for a truce with Maiguru to get her to track down Tambu.

“And of course I say they are good, aren’t they and when people say yes, I charge them and I put a bonus on top for the sweetness” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 228)

A humbled Maiguru, ends taking care of a cantankerous paraplegic (Babamukuru found an unlikely ally in Mai Tambu) as she was the one who made the phone call for Mai Tambu to talk to Tambu at the hostel in Harare (p. 225).

“When he was not supine in bed, he sat in a wheelchair, which rendered him more full of umbrage and more cantankerous than usual” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 198)

Instead of Tambu accepting patronage from people like Tracy who did not respect or appreciate her, she should have associated with and learnt from characters like Ntombi and Patience, including the other black students. That way a lot would have been done in terms of restoration of dignity, confidence and Tambu’s black pride. Using Tambu, Dangarembga calls for equal empowerment and opportunities as men and in Zimbabwe’s case, white women as well, but once the opportunities are provided, one should not wallow in cowardice like Tambu. Through Netsai’s injury during a war duty, Dangarembga depicts her mobility (hopla, hopla) as a silent scream to the government. It may have been wonderful to celebrate independence, but the scars did not heal, the women fighters were ignored. In African culture, a hero is a hero, she would have been acknowledged and helped. Tambu, the elder sister, would have also been eager to take care of her younger sister. But because of her inherited euro-centricity and disunity, she only looks out for her own interests. Dangarembga’s characters are individually flawed and selfish, but truly reflect human nature. Too much poverty, oppression and divisiveness affected African women negatively. For her to regain her place and authority, she needs to be

empowered. Poverty attracts spite, oppression invites indifference and too much pressure with no support system results in failure and lack of courage and confidence as depicted through Tambu.

#### **4.3 Dangarembga's writing style in *The Book of Not***

*The Book of Not* (2006), traces the protagonist's, Tambu's, continuing quest to redefine the personal, political, and historical forces that threaten to destroy the fabric of her community, it also reveals how its aftermath still bedevils Africans today. Besides the similarities between Dangarembga's life experiences and those of her female characters in her novels, *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*, her usage of the first-person narrative mode also reflects on her engagement in her story. Dangarembga depicted her characters as conflicting, struggling and being swept away in the direction of disunity. None of them have support systems as they all have no interest in uniting and facing their problems together. When the book ends, Tambu is confused and unfocused at adulthood as she was when she was fifteen. She is still afraid of her mother and what people think of her. As much as Mai Tambu ends up an enterprising business woman, she still baits and mocks Tambu instead of making peace and reconciling with her. Mai Tambu gives in to capitalism by putting bonus on her products as a way of joining the system. The relationship between Mai Tambu and her daughter keeps deteriorating by the day and one feels that if they communicate instead of fighting and being defensive it would work better for society. A war between a mother and daughter can limit progress. There will be no generational interconnectedness if the daughter is to marry and have her own children. The relationship between the grandmother and grandchildren will not exist because of the mother-daughter war. This only creates room for another badly parented generation because people often parent and govern the same way they were also parented and governed.

Dangarembga's novel was not set out to valorise African women, it was more of an investigation on the social ill, such as patriarchy, lack of support, disunity, loss of African values due to colonialism and capitalism, poverty and individualism that results in the breaking down of society as unity does not exist. She captures how far women have deviated from their societies. In as much as Dangarembga is said feminist, but more influenced by Western ideals, the concepts of Africana womanism, Nego-feminism and STIWANISM have not been fully applied to examine her text or all her works as a whole. It is open to debate whether she would later lead her characters to this or her scope and interest in writing her book- to expose the problems, but in this case, she probably did not have the answer. At this stage she knew it had to be addressed. Dangarembga seems to be unimpressed by the behaviour of the men, just like the women (as previously indicated) in her novel. Babamukuru is presented as a bully, whilst Netsai's boyfriend is a double-crossing person who is happy to have Netsai and another girl compete for his love.

“Netsai was his first war love.... that was when he took Dudziro, and loved both of them, a comrade indeterminate and undecided” (Dangarembga, 2006, pp. 5-6)

Tambu does not have a boyfriend, and the closest person she has to a relationship with a man who is not related to her, is the white man from work who steals her ideas. This man is only interested in her for her ideas and appears not to like her.

“His tone was surly and pained, confirming he did not like me, without volunteering a reason” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 233)

“I sipped my coffee calmly and smiled encouragingly to help him to make his point, for it was clearly difficult for him to be obliged to admit how outstanding the copy I had written was” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 235)

Ntombi and patience who represent anchored African women would not have tolerated being patronised and robbed, they would have quit and walked away disdainfully, the same way they did with Sister Plato and the biscuits.

“She held out a biscuit to Patience who looked at it, and then at Tracy as if both were dirty” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 74)

What Tambu fails to realise is that she is pitiful. The white girl, Tracy, actually pities her and despises her so much that she would rather befriend unpretentious girls like Ntombi, who does not hide her disapproval of white racism. Tambu is so insignificant in all her areas of life as she allows everyone to walk all over her and does not stand up for herself, no one bothers to help her as well. The women in Dangarembga’s novel were steeped in fear far way too long, subjugation by patriarchy and economic disempowerment that they became voiceless and impassive. Maiguru is partly to be blamed for playing a role in this, her self-pitying passive aggression sent the wrong message to Tambu. Silence is usually not golden, especially when your basic human rights are being violated. When Babamukuru forced Tambu to apologise through a letter for a school violation she had not committed, Maiguru is silent. She allows Tambu to continue going to Sacred Heart even with the problems Nyasha endured with a split personality after growing up in England and failing to adapt to her African culture later on. In this instance, Maiguru was irresponsible and self-centred, people learn from mistakes made by others, there Nyasha’s situation should have served as a lesson. Maiguru had a voice, it may have been negligible but she could make Babamukuru uncomfortable, she had an influence over her husband, and this is evident in the book’s prequel, when she threw a tantrum and left him in protest. She ruined Tambu in a way or like Mai Tambu accuses her “she killed Tambu.” She allowed her to become confused and self-destructive and did not intervene with advice or support, like she did for Nyasha.

Dangarembga does not agree with the system of docile submissive wifehood. African women should have a voice and an opinion. Patriarchy in African cultures does not ask women to surrender their power of thinking, economy, or authority to men, as portrayed by Maiguru's character. This is a hybrid of Christian and Victorian thinking that was subtly injected into the African culture through colonial education. This was because the West wanted weak, ineffective and silenced women who were no threat or contribution to moulding the African society into a passive cheap labour force.

In conclusion, one can assert that discrepancies do exist amongst men and women, in both old and new societies, but such disparities cannot be solved by isolating men from women or condemning the new ways in favour of the old. The best route would be to find a balance. Culture is dynamic as its values do not change, but application is flexible to change. In an African culture, taking care of a family does not include gender, it is normal and expected from anyone and everyone. This is why Babamukuru educated Tambu, so she could take care and provide for her family.

Men and women do not need to compete as African societies and cultures thrive on unity not divisiveness. When individuals' interests are put before the community's needs, it is bound to result in a catastrophe; which is exemplified by through Babamukuru, the only driver who has a car and is present at the *Pungwe*, is beaten to Mai Tambu's satisfaction. In the end he calls upon his own inherent humanity and empathy to agree to drive Netsai to the hospital despite his own injuries. Even the spirits' disapproval is evident when cultural norms are violated and human life is taken for granted. African people will forever be shaped spiritually, socially, and through their connection to one another and their land. Without each other, they will fail to prevail, and the death of one affects them all.

Africana womanism, Nego-feminism and STIWANISM may be the best answer to the nervous conditions and struggles African women may be dealing with. This is because they encourage women to seek liberation within the context of the family and the African cultural values. There should be co-existence, accommodation and understanding between the women and men, modernity and tradition. In this manner, both men and women can tackle the obstacles to human progress and not the obstacles hindering women only. Africa as a society will also achieve anchoring and centeredness as people will get to learn what works and what does not. Babamukuru and Mabasa are men who are also victims of the patriarchal society. Their sense of entitlement and conceitedness in warping the system to their own advantage is inherited from their need to survive in a brutal colonial system and took away their true culture (that they continued oppression after independence was only because they knew no reason to discontinue a system they benefited from). Because of wrong socialisation, men were taught to disregard the interests of women and weak groups, not that the African society is designed that way. The author portrays women as mothers, daughters, wives, as well as professionals. Which is a progressive, realistic, as well as, a positive way of thinking on the part of the author. Dangarembga sends out a message that women are not limited to being homemakers or just victims. Despite one's challenges, with the right attitude or mind-set, one will succeed.

#### **4.4 Trauma, and colonial and racial oppression in *The Book of Not***

In *The Book of Not*, Dangarembga tackles colonial and racial ideologies, as well as trauma. She exposes how black people were oppressed and marginalised, deepening and widening the racial and social inequalities in the social and historical settings in which she writes. The book touches on the discriminatory colonial education system that oppressed and marginalised black female students, all who were members of the "African dormitory" at The Young Ladies' College of the Sacred Heart. The school was a racially segregated multiracial convent in

colonial Rhodesia that was run by nuns. Dangarembga convincingly argues that the inherent inequalities in the social and economic systems are a result of colonial legacy.

According to Schmid (1996), defines racism as a practice of discrimination and prejudice that is based on racial classification and aided by the power to enforce that prejudice. Racism is a result of colonialism. Institutional racism can be defined as the social, economic, educational, and political policies that operate to foster discriminatory outcomes or give preferences to members of one group or others. *The Book of Not* explores institutional racism at school by exploring the experiences of black students at the Sacred Heart.

Dangarembga reveals how the colonial education system discriminated against the education of African students through racial policies and practices which denied them an equal access to education with white students. Education is one of the factors for improving the lives of people in a colonial and post-colonial context. This is depicted through the case of Tambu's aunt and uncle, Babamukuru and Maiguru, who to a great extent benefitted from the best and quality education they acquired and managed to be part of elites of the society. *The Book of Not* discloses how the colonial education system discriminated against black students through discriminatory enrolment policies and unfair practices. Tambu explains the recruitment process:

“Each year the nuns went out into the surrounding areas, away from the well-fenced suburb in which the school was situated. To these outlying areas the nuns delivered a beacon of hope by inviting two girls to attend an entrance examination to the convent. Two girls were chosen each year from amongst the hundreds tested. Once we arrived at the school, the two of us found out we were five percent. Or rather, we did not exceed this figure as that was the quota set by the Rhodesian government on difference, and thus the nuns were obliged to respect it” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 37)



This colonial education system made sure that whites had access to the best and quality education service in the colonial setting while the blacks who were the majority of the population remained oppressed and marginalised. Dangarembga contends that the racial oppression established social and racial inequalities, as well as, aggravated the situation of women who were socially, historically oppressed and marginalised. *The Book of Not* also examines the racial prejudice that the black students at The Young Ladies' College of the Sacred Heart endured. It is after Tambu and the other African students arrive at the colonial convent institution, that they realise that they are not treated equally with the white students. White and Black students had separate facilities. The white students were allotted better facilities and were not in crowded dormitories like the black students. The white students had separate boarding facilities while six African girls were crowded in the African dormitory of St Ignatius corridor, where they shared the room facilities, (p. 58). As for the black students who were caught using facilities that were meant for the white students, they would get in trouble. The same way Tambu got into serious trouble after being caught using a toilet for white students, (p. 67). The black students were also threatened as the Rhodesian soldiers could come and insult them for making use of their daughters' bathrooms, (p. 73).

The St Ignatius dormitory was referred to as the African dormitory because that is where the six black students lived and it was the only one with its own ablution section. African students were belittled and coded as ignorant because of their background. At one point, they are blamed for clogging the college sewage system by throwing their used feminine hygiene pads into it, (p. 63). Sister Emmanuel mentioned to them that one of the reasons they had been sent to that school was for them to polish their behaviour. Racial prejudice was prevalent at Sacred Heart.

“When the nannies serve white students food in the dining room, they do so well and politely, but when they serve the black students, they smack down jugs or plates with a

jut of the chin and spills, as though slapping a hard, crushing thing down on obnoxious crawling objects, or throw the plates to them” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 46)

At assembly, the black students would avoid physical contact with the white students. The matron, Miss Pato, was a stickler for order. She insisted that everything should be kept where she wanted it to belong.

“Be it shoelaces above the tongues of shoes, clothes in cupboards or students in dormitories” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 50)

The way Miss Pato insisted on everything being kept where she grants it belongs can be viewed as symbolic of the segregation of the races at the institution and this mirrors the situation in the whole country. Bias is displayed through the teachers, when they award prizes for academic excellence at the boarding school. The African students are not recognised for their performance and worthiness. The African students, including Tambu, are informed that none of them had ever received or achieved the honour roll, (p. 65). Despite Bougainvillea hiding Tambu’s book when they were preparing for the O-level examinations, (p. 147), Tambu manages to obtain the best O-level results and both Ntombi and her are on top of the nation, (p. 152). Even with their outstanding achievements, neither of them receives the academic trophy for achieving the best results. The award is given to Tracey Stevenson, a white student. The explanation they received for these actions was the school undertakes to nurture well-rounded human beings. Tambu was disappointed as she was not given the honour roll, something she had been working to attain, (p. 155).

Black students were not allowed at government schools. Tambu performed exceptionally well in her O-level examinations at the convent and continued to study science subjects for her A’ level certificate. There was a shortage of teachers at her school, and the science teacher who was supposed to come from Europe, failed to do so because of security reasons due to the

liberation war which was raging in the country. As a result, an arrangement was made for the science students to attend classes at Umtali Boys High School every day, but Tambu was not allowed at the school because of her skin colour. Instead, Sister Emmanuel instructed her to identify a girl she could copy notes from after classes. Because of this, Tambu failed her A' levels. After this, she could not be admitted at the university. She managed to secure a few jobs with Babamukuru's assistance and his contacts in education. Eventually, she managed to enrol for studies at the University of Zimbabwe, when there were vacant spaces for mature students who had Ds and Es on their certificates. By the time she joined the job market, her former classmate, Tracey, had climbed up high in the agency hierarchy and was the Advertising Executive for Afro Shine, as well as the Deputy Creative Director in the New Zimbabwe, (p. 216).

In the New Zimbabwe, Tambu came to the realisation that black people were still being segregated from whites in the Twiss Hostel, which she was living in. White girls did not want to sit with the black girls. Whenever Tambu wanted company, she would boldly carry her plate to the table and would be told that another resident had booked even when no one had done so, (p. 223). Mrs May, the hostel matron failed to remember her name and called her Isabel (p. 207). The other white residents would be remembered by the matron, as they walked past, she would greet them.

“Morning Barbra! Hello, Fiona! Hello Jane!” (p. 208)

Tambu's story mirrors the situation that black people face in colonial and post-colonial contexts. The anti-climax of the book as represented by the title of the novel, *The Book of Not*, clearly summarises the condition of black people in general, and women in particular, women in a patriarchal and gendered colonial setting. The matron's failure to remember Tambu

symbolises the fact that blacks are hardly accommodated in the new dispensation as they are not recognised and remembered.

*The Book of Not* probes on racial segregation in colonial Rhodesia. The novel examines racial oppression of blacks, but mainly focuses on how women (and girls) were marginalised and discriminated against during the colonial era. Dangarembga provided a convincing argument for the social and economic condition of women. She analyses the discriminatory colonial and education system from the perspective of Tambu, the protagonist and narrator, as well as other six African students at Sacred Heart. She also reveals how it oppressed and marginalised black students. Dangarembga also asserts that colonial and racial oppression of blacks widens and embeds social and racial inequalities, and as a result perpetuates intergenerational poverty in social and racial groups historically oppressed and marginalised in colonial and post-colonial contexts.

Furthermore, *The Book of Not*, is also a narrative of racial trauma. The novel is set during the period of white minority rule in Rhodesia, now known as Zimbabwe, up to the acquisition of political independence and majority government in 1980. In the book, Dangarembga expresses racial traumatic experiences through Tambu's character and the other black students she learnt with and shared a dormitory with. The author wrote her work using a medias res narrative technique, Tambu narrates the events. The novel begins with a frightening scene in which a female guerrilla's leg (Netsai) is blown off after she stepped on a landmine at the *morari* (night meeting), which had been summoned by the freedom fighters so they discipline Babamukuru. He had been accused of being a sell-out. Dangarembga depicts this scene rhythmically in the opening sentence.

“Up, up, up, the leg is spun. A piece of person, up there in the sky” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 3)

Netsai's leg spins and hooks onto a tree branch where it continued to bleed as Babamukuru was being beaten with a *sjambok* by VanaMukoma (the big brothers), while Tambu and the villagers watched hopelessly, (p. 4). Dangarembga portrayed her characters as deeply traumatised subjects. The characters will be forever haunted by the memories of the odious and horrifying events they all had to witness and go through a process of working out. Because Tambu was so traumatised by the horrendous scene at the *Pungwe*, she constantly experienced visions and dreams even long after the event. This also includes the villagers who were present at the event. Tambu's traumatic experiences reflect the situations that the people in the country have witnessed, namely the gruesome and frightening colonial and war atrocities. By expressing Tambu's experiences, Dangarembga's fiction works out colonial and racial trauma of the whole country. Before the evening of the *Pungwe*, Mai Tambu instructed Tambu not to tell anyone about what she sees or hears at the *morari*.

“Whatever it is, do not say anything. Just sing, whatever the song, sing it. And answer as everyone else does. Otherwise, be quiet” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 12)

Tambu tried to shut her senses for fear of the fact that she would record the events at the *morari*. Tambu remarks:

“I tried not to look, so I would not make the mistake of saying I had seen anything when I returned to school. I tried not to hear so I would never repeat the words of war anywhere” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 13)

Moreover, Tambu also tried to not know whose voice was singing lest she recognised the person. The instruction she had received from the mother to never tell what she heard or saw at the *morari* can be interpreted as an attempt to silence narratives of violence and trauma in the historical setting of the novel. Through Tambu narrating these war atrocities, Dangarembga breaks the silence that has been imposed on these narratives in the social and historical contexts

in which her novel was set. The brutal beatings and the gruesome scene of Netsai's leg being blown off, and how it spins and hooks onto a tree branch and continues to bleed, are all scenes that are horrifying to be watched by anyone. Hence, Tambu described the *morari* as a place where fear paralyses the heart, (p. 27). The following lines describe the war imagery that evoked great fear in Tambu and other witnesses:

“I sat now in the depths of the machine that brought death to people, and I was intolerably petrified to be in the belly of the beast that belched war...This fighting, and the limbs and the fluids and the excreta that it scattered over the land, intoxicated the men and women and youth and children who had come to be told we were all, together with the guerrillas, the sacrifice of whose blood justice was purchased” (Dangarembga, p. 12)

The war images of limbs, fluids and excreta that were scattered over the land symbolise the widespread destruction caused by the war. Dangarembga uncovers the severe physical and psychological damage caused to people and the nation during the colonial and war time in her novel. The images of broken objects and cracks symbolise the extent of these damages. As Tambu was wondering around the rural homestead before going to *morari*, she came across broken objects that could not be fixed because the force of wholeness had been abdicated. Tambu comments:

“I touched this —a broken upturned wheelbarrow beaten to lace by wind and rain— examined that—the twisted axel of a scotch cart—the things that break and cannot be fixed because the force of wholeness has abdicated. It was surprising to see how little there was to remind me that I had lived here for twelve years of my childhood. In the absence of anchoring, I shuffled and picking up a half-seeded maize cob and throwing

the grains to the chickens, as though nothing had happened” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 9)

The broken objects and cracks symbolise the severe physical and psychological damage that was caused by the devastating war on the victims and the nation which cannot be mended. This is also depicted in Tambu’s description of her family members as people who cannot become whole again. This can also be picked out from her description of her sister, Netsai, who she describes as a piece of a person, (p. 30). The war scars and psychological damage that the characters and nation endured are presented through the broken images, pieces of flesh and limbs of legs. They symbolise the depth of the trauma the victims sustained, as well as the heinous and terrifying scenes they witnessed. The extent of the damage caused by colonialism and war on the people, is depicted through Tambu, who continued to be haunted by the horrifying visions from the *morari* even after she returned to school. Back at school, Tambu was under immense pressure to excel in her academics and attain an honour roll but she was constantly haunted by the events from the *morari*. She constantly experienced visions of the *morari* night. When Tambu was in class, she revealed that:

“Now, being there on a copper plate was even more necessary: it was as that name so perfectly inscribed couldn’t be blown off so jaggedly, just like that, not in the middle of a night, nor in the middle of anything. But now, after a leg was blown off she came walking backwards over those stones of learning and concentration, hop-hop-hopla because she had only one leg. I could see her clearly as I sat in class, my mind opening to the teacher. It was a woman. It was my sister. Would the honour hold its promise? I could not concentrate. Whenever I focused, the woman stepped back, groaning too many questions” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 28)

Tambu also experienced the same visions during Sister Catherine's Latin lesson. Then mention of soldiers in the Latin sentence translated into English triggered horrible memories of the war and that of her injured sister. In order to block the vision, she had to stop paying attention.

Tambu remarks:

“This morning, towards the end of class, Sister paused. I wasn't looking at anything or anyone in the classroom. I was preventing the appearance of the hopping woman who was a girl. By not paying attention I was making her not come down the mountain...I could tell I was too tired to keep my balance sufficiently to make sense of the Latin phrases, as I was enervated from forcing, for the better part of the morning, everything out of my mind, in case that woman was my sister came hopping down on the stepping stones of attention. The silence went on for a long time while I vacillated between being in the class and not being there, and Sister and the rest of the class waited”  
(Dangarembga, 2006, pp. 29-30)

Her injured sister's image could not leave her mind and she could not flee away from these thoughts, no matter how hard she tried. She explained her dilemma:

“This time I wanted to put my hand up even before Sister asked me. But that would mean I had to open my eyes. They were closed against dark green pine and wattle plantations on the mountain slopes, and the great tracts of burnt bush beside them, green growth oxidized to ash the better to see those people whose legs were to be blown off. If I opened my eyes, I would end up turning my head. Mesmerized I might forget and the tear might fall. If I kept the eyes closed, I would not do well, rather face a lifetime of being nothing, like Mai. This is because of my sister... And didn't my sister see how able such people were, which meant her own leg was in danger of being blown off...Ha! Those thoughts crept up on you just like that, even when you weren't thinking them.



You just couldn't flee far enough; they always insinuated" (Dangarembga, 2006, pp. 30-31)

Any slight incidents trigger the terrifying memories of her injured sister. Quarrels and fights which flare up in the dormitory amongst other students result in Tambu screaming out her sister's name, (p. 78). The novel also investigates the psychological effects of colonial and racial beliefs. These beliefs portrayed blacks as uncivilised and inferior to whites. Tambu confessed this during one of her visions of her sister:

"Besides, I suffered secretly a sense of inferiority that came from having been at the primitive scene. Being a student at the Young Ladies' College of the Sacred Heart, I possessed images from the school's films and library: cavemen dragging their women where they wanted them by their hair of bludgeoning their prey. And in the final analysis there was everyone, sitting mesmerized and agreeing about the appropriateness of this behaviour...It was as if a vital part had been exploded away and in the absence that was left I was cracked and defective, as though indispensable parts leaked, and I could not gather energy" (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 28)

At the convent, Tambu and the other African students are denigrated and dehumanised because of race and underprivileged backgrounds and as a result they suffer from racial trauma. Racial trauma produced feelings of inferiority and self-blame among black students at the institution and this made them obsessed with the idea to create a good impression to the whites. Because of how they were denigrated, this greatly affected their images and their self-esteem and created a sense of worthlessness. At Sacred Heart, the blacks and whites avoided physical contact, and when this accidentally happened, the black students were filled with a sense of shame. Tambu is shamefaced when she gets in physical contact with Sister Catherine and during tug of war with the sheet, and Matron in the dormitory. Tambu expresses:

“Now shame came crushing down on me. I was appalled at having let my skin and this white person’s touch. A dentist could see a person tremble in agony and not touch. A doctor could watch a person dissolve into death and not touch. This could happen because it was taboo: this person and that one could not touch. The army did its work aseptically, with grenades and landmines and bullets. So, my first impression was I had soiled my teacher in some way. I liked her and I did not want to do that. Sister should not touch me. I started with all my muscles to pull away. I was horrified to see my hand disobedient and motionless” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 32)

The rift between races at the institution is explored through the dining room events and at the assembly where black and white students are not permitted to mix and share anything. At assembly black students take necessary precautions to avoid physical contact with white students because their skins should not come in contact. Black students internalised ideas of inferiority and this is evident in the fact that they considered themselves less worthy or important than whites, this is presented through Tambu. She described her dormitory mates as all having little boxes tight in their chests for their memories of war and added that there was too much grief for a room of girls, (p. 32). Sister Emmanuel further traumatised the students by showing them horrifying images of the raging war at assembly. She brought copies of the Rhodesian Herald that contained horrendous images of Mr Swanepoel’s body with an axe in its head and distributed them to the learners for them to see, then later on announced Mrs Swanepoel’s death.

*The Book of Not* explores colonial and racial trauma. Dangarembga exposes the physical and psychological damages that were caused by war on the victims and the nation. The physical and psychological damages and the scars that were symbolised in the novel cannot be fixed or healed. The trauma that was caused by the colonial and racial ideologies produced feelings of inferiority amongst the African students of Sacred Heart.

#### 4.5 Representations of women, identities, and education in *The Book of Not*

*The Book of Not* also explores the traditional roles of women, it be a mother, daughter, wife, sister, aunt, or grandmother. It also focuses on how they change in order to accommodate that of a scholar, provider, educator and independent individual. As depicted in both novels, *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*, education in the Western sense, is an important status marker for women in the novels. There may be examples of informal schooling in the texts, there is focus on Western education and its effects in the divided Zimbabwean colonial society in the years leading up to independence. In both novels, the classroom is the setting for most of the scenes. How a school is represented, whether it is a mission school, a convent school, or an exclusive black private school, serves to generate possible identities for the pupils or characters. It is compelling to note the multiplicity of perceived functions of education in these texts, because it undermines the supposition that education is value-neutral. Dangarembga's texts show that the girl children are sent almost reluctantly to school as it is assumed that they will not benefit the girls directly but could function as a desirable quality in marriage negotiations later on. This is because the parental figures believe education would inculcate values that are needed to be good women in them. Furthermore, education is an insurance policy as well as a communal commodity. In this respect, I will examine how Dangarembga's novels create an awareness of the contradictions that are immanent in the colonial education system, as well as those on a personal scale that emerge from the conflict between a self-aware educated individual and expectations of a traditional patriarchal society.

*The Book of Not* is a continuation of the story in *Nervous Conditions*, but it delineates a number of different aspects, mainly those of race before Zimbabwe attained its Independence. The novel focuses on identity in terms of troubled assimilation, rebellion, and then an overwhelming sense of self-pity and submission. The novel mediates on gender roles and relationships between women in a different way to the first novel's focus on collective female

identities. In this novel, Netsai is part of the guerrillas and Mai Tambu sides against anything English, these two factors alienate Tambu from them, especially when Tambu was in the process of being brainwashed with the ideologies of the white convent school she was attending. Through this, identity formation becomes closely linked to the story of the nation, the text asks its readers to consider what it means to have an identity of one's own that is strongly influenced by the setting of a liberation struggle. Furthermore, the novel is much more closely aligned with the story of the nation. The sequel took a dramatic departure from *Nervous Conditions* thematically, this includes character depictions and most importantly, Tambu's narrative voice. *Nervous Conditions* is a book of hope and escape, it also ends with a clear light at the end of the tunnel, and reassurances of how things turned out, whereas the sequel is aggrieved and downbeat. It is my contention that the gap between the publications (1989 and 2006) is due to a change in perspective on the nation. *The Book of Not* explores the struggle for freedom and brutality of war in how they affected the African women in the society. The first chapter sets the tone instantly, where Tambu witnesses her sister's leg being blown off by a landmine. The optimism of the late 1980s and the innocence of the youth in *Nervous Conditions* is juxtaposed with the pessimistic and jaded view on what it is to be a new Zimbabwean and a woman in *The Book of Not*.

The notions of identity change in Dangarembga's sequel. In the first novel, identity for Tambu has to do with persistence, female solidarity, and self-definition against her home culture and Western ways. By contrast, in the sequel, Tambu's pillar of solidarity is absent, she deserted her home identity and also discovers that perseverance is not always successful. There are a few reasons behind this, the researcher's argument would be, Tambu, made a Fanonian error, she internalised her oppression and became complicit with it in ways she did not even realise. Tambu also loses her agency because her desire to be successful drifts her away from her culture. The novel starts off with an older Tambu witnessing the summoning of Babamukuru

to a tribunal at the village homestead. She is older, more cautious, and her alienation from her mother is plausible in the opening pages of the novel.

“Oh, you wekuchirungu! Do you still like matumbu, Tambudzai! Can you white people eat mufushwa with peanut butter?” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 7)

“*Wekuchirungu*” refers to people from European places. The idea that Tambu’s distance from the village and life at the European- dominated school would have left her unable to eat her culture’s staple dishes echoes with the discussion of food and eating as bearers of cultural identity. Her identity is effectively erased by her mother who refers to her as an aloof white person. The novel sees a marked shift in the roles of women, which is related to the historical conditions of the time. Netsai became a freedom fighter, and the existence of women who take up arms presents a new category for Tambu beyond those who submit and those who resist. The novel comprehensively focuses on the notion of what role women are supposed to hold in society. This can be seen through Tambu, who is unsure about what is required of her. This is highlighted in the following line:

“Oh Netsai, how I wish you were not my sister, who informed you a woman’s business is aiming communist rifles at people like kind and gentle Sister Catherine”  
(Dangarembga, 2006, p. 31)

Tambu rendered Netsai unfamiliar to her, while Sister Catherine, who is the agent of her oppression, became a welcoming model for her to follow. Tambu’s state of denial in the case of her identity is emphasised by this confusion. She is motivated to identify more with Sister Catherine than her own sister. The disturbing part about this alignment is an incident in class between Tambu and her teacher. When Tambu was daydreaming and unconsciously grabbed the sister’s hand as she was coming back to reality, the sister recoiled. Tambu implicitly accepted the disgust her teacher felt by her skin contact, (p. 31). Apart from skin colour, there

are other factors that dictate social order at the convent. Dangarembga made use of food as a symbol in the text mainly as a marker for prosperity in the dormitories.

“The girls took great pride in telling each other how far they’d gone to propitiate their gustatory fetishes. Diverse fish and meat pastes, yeast extracts, the powders of beans and grains, whose consumption proved the consumer was a better being compared with others, were stacked at the centre of every table” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 39)

From the very beginning, Tambu avoided Ntombi, the only black girl who was her age. We are also made aware that Tambu had access to foods that Ntombi did not, which gave her a sense of entitlement. At a point in the novel, food was used as a divisive form of social currency. One of Tambu’s dorm mates, Patience, is reprimanded for getting in the wrong line for bedtime biscuits and milk with a slap on the wrist. Tracy offered Patience her biscuits, only for her to look at them and then at Tracy as if both were dirty (p. 75). An unfazed Tambu, took the biscuit for herself, erupting a fist fight in the dormitory and Tambu is accused of being disrespectful and has a habit of siding with white people. The biscuit was a catalyst for the explosion in the dormitory. This is an example of Tambu’s struggle in relating to the other African girls around her. Most of Tambu’s encounters with the other Africans, excluding her family, are mediated by food. This is presented when Tambu is served in the dining room at the convent.

“The maids came and slammed the plates down in front of Ntombi and Tambu at the table as usual. When they had something a platter of bread, a jug of milk - to set in front of the white girls, they did it smiling gently” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 122)

Similarly, this also happens to Tambu in her professional life. Dangarembga used the trope of food further by linking it to war. There were sisters from the convent whose father was killed in the surrounding violence of war. Ntombi describes:

“Whenever they look, it’s as if something is devouring them. Shame, hey, something is got inside of them and its eating them! Completely! It’s even digesting them” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 129)

Here, Dangarembga was referring to the detrimental effects of war that was consuming the girls. She employs this metaphorical positioning of abstract usages of food and eating in relation to *Nervous Conditions*, as well as in the sequel. Similarly, to the food and language metaphors in the first novel, *The Book of Not* actually has an example of Tambu “devouring” her O-level texts like a cow eating grass to be regurgitated as cud upon the examination paper, (p. 165). The devouring language is employed when Tambu recites a text during studying:

“The words tasted good upon my tongue, seasoned with the memory of my O-Level triumph” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 171)

Compared to the first novel, the familial climate is different. The informal education Nyasha was giving Tambu and inspiration from Maiguru’s achievements are not present in *The Book of Not*. Tambu has no role model or friends, she is alone. Mai Tambu is the only recurring character, her mother who is determined to prove herself to and define herself. Nyasha is heavily medicated and susceptible to zoning out; she plays a smaller role. Maiguru who would stand up to Babamukuru in *Nervous Conditions*, is back to baby talk and fussing in the second novel. Mai Tambu became the centre of attention that Tambu was avoiding. Their relationship was already strained in the first novel, but it is peppered, but also seasoned with some empathy and understanding of circumstances. Mai Tambu who is enraged by Tambu’s education, sets in motion a chain of events that leads to Babamukuru being labelled a sell-out at the morari, which endangers Tambu for her complicity in her white education.

Tambu is always aware of her mother’s judgement that she passes on her, even when it is all hypothetical. On numerous occasions Tambu has described her mother and the awful covetous

emptiness in her eyes (p. 9), as well as speculating that if she had a spirit, it was not great enough, being shrunk by the bitterness of her temper (p. 11). Dangarembga's characterisation of Tambu's relationship with her parents is an elucidation of her education, and the shame and embarrassment with which Tambu regards her family members indicates that her education is basically racist.

In addition, the women who would have things in common with Tambu, are the African girls from the dormitory but they are the sources of grief and alienation. This is also because Tambu does not resist any constraints or injustices that she endures. Tambu stopped questioning those that oppress and belittle her, instead she took it out on those that did less to her. She was not angry with her white classmate, Bougainvillea, who frigidly and scornfully doled out some chocolate milk for Ntombi but is upset with Ntombi for embarrassing herself and begging (p. 43). The time that Ntombi almost subverted the power relations in this exchange, Tambu became annoyed that she did not follow through with it. For the first time displayed some humanity. She was ensuring the well-being of others and thought they would ensure her well-being in turn. But her interpretation was distorted and misdirected, Tambu condemned Ntombi for begging with the aim to shelter her and the other African girls from that kind of humiliation instead of questioning the power relations that occurred in exchange.

Dangarembga also emphasises Tambu's self-hatred: After she was caught using the white girl's toilets and is punished harshly

“Idiotic women! The fools who couldn't use a decent sewerage system! If they'd only shown they were conversant with those contrivances, I was sure there wouldn't have been any bans- not on anyone from the bathrooms! Had these people I was forced to identify with been more able, those bathrooms would have been open to all. No one



would have been standing here in this humiliation... Oh, I felt yet another surge of dislike for the other girls in my dormitory!” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 71)

Tambu completely alienated herself from the other African girls in the dormitory when she decided to volunteer to knit for the Rhodesian forces. She detached herself from the African girls. Her goal to advance herself and to dissociate herself from the other African girls in order to earn the goodwill of her white classmates and teachers clouded her sense of community that tied her to the homestead and other black women. This also shows how much Tambu, as a character, changed from the first novel because she internalised her complicity. Tambu’s knitting represents betrayal of her community in the pursuit of her own advancement.

When Tambu is not allowed to attend the science classes at the boys’ school, she did not do well in her tests. And it appears that this was her tipping point, her development began its downward spiral. Shortly after this, her uncle made it clear that she was a great disappointment and accused her of squandering the education he had so benevolently provided.

“Your education,” he rebuked me sadly, “is your greatest commodity! It is as if I have taught you nothing, because you have simply wasted it!” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 191)

It was at this stage that Tambu’s belief in the benefit of education was cruelly exposed because it proved to be insufficient to sustain her. The paradoxical twist in this is the only profession that she could have after failing to attain her educational success was teaching. Obstacles that blocked her from attaining her goals and were beyond her control are made visible to the reader. Tambu was unable to shake off her denial and acknowledge her failure, namely, that the colonial system that promised her so much failed her at a crucial moment. She blamed herself

“But I believed in the college with a practically ferocious tenacity. I may have thought differently, but I didn’t believe it. Belief prevailed” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 164)

Tambu may have been too idealistic in her academic pursuits, yet throughout *Nervous Conditions*, she was motivated primarily by the belief that with enough will, power, and hard work, education could pay dividends and not making room for external factors she could not foresee. Her education had not prepared her for the possibility of failure. After obtaining her degree, she described feeling “petrified by intense surges of aggression” (p. 199). Tambu even admitted to redirecting her rage on her landlady:

“Insupportably, she had managed when I hadn’t. Yes, I felt passionately indignant when I thought about it... An impulse to perform drastic and damaging acts upon my landlady’s body welled up whenever I caught the sound of her footsteps in the hallway”  
(Dangarembga, 2006, p. 199)

Tambu’s post- academic life is marked by a sense of bitter passivity. She works a copywriter at an advertising agency, under her rival from school, Tracy. She did not like her co-workers much, even those that were friendly, are the ones she hated the most. An exchange with Pedzi, the perky and pretty receptionist, supports this idea. Pedzi would compliment and greet Tambu as she admired her as a successful black woman, but Tambu could not respond to her in good faith as she was aware of the insecurity the self-assured Pedzi generated in her. She coldly responded:

“Yes, something each time closed at her adulation; a small pane slide down that had always remained raised when I spoke to colleagues in the dormitory and at university who did not exhibit this admiration. When this thing locked I believed this girl who looked like a goddess was mocking. Could a mocking person be liked? How indeed!”  
(Dangarembga, 2006, p. 214)

Because Tambu was so caught up in the idea of herself as a failure, she was not willing to see Pedzi’s friendliness for what it was. Her self-image was so damaged at this point that she could

not accept friendship or complements but was hostile to the very idea. The comparison between the two is illuminating as Pedzi seemed to be a black female who was well resolved and ambitious. If she had lacked Tambu's intellect, then the novel shows that this does not handicap her unduly. It emphasised that the idea that education is not the key to happiness.

Tambu's relations with her African co-workers may be strained, but she got along with her white colleagues, which mirrors the larger situation in the country but also magnifies Tambu's self-loathing. At the advertising agency she was asked for advice on a campaign for the women's hair care product, Afro-Shine, by a senior copywriter, Dick. She described the meeting as one of her happiest moments of her life and felt the ultimate validation of her work.

“I could not recall when I had been happier... For now, I had moved forward and been recognised as a result of my own resources” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 234)

Her relationship with Dick seems to hold a symbolic significance. When they were discussing at the coffee shop, she imagined that the patrons were seeing an intriguing new Zimbabwean couple, she also noted that she could feel people watching them and nurturing their smiles like hope at that reconciliatory, post-independence harmony (p. 236). She was basking in her soon-to-be triumph and soon reward would be reaped for effort. Tracy stole her academic acknowledgement and another white person, Dick, stole her glory and efforts. Tambu said nothing but just accepted defeat and was unwilling to voice her disappointment. Through Tambu's silence, Dangarembga makes us aware that she was failing to articulate what high complex feelings were. Tambu attempted to justify the injustice herself:

“What was good for Afro-Shine was good for the agency which I was a part of, thus what was good for Afro-Shine was good for me. This act that put Dick's name to my work was good for everybody” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 237)

Afterwards, Dick was given the award for the great copy during a social evening for the agency. Tambu's reaction was to let Dick buy her a drink then slip out early to her desk to type her resignation letter claiming she was about to get married and her husband did not want her to work. Her response to the way her colleagues mistreated her is emblematic of the nervous conditions of the first novel where the ideological battle took place solely in her mind. This can be compared to Nyasha's outburst in *Nervous Conditions* but because Tambu cannot articulate her confusion and injustice of the situation, she slinks away in a posture of defeat.

Tambu's profession is not the only unsatisfactory aspect of her post-academic life. She continued to be alienated in her living quarters. She described the anxiety she felt when she entered the dining room

“These girls on occasion went so far as to prevent my joining them by whispers as pointed as arrows, and sidelong glances” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 223)

The female solidarity that was present in *Nervous Conditions* is absent in *The Book of Not*. For example, Mai Tambu phoned Tambu towards the end of the novel, hostile as ever, trying to make plans for a visit. After a conversation ridden with guilt, Tambu thought to herself:

“As usual, in my dealings with Mai, shame welled up. Was there any misfortune in the world as bad as being the daughter of this woman!” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 228)

Their relationship seems almost unsalvageable, Tambu remains ashamed of her mother and does not respect her. *The Book of Not* is a different novel in character and form to *Nervous Conditions*. The Africana womanist voice is subverted to the fragmented colonial subject in *The Book of Not*. Whereas, in *Nervous Conditions*, the Africana womanist voice is active throughout. Tambu is no longer an assertive, optimistic female, but a colonised and persistent individual.

#### 4.6 Chapter summary

Because Tambu was the girl child, she was expected to learn the feminine roles from her mother (Mai Tambu) and the women close to her. Tambu should have learnt roles such as child rearing, cooking, cleaning and cultivating the fields, which is what she did not do in both novels (*Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*). Stiwanism and Nego-feminism are not against women and girls doing chores. However, they argue that such roles should not be forced on them to the extent of them not being able to do other things that interest them, as well as, getting educated and getting formal jobs. Maiguru studied up to master's level and she became an educator at the mission school, alongside her husband, Babamukuru. That is an example of Stiwanism and Nego-feminism. Because of her qualification, Maiguru should have been considered for a leadership position and not be discriminated because she is female.

Africana womanism is quite evident in second novel. The one thing that stands out in *The Book of Not* is ambition. Tambu continued with her mission to obtain an education and better herself. She had learnt that hard work pays from Babamukuru's achievements. Tambu could be just like him. Finding herself at the Young Ladies' College of the Sacred Heart, which was a prestigious school that was mostly populated by white students. This was motivation enough for her to work hard, she valued to outdo them.

Tambu still had the same ambition she had in *Nervous Conditions*. Her grandmother greatly inspired her with her stories about how Babamukuru became successful. Babamukuru had become successful in a white territory. And like Babamukuru, Tambu wanted to be successful, have money and become a provider. After being told that not a single girl from the African dormitory had ever achieved the honour roll, she became determined to obtain it. However, after displaying so much determination, she failed to attain the honour roll because she was black. She did well but her white counterparts got the credit at her expense. Tambu did not do

anything about this but instead she resigned and claimed the reason behind her actions was because she was getting married and her husband was against her working. She submitted to the white authority and abandoned her African culture, but in the end, she accepted that she had no place with the Europeans.

Another dominant feature of Africana womanism presented in the novel, is strength. Tambu demonstrated strength and strong will despite her disappointments and obstacles she faced. She struggled to find herself at a white dominated school, life was not easy for black students as they were segregated and belittled by the soldiers, nuns and white students at Sacred Heart. Even when she lost her trophy to Tracy, she was determined to do better than them but due to the conditions of her learning her science subjects, she failed to make it. As a result, she was so frustrated but could not do anything about it, she accepted her situation. Her struggle was not just to better herself but also benefit her family.

All Tambu wanted to do was rescue her family from poverty, even when her mother did not understand her way of doing things. She felt her daughter had been taken away from her. According to Hudson Weems (1994), the Africana womanist comes from a long tradition of psychological as well as physical strength and continues to demonstrate her strength and steadfastness in protecting the vulnerabilities of her family. Tambu's initial goal conformed to Hudson Weems assertion, but Mai Tambu's scheme pushed her to doing things her mother's way.

Africana women also work together with their men ensuring that their African legacy lives on and in safeguarding peace in families, as well as, coexist together. Netsai demonstrated this by joining the men to fight for their liberation. She also fed the freedom fighters at their hideaway. Netsai eventually fell in love with one of the freedom fighters which shows that she was

compatible with males. Taking part in the liberation struggle is proof enough that she was a feasible role player.

Furthermore, despite the challenges Maiguru endured with her husband, she stood by him. Maiguru accompanied him to the morari although she knew what was waiting for him. For Tambu's sake, Babamukuru was beaten and accused of being a sell-out. This further cements the co-existence of men and women, which suggests that Africana women are in concert with their men in struggle and that they are male compatible. Throughout *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*, Babamukuru displayed love towards Tambu, he provided an education for her and acts like a father figure to her, and he supported her. Hudson Weems (1994), asserts that "men and women need each other emotionally and of course for survival." In other words, both genders are important in development and survival of the other. Babamukuru tried to build a future for Tambu and is hurt when she fails her A-level examinations considering what he had endured at the hands of freedom fighters. Not only women are expected to love and sacrifice for men, but men also go out of their way to make women better people and ensure a better life for their counterparts. Tambu also shows full awareness and appreciation of Babamukuru's efforts of creating a better life for her. Tambu further displayed her male compatibility when she told Nyasha. Because she aspires to find love and have a family one day, this proves that she possesses characteristics of an Africana womanist. Tambu realises the importance of having a man to love African women celebrate families and positive male companionship. Maiguru is also a flexible role player as she is an economically active woman. She is a teacher at the mission school and is also involved in agriculture. She sells her produce to people around her too. Maiguru's efforts complement those her husband and Mai Tambu does the same for her homestead. She sells vegetables that she had grown, so that she at least has some money when Babamukuru cannot provide, (p. 228).

*The Book of Not* captures the colonial period in Rhodesia and post-colonial era in Zimbabwe in the 1980s. It exposes the atrocities that were committed by the whites in the name of civilisation. African families were affected negatively by colonialism, including relations between males and females. This is depicted by the strained relations between Jeremiah's family and Babamukuru's family because of Mai Tambu's cruel plot against Babamukuru. Mai Tambu assumed Babamukuru was a sell-out therefore she wanted him killed. According to Furusa (1996), "the colonising process separated Zimbabwean men and women, and also reinforced inequalities in the way each gender experienced the colonised environment." Both men and women considered each other as enemies.

The arrival of colonialism meant the arrival of a foreign culture with it. The colonisers had their own culture which was completely different from the indigenous people's culture. Colonialism sought to crumble the already existing cultural institutions of the African people and replace them with the Western ones. As a result, African people deserted their cultures and adopted the colonial cultures as they considered them to be superior to theirs. Tambu is a clear example of this.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE RAVAGES OF POSTCOLONIALISM, GENDER AND RACE RELATIONS EXPLAINED IN *THIS MOURNABLE BODY*

#### 5.1 Introduction

The title of the novel, *This Mournable Body* is metaphorical of the conditions (both realities and injustices) female body has become as a result of the pre-colonial to post-independence Zimbabwe and other African countries. The female body is presented as a sight of oppression and poverty has been battered to a point of lifelessness. Fundamentally, the body is dead because of the degeneration that was caused by patriarchy and fragments of colonialism, which meted on it in what highlights the concept of double colonisation. *This Mournable Body* (2018), aims to depict the female body as a way of telling the story of an African woman. The comprehension of the conception of being a woman in a postcolonial African society in the text is presented by the female body being compared to a corpse, the image is further provoked in the title of the novel the words “*mournable body*” to allow the reader to cite the extent of the damage that the society has inflicted on the African woman. The text portrays depictions of the struggling and suffering woman and expose the causes of her nervous conditions and suffering.

Additionally, it is within the text that new depictions of the female body are created. In this case, the new woman is one who gives herself agency through resistance to the sources of her downfall in the society. Through the creation of the two female bodies that are binary oppositions of each other, the text demonstrates how the African woman has suffered, her survival methods and ways that she can conquer the social barriers that have hitherto been the cause of her predicaments and “*mournable body*” status. Thereby, the novel, thus provides agency to the African female body by telling and sharing her story, and the cyclical evocations

of the nervous conditions, survival strategies, also, by building a platform for resistance in a postcolonial society.

A postcolonial feminist scholar, Katrak (2006) conceptualises a woman in postcolonial fiction as a colonised body. In the case of this novel, colonisation is depicted by female characters and is presented in a binary form, the female character is made inferior by the nature of her gender and race. Therefore, double colonisation has been on the forefront as a theme in most postcolonial literary texts all over the world. Tsitsi Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body* (2018) concludes the trilogy that started with *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and *The Book of Not* (2006) as the sequel, where she presents the postcolonial African woman grappling through colonial and patriarchal forces in her pursuit to gain agency for the female body. By making use of Tambudzai Sigauke as the protagonist, Dangarembga mirrors the impacts of racial, gender inequalities, cultural limitations, and sexual politics on the female body in the colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe.

The female body embarks on a journey of self-identification; however, her journey is complicated and filled with physical, emotional and mental hurdles. The first thing she has to do is realise that she is a human being, and that human being are divided into men and women. Then she has to realise that she is black or white. This is the very essence of double colonisation which induces a psychological pain on the individual.

Dangarembga carefully crafted to expose the oppressive experiences that entrench the female body in a postcolonial society. Together with other female characters in the selected three texts, they portray the essence of being a woman in a patriarchal society. Accordingly, in *This Mournable Body* (2018), the female body is presented as a sight for the women's oppression and in which only the women have to display resistance in order to break free from the chains of patriarchy and legacy colonialism such as racism and capitalism.

This chapter therefore, examined the relevance of the second person narrative. This was done by analysing the second person narrative from an implied narrator and reader perspective and as a solidarity maker. The chapter also explored Tambu's mental imbalance through a second person narrative, as well as, how Dangarembga depicted the suffering and struggles of the Shona woman, including her mental imbalance. Furthermore, how the Shona was objectified was interrogated as well. The chapter continues to explore the metamorphosis of the body of a Shona woman through an internalised exile, abjection- survival through agency. How the Shona woman's body was used to represent postcolonial Zimbabwe and the economic failure in Zimbabwe was explored in this chapter. Lastly, the chapter examines racial discrimination through the female characters and concludes with the exploration of Zimbabwean women empowerment.

## **5.2 The logic behind Dangarembga's application of the second person narrative in the novel**

Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body* (2018) is written in a second person narration and this also tells the audience what is real and what is not. This is what makes the novel unique in regard to the first two novels, *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and *The Book of Not* (2006), as they were written in first person narration. The novel goes back to touch on a post-conflict temporality marked by trauma from the previous novel, *The Book of Not* (2006). The second book of the trilogy exposes the struggles of the disappointment of unfulfilled expectations and the obstructed futures, as well as, the lives that were also caught up in downward personal courses. *The Book of Not* (2006) exposes a realist situation of a desolate post-conflict society. The novel has to go through several setbacks before the question "What future is there if one rejects the permanent secondariness that is assigned to one after the liberation?" The dissension depicted in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) is also introduced in *The Book of Not* (2006), where the outcome of a split mind-set produced by colonial education is failure. However, *This*

*Mournable Body* (2018) deviates from the social and colonial issues and drifts into a more speculative territory.

Therefore, when reading *This Mournable Body* (2018), one should avoid reading it as a continuation of the same story, with the expectation of Tambu plummeting to the bottom of the society. Evidently, Tambu's nervous breakdown, which is also a counterpart to Nyasha's breakdown in *Nervous Conditions*, is the core of the novel, a critical moment whereby Nyasha rescues Tambu by taking her back to their childhood briefly then snapping her out into something new. The narrative of disappointment and disillusion levitates and the challenge of uniting the self across the divides of a fragmented national space with competing memories of war appears to be almost impossible to overcome. Yet, the change in the narrative mode and the usage of a narrator who addresses Tambu as "you," discharges the claims of realism and gives the narrative a speculative quality that presents the question of futurity or becoming in a new way.

The struggle to portray the self from something larger and more determining takes shape against a "you" address that envelopes "the notion that someone or something outside of yourself dictates your thoughts and actions" (DelConte, 2003). The hypothetical tenor of this narrative mode allows a degree of open-endedness for one to interpolate themselves into the space of the narrator. Therefore, the novel guides us in how to think about the challenge of accounting oneself. In the novel, Nyasha held workshops that focused on women's storytelling with the aim to empower them. Therefore, the novel's "you" narrative can be read as an outcome of Nyasha's workshop, one that empowers women. It can be seen as an exercise on self-observation or an account from oneself to oneself. By renouncing the first-person narrative, the novel allows the reader to wonder if any of it means what it appears to mean and whether the "you" can give an account of the self which makes Tambu's character cohere.

The narrative structure of “*you did this*” or “*you did that*” induces a response or correction from the first person, which never comes. The readers must figure out whether the response would be an objection or an admission of the account’s accuracy by the figure of a crying and depressed Tambu, as we can see it depicted at the end of the novel when she is trapped into a women’s circle, ashamed and admitting her lack of “*unhu*”

“I am ashamed,’ she keeps repeating”

The stories of the women of Tambu’s generation may not have been the stories they had hoped for, but one senses a resistance to giving up easily on that aspirational narrative depicted in *This Mournable Body* (2018). The concluding novel of the trilogy does not declare these stories as known, the lives of its women are bounded by past events and restrained within the limits of the historical reality. The trilogy’s premise of an African feminist’s life may not be fully achieved but the effort to achieve it is kept up. An alternative to the social and colonial issues is given in *This Mournable Body* (2018). In the first part of the novel when Tambu lived with the widowed landlady. The widow is described as having improvised a life, “fashioned for herself” (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 497) out of the domesticity to which marriage restricted her. She found a way to make a living for herself by performing a fantastical recasting of personal relations, turning the loss and embarrassment because of men into a productive delusion until it could hold no more and erupts violently, this can be said to be her survival strategy. More than any other character in the novel, the widow symbolises an allegory for Zimbabwe. Considering her sons’ inclination and their greed because of the way they fight over her property; this symbolises the country’s dysfunctional politics over time. Most of what transpires at the widow’s home has undefined status for the reader. The widow endures a dramatic bleed that has undetermined cause. The blood that spills all over connects all those who come to help her as they have to walk through the blood on the floor in order to get to her. The allegory shows the publicly unacknowledged violence of the political regime. A part of

Tambu's life at the widow's is also depicted through the details regarding a photograph that the widow cherished (p. 475). Family photographs that are always visibly displayed, are a reminder of how and what to remember, looking at how far she had come, even with the nervous conditions surrounding her. The first time the widow gave Tambu a tour of the house, she led her to a photograph of herself and her husband during better times. The picture can be seen as the evidence of a normality that is completely elusive in the reality of the novel. The photograph can be seen a relic that permits the widow's fantasy of who she is and sustaining her in the present. During the bleeding episode, the glass frame shatters all over but the photograph remains intact, the picture is therefore a metaphor for the relationship between history and the present, and the present is always mediated. The picture in the broken frame indicates that violence destroy the narrative frame, and also suggests that we reframe it.

Furthermore, there is something fantastical in the account of Tambu's life, almost similar to a folktale. Tambu is invited to enter the widow's home, she goes beyond her gate as though she was lured by a witch. In order to cross the threshold, she breaches the interdiction by entering. Her curiosity about this new environment and the widow's seeming autonomy motivates her. It is during this time that Tambu manages to secure a job and returns to teaching. As a teacher, Tambu is a very strict disciplinarian. After her scandalous violence against a student, she suffers from a breakdown that threatens a dissolution of the self.

The second person narration is used as cohesive device, it introduces a dilemma to us: whether the "you" narrator is telling us the forbidden truth and taking the difficult story away from the "I" in order to give it more authority, or perhaps the second person is presenting a hypothetical, contradiction that needs to be rooted out so that it does not become real. The effort appears to be directed strongly at provoking a response, but who will give it? Ahmed (2017), refers to such dilemmas as feminist killjoys. It is the distancing enacted by the second person narration, the relentlessly critical self who does not make the happiness of others her cause. So in this

case, does the second person contain the killjoy, by keeping it at a safer distance? *This Mournable Body* (2018) then comes to an ending with a kind of repetition. After regressing and losing ground, Tambu is again in a new context, a new relation with familiar (and familial) persons. Once again, Tambu braces herself to climb out of a new low. How do the readers know and trust that there will be a good ending? The ending indicates a reintegration of Tambu into the ordinary, where a community of women empowered through the roles they played in the war and whose personal courses have surpassed Tambu's, is receptive of her. The second person narration makes this inclusive gesture tentative, but it is still held out to the readers. The problem of what it means or what it is like to belong to the Zimbabwean society as a woman persists, but there is hope and a future.

#### **5.2.1 Second person narrative (the implied narrator(s) and the reader)**

The first question a reader would ask themselves when reading *This Mournable Body* will be based on the narrator's identity. A common thing readers do as they are about to read a new text is figuring out who is telling the story. Which makes the narrating voice a vital element in a story as it reveals the point of view, as well as, the reader's experience. By determining the voice narrating the story, a reader begins the active and interpretive roles that should be subjected to a text so as to ascertain its meaning. *This Mournable Body's* second person voice places the reader in an ambiguous point. The author immediately introduced the second person's voice to guarantee that the reader becomes aware of the form of narration as early as possible.

The second sentence of the novel is written in a second person voice, the narrator states:

“The mirror is above the wash basin in the corner of your hostel room” (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 5)

By Dangarembga immediately introducing the second person voice through the possessive second person pronoun “your,” she treats the second person voice with urgency as it is fundamental to reading and interpreting the novel. The reader has to be conscious of this point of view from the very beginning. Therefore, the reader becomes interested in who the second person possessive pronoun “your” is assigned to. The ambiguity that is created here is because the voice could be that of the protagonist in the novel or the addressed, and both assume ownership of “you.” The elasticity and ambiguity of the second person narration in the English language where the addressed “you” could be anyone. Consequently, one assumes that he or she is the “you” and acts. When the reader continues to read the text, the identity of the “you” is revealed and it becomes clear that the “you” serves the role of the actor and reader in the novel.

Dangarembga then builds up of this identification by making sure that the second person narrating voice interacts with the other characters so as to reveal more information about the “you.” The author ensures that the realisation is immediate to avoid confusing the reader about the narrator’s identity. This is evident in the first chapter where Gertrude, one of Tambu’s roommates at the hostel, assists the reader to identify the narrating voice. The narrator says:

“It is a woman knocking at your door.’ ‘Tambudzai,’ she says, ‘Are you coming?’ It is one of your hostel mates, Gertrude” (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 5)

This informs the reader that he or she is actually not the fictional “you” that was personified in the text. Through this, Dangarembga, grants the readers a choice to accept and identify with the protagonist or continue reading as the implied narratee or a reader. The reader becomes aware through the other characters that he or she could not be Tambu in the text but has the possibility of narrating her story because of the implied “you.” After separating the reader and narratee from the text’s protagonist, the text starts to emanate. The reader understands and is



aware that “you” is a fictional character, Tambu, telling her story in the second person point of view, in a fictional world. Identifying the textual narrator through Gertrude makes it easier to read and understand the text, a line would have been drawn between “you- protagonist” and the “you” the reader, who becomes addressed.

### **5.2.2 Second person narrative as a solidarity maker**

In order to fully understand and appreciate Dangarembga’s application of the second person narrative in her novel, we need to explore all the possible reasons behind the second person narrative. This section explores and discusses the second person narrative as a solidarity maker as part of understanding the premise on the general analysis is based.

Dangarembga makes use of the second person view as a device that brings, introduces and adjusts the narratee and reader as part of the narrative world. This allows the narrator to unify with the reader or narratee in terms of experience and ideology. The “you” pronoun reference also makes sure that the reader or the narratee becomes an accomplice of the actions and also a protagonist. Entering the textual realm permits the reader or narratee to ascribe to the narrator’s experiences and feelings. Dangarembga achieves this with the “you” narration. As Tambu is going through the textual experience, the reader can insect between her and the world outside the text as shown below:

“You curl your arms around your head. Your knees touch your chin. Even like this you are not big enough. The softness is bigger. You allow yourself to be swallowed”  
(Dangarembga, 2018, p. 101)

The idea of the second voice narration in this text is likely to be that the text is interpreted by a reader or narratee as an invitation that asserts him or her in the protagonist’s position in the story. This logic therefore allows the reader or narratee to experience the text’s actions and feel the sensations that come with being Tambu as a female body suffering from depression. The

ability to understand and share feelings with Tambu when she was in the hospital ensures that she receives the support or consensus from the reader or narratee of the text, who has allowed himself or herself to be in her shoes.

Thus, the reader or narratee of the text supports the protagonist even in situations where Tambu displays antihero characteristics such as a mental breakdown and suicidal thoughts. Keen (2006) supports this as she states that “We are living in a time when activation on mirror neurons in the brains of onlookers can be recorded as they witness another’s actions and emotional reactions.” The second person narrative is an invitation to the reader or narratee to enter the textual world and witness Tambu’s actions and experiences. The mental images that are induced by the text in this observational journey trigger the mirror neurons of the reader or narratee to support and empathise with Tambu. As a result, the readers of *This Mournable Body* are invited through the second person narration point of view and putting themselves in Tambu’s shoes, allowing them to identify with the speaking voice. The whole process triggers the addressee’s involvement in the text as Tambu, and creates feelings of empathy for her. The narrator’s intention is to capture the readers’ attention and empathy for Tambu’s downfall and summarise her journey through the second person narrative that deflects the actions to the reader to feel the same way she does. The narrator asserts:

“When you were young and in fighting spirit, growing mealie cobs in the family and selling to raise money for your school fees, you were not this person you have become”  
(Dangarembga, 2018, p. 82)

The narrator appeals the readers to place themselves in Tambu’s educational ventures that were full of difficulties because of her gender in a patriarchal society. While these experiences steer through the readers’ mental capacities, they develop empathy for Tambu and her struggles. The “you” pronoun in the above quote encompasses a generalisation effect by referring to anyone.

Therefore, the second person narrative in fiction brings the essence of inclusivity with the aim of gaining empathy from those who experience the text.

### **5.2.3 Tambu's mental imbalance through a second person narrative**

When reading *This Mournable Body*, one can view it as a successful attempt of providing readers with preoccupations of the mind of an oppressed and dominated female body. By sharing this through a second person narrative, readers are introduced to the extent of the emotional pain Tambu endured in a postcolonial society suffering from the effects of imperialism. When considering the relevance of the second person narrative of the characters' mental state, Fludernik (1994) argues that the "Second person narrative can, and frequently does, correlate with great emotional depth since the dialogic relationship it puts at its very centre stage allows for an in-depth treatment of human relationships, especially relationships fraught with emotional rifts and tensions." When it comes to perspective, the mental state is important. Hence, the text was written in a second person perspective so as to give the readers access to the mental state of a suffering woman. This allows every reader to understand the circumstances that surround a woman in a postcolonial society. The narrator asserts:

"Even as you speak, you are aware this person is not that particular white woman, the executive from the advertising agency who schemed with her fellow white people to steal the ideas you sweated over and produced a copy" (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 79)

The protagonist's mental imbalance is triggered by the racial discrimination and nervous conditions that she experiences, which is also socially constructed, in a postcolonial Zimbabwean society. By attacking a woman, she did not know, this made her uncanny. In as much as she knows that attacking the woman is neither right or wrong, it helps her manoeuvre in her unsettling situation as a victim of racial discrimination in Zimbabwe.

Nevertheless, this section concludes by providing an examination of how the author, Tsitsi Dangarembga applied the second person narrative in *This Mournable Body*. This form of narration comes out as a successful method to estrange her audience or readers. This Mournable Body estranges the readers as opposed to *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*. Dangarembga successfully de-familiarizes her readers through her narration style. The barring effect guarantees that the readers' interpretations of the female body start by them investigating the identity of the protagonist and the narrating voice. The author also successfully invites readers into the textual world as actants, the protagonist and narrator of the textual experience. Through this method, she manages to create a positive reception for her protagonist whom the readers have to identify with and also support as they ascribed to the "you-narrating voice."

In addition, the readers are brought on board into the mind and thoughts of an oppressed woman because the pronoun of address "you." This was the author's deliberate effort to gain empathy and support for female agency in the text. The second person narrative also guarantees that the story's narratee is unspecified but limitless, which increases the readers and audience of the novel. The "you" pronoun also automatically dictates that any reader of the text becomes the narratee. The second person point of view in this novel calls for attention of a whole society, nation or international community for the emancipation of women in double colonised postcolonial societies.

The second person narrative that was employed in the novel ensures that reading the novel becomes an engaging experience that it is supposed to be. The reading experience features readers who switch roles of narrators, protagonists, and narratees, as well as, actants of the actions depicted in the novel. It also provokes the reader's or narratee's mental capacity of imagination that stands by the intrigues that surround Tambu's experiences.

### **5.3 The depiction of an African (Shona) woman's suffering**

Growing up or being raised as a woman in a society that has socio-cultural values that consign the female gender to a dominated zone and postcolonial society entails pain and suffering. The female characters in *This Mournable Body* endure countless forms of sufferings from different or unrelated experiences. The struggles, pain and suffering are responsible for their current condition. In the first chapter of the novel, Tambu is presented in front of a mirror where she inspects the state of her body. The mirror can be seen as metaphorical as it represents a referential point where the female body is examined and evaluated. It provides the depiction of what the woman has become vis-à-vis what she used to be in the past which is discerned through the character's own initiative of recall.

Tambu finds herself trapped in this terrible standstill and it is worsened by the reflection she sees in the mirror, which shows a representation of a suffering female body. Because of this, Tambu unveils her past life by remembering herself as the protagonist in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and *The Book of Not* (2006), which is crucial in understanding her in the present. *This Mournable Body* sets off with scene where the protagonist views her own reflection in the mirror, which implies that the novel is an immediate form of self-assessment of the female body that has endured all forms of oppressions.

Tambu is disgruntled by the reflection of her body because of the battering it has endured from the postcolonial society and cultural values such as patriarchy. She can barely recognise her own body. She fails to look into the mirror because she does not believe the reflection in the mirror is who she is supposed to be or who she is. Tambu observes:

“There, the fish stares back at you out of purplish eye sockets. Its mouth gaping, cheeks dropping as though under the weight of monstrous scales. You cannot look at yourself”  
(Dangarembga, 2018, p. 18)

The quote above gives off the impression that the female body was in a physical state of hopelessness and succumbing to victimhood. Tambu's struggles and pain diminished her feminine body to a degenerated condition which induces self-shame. Her body is compared to that of a fish because it is rough, dry and scaly. The animal imagery of a fish is an important representation as it presents the prevailing physical and emotional circumstance of the female body. The conversion of the female body to that of an animal is a result of patriarchy and postcolonial fragments such as racism and capitalism. When Tambu examines her body and thinks of all that it has endured and equates it to that of animal, she imagines herself as a skinny fish. The story is based on a female body that is in this state, hence it was presented initially in the first novel. This is a strategy that the text builds a case for the female body; a body that is in both physical and emotional despair and can only be likened to that of an animal. Subsequently, all the tribulations of the female characters take this precedence of struggles and pain, as well as, being associated with animal imagery. Tambu's experiences contribute to her condition and can be viewed in two ways, that is by making references to *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*, including flashbacks that are present in *This Mournable Body*. While Tambu ponders on suicide, she also examines her state in the postcolonial Zimbabwe. At this moment, she questions how her life ended up being a disappointment. In spite of her university qualification

“she is jobless and lack sustaining family bonds” (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 37)

Because she is not married and has been running away from her poverty stricken family and patriarchal village as illustrated in *The Book of Not* which threatened to consume her being in *Nervous Conditions*.

“You are concerned you will start thinking of ending it all, having nothing to carry on for... How, with your education, do you come to be needier than your mother? End less

than a woman so dashed down by life that she tried to lean on her second daughter- a daughter who requires support herself, after losing her leg in the war and now fends for two liberation struggle babies, your nieces... Your uncle, who intervened to keep you from your mother's fate by sending you to school is in a wheelchair, made a casualty of Independence by a stray bullet" (Dangarembga, 2018, pp. 37-38)

The above excerpt highlights the sources of Tambu's impasse which takes us back to some defining incidents from the first two texts. As a little girl, her education was an afterthought and that her uncle, Babamukuru, provided after the death of her brother, Nhamo, who was preferred to her for the Western education as he was male. His death made her an unlikely option and ended acquiring the education that is preserved for male children in the society. Tambu is a victim of a colonial society that "*othered*" the female gender with priorities and opportunities given to the male gender. Therefore, her pursuit for an intellectual achievement does not only aim at escaping poverty in her village and a mother who does not support her journey but also emancipation from the chains of patriarchy. It is unfortunate that the education that Tambu's suffered for has not yet yielded the success that she was craving for. Even with her university education, she is unemployed and is now a victim of race and gender discrimination that exists in the postcolonial and multiracial Zimbabwe's workplace.

Tambu's cousin, Nyasha, is another female character whose life is defined by failure to achieve materially after long periods of studying. Unlike Tambu's parents, Nyasha's parents are financially stable and well-educated, possessing a master's degree from the United Kingdom. Tambu argued how Nyasha had such privileges but ended up hopeless and jobless like her. It is at this point that the protagonist is introduced to the world of realities which is described as a "realm of impossibilities." Tambu states:

“You have entered in a new realm of impossibility, worse even than the discovery that your cousin has been placed on the slide to impoverishment, in spite of her degrees in Europe” (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 130)

Tambu’s perspective is that failure, struggling, and pain are only reserved for people who come from a humble background like her. Therefore, her struggles and suffering should be more understandable than those of Nyasha. Tambu’s education was started off with immense difficulties as demonstrated in *Nervous Conditions*. She grew maize to sell so as to fund her school fees as a little girl. Furthermore, the education system and society favoured boys than girls. Whereas, Nyasha’s education began in Europe. Later she moved to the Mission School and then proceeded to Europe for her two degrees. Tambu believes Nyasha is a woman who gets everything that she wants because of her fortunate background. She believes she should not fail because of the above-mentioned privileges and chooses to not succumb to the culture of victimhood. Tambu is shocked to the knowledge that despite the coveted educational milestone Nyasha achieved, including her marriage to a white man, she dwindles into abject poverty just like her. Therefore, success and material achievements for the black women in Zimbabwe becomes difficult to achieve even when one is educated at advanced level. The African who is portrayed by Tambu, endures the pain that comes with failure. That is why she is of the belief that education is the only hope that a woman can use to transcend social and economic barriers. It becomes the ladder for social mobility that will rescue her from her predicaments that were caused by her gender and impoverished background. Tambu’s glorious past contradicts her present situation and it is this fact that haunts her. She is traumatised that she does not possess the things that make her better after all the struggles and pain she experienced. She admits that she is ashamed of herself and the person she ended up being (Dangarembga, p. 108). Tambu desperately wants things that make her better but cannot have as she is unemployed, living in a ladies’ hostel, has no family bond and is lonely. Her past



becomes the referential point for her present and at the same time the source of her emotional pain.

From her experiences, Tambu is portrayed as a victim of racism that has disfigured the postcolonial culture of Zimbabwe. The colonial Rhodesia was stratified into races. Being a black girl, she was faced with racial prejudice while studying in the multiracial Yong Ladies' College of Sacred Heart. The irony is that despite being a multiracial institution, there were only six black African girls who were enrolled at the school. Tambu was one of them by virtue of a scholarship that she had won. The school environment was also harsh as they had to compete against white girls who were privileged from the system. Simultaneously, Tambu and the other African girls had to stay away from their white classmates because of the barrier that had been created by the colonial culture and institutionalised by the school and education system. The African girls in the school became the "*other*" and this explains why Tambu was short-changed when she scored the best O-level results. The award was given to her rival, Tracey Stevenson who was white. Tambu experiences similar racial discrimination in her Steers et al. when the award that was meant for her hard work was given to a white official.

Because of the racial discrimination on her race, Tambu develops hatred for white people. To her it seems like all her suffering and pain from her days at The Young Ladies' College of the Sacred Heart and at Steers et al. was contributed by all white people. Aside from that, white people remind her of her sister, Netsai, who was now one-legged as a result of the landmine of the colonial war army. White people seem to have inflicted so much pain indirectly and directly into her life by targeting her family. When she was at the mental institution, she admitted to Dr. Winton that she wanted to beat up a white woman that looked like Tracey (Dangarembga, p. 107). All this hate was because Tracey was a beneficiary of the racial discrimination and victimisation that she endured at school and at work. The presence of white people reminded her of the suffering and pain she had endured. Dr Winton says to her:

“It seems you do not like white people” (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 107)

Tambu’s response summed up the problems that all black people go through. Tambu claimed to have been invisible to everybody including the white people. Double invisibility is evident here in that as a woman, her achievements are not recognised even by her own mother and then by white people who took advantage of her.

#### **5. 4 The depiction of an African (Shona) woman’s mental imbalance**

*This Mournable Body* expresses the mental breakdown that the female bodies experience due to the amount of struggling they endure. Because of the harsh socio-economic and political society that the woman lives in or has passed through, she is most likely to suffer from mental health problems. Lionnet (2018) states that “in novels, the physical suffering for the main female character functions as a code denouncing an unsettling situation: the ambiguous status, and legacy of a colonial past.” Therefore, the novel can be seen as an analysis of the mind of a struggling woman who has suffered immensely at the hands of patriarchy, cultural constraints, colonialism and gender inequalities. The author makes use of the protagonist’s mind (who is also overwhelmed by multiple thoughts of her failure in comparison to her glorious past) to expose all that transpires in the novel. Tambu is portrayed as an individual who is dealing with an unbalanced mind, she feels sheepish and lonesome. Her physical appearance not only scares her but also reminds her of how much she has failed and fallen. In her mind she pictures a hyena that is forever laughing at her because of her condition, she also sees insects on the walls, her bed and on her body as they gnaw at it. Her problems get the best of her, she is irritated and constantly in despair. Because she is always on a journey to find her lost self, she is also, in most instances unaware of her surroundings, body and self. At one point after a night out with Christine, she found herself sleeping at a bus stop. The novel depicts her physical state of her

body as the one being eaten by insects and spiders as she struggles to remember who she is or has become. Tambu states:

“Ants and spiders trek over your body... I am the kind of person two cooks give a coin to. No, I am not that person. I am. I am not” (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 82)

Her body is presented as a recurring thought in her mind that is making her unconscious of her abilities and what she can do in order to rid herself of her problems. When Tambu was teaching at Northlea, a group of girls would often laugh at her situation and the nicknamed “Miss Grief.”

An indication of her mental breakdown was her attacking Elizabeth. Tambu unconsciously beat her up, and as a result of her action, she found herself in a mental institution where she had to face her problems as a healing process.

Another female character who suffers from a mental instability in the novel is Nyasha. In the first novel, *Nervous Conditions*, she attempted to commit suicide when she developed a habit of throwing up her food after eating. Nyasha became anorexic. Her actions were as a result of her strained relationship with her father, who at a point got into a physical fight with her. It is the newfound woman who grew in her, who was afraid of masculine force and violence. Nyasha carried this characteristic throughout and is often sentimental in *This Mournable Body*. When she is slightly provoked, she easily sheds a tear as it reminds her of her abusive childhood and victimisation of being a girl child. When her daughter, Anesu, informs her of how her brother’s (Panashe) teacher beats children and noticing how he had become so afraid to the extent of crying, she broke down. Tambu was nauseated by Nyasha’s behaviour and felt that crying in front of her son, a first grader, was just a ghast act of femininity. Tambu believed what the teacher did was a minor act of corporal punishment. What the teacher had done by beating the child triggered past memories and painful feelings in Nyasha. Through Tambu, the reader notes:

“Your cousin, who was a teenager was herself brutally beaten by her father, closes her eyes... Now tears roll quietly down Nyasha’s cheeks” (Dangarembga, 2018, pp. 171-72)

It is at this point that Tambu realises that Nyasha was not just displaying characteristics of nauseating and ghost femininity but actual serious psychological distress that was developed in her past. Therefore, the physical abuse of the female characters in the novels left them with lasting psychological effects that were affecting them in their adult lives, no matter where they were. Their past always caught up with them even when they did their best to escape it.

### **5.5 Sexually objectified Shona woman in *This Mournable Body***

Both men and women in *This Mournable Body* seem to have accepted certain issues in their society as normal. Part of these issues is the culture of victimhood; in this case, the female body is presented as a victim of sexual objectification. Therefore, this section explores how the female body was presented as a victim of sexual objectification.

*This Mournable Body* investigates and exposes how women in a post-independent society were treated and perceived as objects of sexual pleasure. Some of the female characters in the novel were victims of sexual objectification. The *kombi* and bus stations are two places that comprise of many people from different parts of a society. Because of this they automatically become exemplars of a society and to a greater extent, a nation, and because of this all conversations, events or activities that may take place inside a *kombi* or bus station may as well define the character of the society. Because of this justification, the texts depict a society that considers women as sexual objects through the activities in the *kombi*. In the case of this society, it does not evade from degrading the female body and passing sexual about it. The issue of female bodies being sexually objectified, therefore, matures into a phenomenon that is rooted in patriarchal cultures and reinforced by stereotypes. Women in such societies end up victims of

sexual abuse, even because of the smallest thing such as how they dress. In the text, Gertrude, was the first woman to be sexually objectified at an incident that transpired at a *kombi* station. According to the travellers, who were both male and female, her dressing did not conform to the society's expectations. The reader observes Gertrude's dressing through Tambu:

“She is elegant on sky-high heels in spite of the rubbles and the cracks in the paving. She pushes out every bit of her body that can protrude-lips, hips, breast and buttocks-to great effect. Her hands end in pointed black and gold nails” (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 108)

The society regarded her as socially inappropriate and by, “*othering*” her. According to Lionnet (2018, p. 27), in an African context, “one is not simply born “a woman,” one becomes a female person after having submitted to a cultural process. Similarly, a person is not a person until he or she has been marked by society in a way that confers dignity and social status within a specific ethnic group.” One has to be marked by society in such a way that complies to and holds the society's expectations and confers dignity. The way Gertrude was dressed did not conform to the society's standard of femininity. Consequently, she had to experience a cultural objectification in the *kombi* station where she was subjected to verbal and physical abuse in order to re-establish the society's view of true womanhood with regards to how women are expected to dress. Her clothes revealed too much of her body from her breast to her thighs and this made other passengers at the bus station uncomfortable. Gertrude received all kinds of sexist comments from all sorts of people, from street urchins to adults. For instance, one told her:

“Someone open those thighs for her... Do it for her if she won't” (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 19)

The society regarded Gertrude's dressing as being not fully dressed or naked and threw sexist comments at her. Because of this, she not only became an object of verbal attack but also was physically assaulted by the people who were around her. People threw stones and mealie cobs at her while others were stripping her. For some reason, throwing objects at her and hitting her head brought satisfaction to her attackers at the bus station. The travellers found a lot of pleasure in attacking Gertrude under the misconception that they were cleansing the society of women like her. What is shocking about this was the sexual degradation of Gertrude was also actively performed by other women. The other women regarded her as a social misfit in the society, a woman who was not a worthy model in the society. One of the women who insulted Gertrude is Tambu.

It may be relevant to interrogate why Tambu, who was Gertrude's neighbour at the hostel and also a woman was on the forefront of attacking her. The researcher argues that Tambu comes from a patriarchal society that dictates the way a woman should look, speak and behave in public. The female body is not only a member of the culture but it is also a product of that very culture that it is inscribed in. With culture comes meanings and concepts that include the conceptualisation of a woman and becoming a woman within it. These gender roles and expectations or norms are rooted in the beliefs and customs of the people, including women, and they have to accept them. Tambu attacked Gertrude because she was socialised by the cultural codes to believe that a certain way of dressing is not womanly and has to be condemned by all means possible. This is why she ignored Gertrude's cry for help. Tambu's mental distress could also be said to be the cause, also she probably was unaware of her actions. She is a woman who was in pain because of the struggles she had endured, which has caused her mental imbalance that in most cases makes her do things unconsciously. Tambu probably experienced a cathartic effect when Gertrude was being attacked, it allowed her to release all her emotions and take in all the excitement that came with it. This also explains why she was not moved or

sympathetic when Mako narrated her ordeal (p. 55). Tambu's troubles cloud her sensibility hence she cannot feel anything for her female neighbours.

Tambu's character is quite crucial in investigating how the society objectifies women with sexual connotations. She was of the belief that material achievement and social mobility were impossible for Zimbabwean women unless they offered their bodies to men. Because she failed to acquire social mobility through education, her only option to attain this aspiration was to attach herself to a man. As a result, patriarchal oppression is then justified by connecting women more closely to the body than men, thus limiting women's socio-economic roles, which could be the only way to emancipate themselves economically. The society explored in the novels is highly patriarchal such that a woman has to attach herself to a more powerful gender, a man, so as to achieve material success.

Tambu also considers meeting one of Mai VaManyanga's sons so that she could finally become successful.

“This arrival is a gift, bringing you to a man to consider. It is a stepping stone to the life you crave... You do not think of love, being obsessed only with what the gentleman can do for you, how the widow's son will be insurance against your absolute downfall”  
(Dangarembga, 2018, p. 39)

Tambu had to first weigh her options amongst the three sons, namely, Praise, Ignore, and Larky. She eventually picked Larky because she thought he was more powerful. In this society, wealth and prosperity are determined by masculinity. Tambu made her choice mainly out of desperation, she struggled to become successful on her own despite her education. And this is a belief that is common amongst the female characters in the texts, they associate masculinity with material achievements and success. Mai Manyanga is portrayed as a rich woman as she owns property and other riches. Notably, she is a widow who became the sole owner of the

riches by inheriting them from her late husband. And this is a common situation for most women in a masculine society, widows tend to become rich women after the death of their husbands. Once upon a time, Mai Manyanga used to work for the wealthy Mr Manyanga as an executive secretary and she was “upgraded” to being his spouse. Of course, no time was wasted as she put a concrete slab to an executive property that she had acquired by virtue of her marriage to Mr Manyanga, (Dangarembga, p. 30). The concrete slab is a symbol of her efforts to cement the marriage so as to protect her place and ensuing riches that she eventually inherits upon her husband’s death.

The corporeality of the female body permits the male to access a woman’s body for sexual pleasures. One of the not so many male characters in the text, Shine, is a representation of a man that objectifies women for sexual pleasure. Tambu recorded that he takes different women into his room on a daily basis (Dangarembga, p. 59). He took advantage of the material deprivation of most women he took to his room, lured them with money and gifts, something Bertha was quite cautious of. According to Bertha should survive on hard work and not depend on men like Shine. She states:

“Now look at her, thinking sugar isn’t bought in the shops with money but with Shine’s foolish organs” (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 61)

Bertha was able to avoid using her body in order to acquire material achievement by finding a more dignified alternative of working hard and being self-reliant. The binary positioning of the mind and body are applied in the analysis of the relationship between men and women in terms of wealth ownership. Because the body is said to be controlled by the mind, patriarchal societies look at women as properties and are subject to the control of men. The implication of this is that women’s bodies are thought of as incapable of the same achievements as men or weaker. It is such beliefs and thoughts that perpetuate a socialisation process through cultural and



religious beliefs that foreground the female as a dominated gender, again succumbing to the culture of victimhood. Mai Manyanga's wealth is a big problem in a society that believes she should not own any wealth. Her sons are in a violent conflict that turns bloody as they fight over their mother's wealth. The three sons represent the forceful and hegemonic patriarchy that attaches wealth ownership to men and not women. They represent the larger portion of the society and also how the society looks at a woman that owns wealth. Their mother's woes result from a socialisation process. According to Katrak (2006), offer more insight into socialization as encompassing layers and levels of ideological, socio-cultural influences which then impose ignorance or knowledge of women as gendered subjects. Because of this, barring women from owning wealth is a product of socialisation in a patriarchal society.

### **5.6 The metamorphosis of the body of an African (Shona) woman**

Dangarembga's final novel of the trilogy not only focuses on pain and struggles as characteristics of the female body in postcolonial Zimbabwe, but it also explores the images of the new body of a woman and its survival strategies and agency. The text portrays the postcolonial Zimbabwe as a metaphorical "hyena" or "insects" that seek to scavenge and gnaw on the female body. The text also provides a victorious image of the female body over her struggles. The novel creates a new female body who is referred to as the Zimbabwean woman throughout the story. This woman is portrayed as a strong woman who does not quit no matter what is thrown at her and has overcome victimhood. When she runs out of options or choices, she does not allow grief or failure to devour her body, she stands up tall and moves on with life.

The author divided the novel into three strategic parts and this demonstrates the creation of the new female body. The first part being "Ebbing," which is when the female body collapses to the external forces. The second part where the female body is at the peak of struggling and

enduring immense pain and is also metaphorically represented by an image of a corpse is “Suspended.” The third and final part, “Arriving,” is when the female body refuses to be devoured. The body is a representation of the Zimbabwean who is fighting for her survival as it depends on it. This is the part that is taken to create a new female body that is personified by Tambu and the rest of the female characters in the novel. This can be seen as a sign of hope for the emancipation of the Zimbabwean woman.

As stated by Boehmer (2005), “The silenced and wounded body of the colonised is a pervasive figure in colonial and postcolonial discourses, although its valencies obviously shift with the transition from colonial to postcolonial history” (p. 129). Therefore, most postcolonial works or texts seek to create a new body. In addition, Boehmer (2005) further asserts that the “oppressed body undergoes significant translations or transfigurations.” The body may move in the same society with the oppressive patriarchy, racism, poverty, gender inequality and unemployment but will fight so as to avoid succumbing to the forces that seek to suppress it. This strong body is the one that is conceived to be ideal in the novel and should be emulated by all African women in patriarchal and hegemonic societies. Tambu strives to create and embrace this new body throughout her struggles to redefine herself and find meaning to her life. Tambu wants to identify with this new body, which is the Zimbabwean woman. In her mind, she declares:

“Zimbabwean women, you remind yourself, know how to order things to go away. They shriek with grief and throw themselves around. They go to war. They drug patients in order to get ahead. They get on with it. If one thing doesn’t turn out, a Zimbabwean woman simply turns to another” (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 169)

With this quote, Tambu is declaring that she will no longer succumb to the victimhood of her femaleness and the nervous conditions surrounding her. Tambu chooses to take on any obstacle

that may come her way and overcome it, if she fails, she will try again. When Tambu says, “Zimbabwean women, you remind yourself...” she is urging all the other women in her condition or similar to not give up on themselves.

### **5.6.1 Metamorphosis through internalised exile**

The body that Tambu personifies can be contended that it is weak because she seems unwilling to embrace the characteristics of the Zimbabwean woman who she aspires to be. Tambu is portrayed as disappointed and discouraged with life and herself. She holds on to her feelings of self-doubt and shame, as well as, looks down on herself. Even with that, Tambu admires and wishes to be like the strong-willed characters such as Christine because they possess the characteristics, she desperately needs but cannot acquire.

On the contrary, Tambu’s body should be seen as a political site of resistance against her difficult circumstances. Ketu H. Katrak (2006) would refer to Tambu’s body as being in “internalised exile.” According to Katrak (2006), internalised exile is a situation where the body disconnects itself, as though it does not belong to it and has no agency. When in exile, the body offers resistance to issues brought by patriarchy and post colonialism, such as poverty, racism and gender inequality and also avoiding to do what is socially expected. The body is on strike against the forces that aim to consume it. Therefore, Tambu’s mental state can be viewed as a situation of her body being in internalised exile. Additionally, Katrak (2006, p. 2) asserts that “the unfolding, the process of the body being exiled brings female protagonists to a “liminal” state of consciousness.” Liminality is a space for the female protagonist to cope with, and sometimes, to transcend exile. They resist being dominated and try to reconnect with their bodies and communities. When resisting exile, “they often use their female bodies via speech, silence, starvation, or illness. At times, resistances fail and fatal outcomes result in murder or suicide (Katrak, 2006, p. 2).

Tambu's admission to the mental institution reveals her state of exile that her body had become. At this point, she was unaware of who she was, or her environment and those who were around her. It took her some time to snap back to reality and realise that she was in a hospital and that the people who would visit her regularly were her relatives, namely, Nyasha, Aunt Lucia and Christine. Tambu would see animals such as the hyena that would constantly laugh at her and was ready to scavenge her body. She noted:

“The hyena laughs at you as you enter the gate. It has slunk once more as close to you as your skin, ready to drag away the last scraps of certainty you have preserved the moment you flatter” (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 204)

The hyena and the other animals that Tambu sees are all imaginary and are a reflection of the mental state of her mind. These animals and insects are persistent reminders of her problems. In her mind, her body is a corpse that is being scavenged by her predicaments. There was a point at which Tambu saw a dead body, which happened to be her own body. Tambu observes:

“She is a corpse, long dead, lying by the bus shelter, dined on by creeping things, gnawed on by scavengers” (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 205)

This was the time her body was in a state of internalised exile that runs away from consciousness and reality. Reality had become too harsh and shocking for her to bear, she could not accept her own situation. As a result, it drove her to a point of insanity and unconsciousness as a way of protecting herself from her problems that had been inflicted by the oppressive patriarchy and postcolonial culture.

Another form of exile and resistance that is displayed by Tambu in the novel is physical detachment. In the sequel, *The Book of Not*, when she discovered that her mothers and the freedom fighters conspired to kill her uncle, Babamukuru, she swore never to return to the village. Tambu made this decision based on several reasons. Firstly, because her village was

highly patriarchal, it is the same physical and social environment that hindered her education. Furthermore, Mai Tambu always mocked her and her goal to attain some education. She did not want her to succeed and always did not see the reason in her getting educated. She believed Tambu was becoming spoilt by the European education. Thirdly, the village reminded her of where she had come from and did not want to go back, it was a reminder of poverty and she wanted to escape it. The novel only reveals only two occasions where Tambu goes home, she goes on a journey when she recognises herself as relatively successful woman who drives a car, is employed and owns a house. Other than that, she avoided going back home or any contact with her village, which demonstrates that in as much as Tambu had managed to achieve what she wanted and could go back home to prove everyone who doubted her or discouraged her wrong, something was still missing. Her village or home reminded her of what she had run away from and she did not want to go back to that part of her life.

#### **5.6.2 Metamorphosis through abjection: survival through agency**

Tambu's village reminded her of a socio-cultural and political community that degenerated women at the expense of men. As a direct victim of this displacement, she regarded oppressive patriarchy the root cause of her ebbing. The masculine society that is presented in the novel considers a female body as a low rated binary opposition of a male. According to Lionnet (2018, p. 27), "in the African context, the discourse of female sexuality defines femininity in terms of binary cultural inscriptions." Therefore, these cultural inscriptions entitle the men over the females, which then results in women being abject. Abjection is associated with being hopeless, miserable, self-abasing and extremely submissive. It is these characteristics that are evident in the female characters, namely, Tambu, Mai Tambu, Aunt Lucia, who lived and experienced the village life. For this reason, Tambu's village should be analysed as a depiction of a society that is rooted in patriarchal values that demeans the female body, hence the protagonist detached herself from it.

Kristeva (1982) expresses that “the abject has only one quality of the object and that is being opposed to I.” therefore, Tambu as an abject, she becomes resistant to the expectations of her condition and status by the society. The bag of mealie meal is symbolic of her village that she tries so hard to detach herself from. When Christine brought it to her, she promised to do away with it but always forgot to do so. Tambu travels with the mealie meal bag from Mai Manyanga’s home to when she lived at Nyasha and Leon’s home and eventually to when she moved out into her own home that had been provided by Green Jacaranda Safaris. The bag represents her identity as an abject in a postcolonial society. It defines who she is, where she is coming from and where she is going.

Tambu’s mission was to abase her abject identity. She started a process of transforming her body by challenging societal values that “*others*” her. The novel presents Tambu as an abject whose character is perverse. In consonance with Kristeva (1982) such characteristics see the abject manipulating her condition and subverting social norms in order to create a new image of self that she can identify with and be proud of. When Tambu eventually tries to get rid of the bag of mealie meal, this can be interpreted as a self- liberating act of the body to detach itself from forces that threaten to consume it. This incident takes place when Tambu is at the verge of experiencing an emotional breakdown. As noted:

“You rush away from her into the kitchen. Once and for all you must bury this woman. You rip the lid from the rubbish bin and heave up the bag of mealie meal. You scatter its content across the floor and over the furniture.... You dig a hole deep as a grave and pour in the gift from your mother” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 205)

Tambu’s action of destroying and burying the bag of mealie meal translates to a moment of temporary victory for her. It is a metaphorical victory over her village and the cultural chains that relegate women to abjection.

## **5.7 The African (Shona) woman's body as a representation of postcolonial Zimbabwe**

The narration of the female body in the novel, *This Mournable Body*, simultaneously provides agency to postcolonial Zimbabwe. Through an examination of the characters' experiences and struggles, clear depictions of the postcolonial Zimbabwe are presented in the text. The story was set about fifteen years after the country attained its independence. And just like many other postcolonial countries, Zimbabwe was portrayed struggling with the legacies of colonialism namely, racism, underdevelopment, gender inequality, and unemployment. Thus, this study contends that Zimbabwe was portrayed as a "mournable body" in the novel, hence, the mournable state of the body.

### **5.7.1 A depiction of economic failure in Zimbabwe through an African (Shona) woman's body**

The novel was set in a postcolonial and post-independent Zimbabwe; therefore, the story is about how the country struggles to reconceive its identity a few years after attaining its independence against a postcolonial plight that brought issues such as capitalism, racism, poverty, gender inequality and cultural limitations. Zimbabwe attained her independence in 1980 following the freedom fighters' victory over the Rhodesian forces. With Robert Mugabe being the country's first president to be sworn in and this was followed by the change of the country's name, from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe, as an effort to indigenise and nationalise the country. The aim of doing this was to shed off any imperialism influence. This was to be achieved by claiming assets that were initially owned by the white settlers and colonial officials. The new African government aimed at making the country an African one that was governed by 39 Africans. For the whites such as Tracey Stevenson, they had something to worry about as this meant that the ownership of their property and their stay in the country had been threatened. Tracey asked Tambu:

“We’ve got a fair trade deal with suppliers in Mutoko. So we hope it’s just a vicious rumour about the government nationalizing everything. This indigenization thing. What d’you think they’re doing Tambu?” (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 185)

The indigenisation process of Zimbabwe was a process of reconstructing and reconfiguring itself to the pre-colonial times before the whites overthrew the country. The new government’s agenda agitated the white communities. Eventually, Tracey’s fear became a reality when a portion of her family’s land that she used for her Green Jacaranda Safaris was taken away by the government. Furthermore, the central park in Harare was renamed to Africa Unit Square from Cecil Square (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 188). The initial name, Cecil Square had originated from Cecil Rhodes, who was the head of the British South African Company, that was also behind the annexation of Zimbabwe and naming it to Colonial Rhodesia. The African governments’ indigenisation process was a course of action that had to be taken because of it fear and contempt of the white people who were a constant reminder of the colonial oppression that the country had endured. However, Zimbabwe ended up being a multiracial country that had to struggle with the challenges within it.

Although, Zimbabwe might have been trying to cast out traces of imperialism that was represented by the white communities, the country was trapped in a web of neo-colonialism, a representation of cyclical evocations, as it depended on the European nations for her success. Tambu shared her opinion of the phenomenon that she was observing in the city of Harare:

“It is ironical that in spite of the Cecil Square being renamed to African Unity Square through the indigenization process, its path is still arranged in patterns of the British flag” (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 188)

And this clarifies the ineffaceable marks of association that the British had left in Zimbabwe, even though the country was approaching a millennium. Additionally, the British flag that was



in the African Unity Square was symbolic of the dependency the country had on its former colonial master. This raises questions on the reason behind the indigenisation process. Indigenisation was evasive and a reserve for some Africans in Zimbabwe. Only the African leaders as the beneficiaries and the white communities as the losers were aware of the scheme. The rest of the Zimbabweans who suffer at the hands of poverty, such as Tambu, knew nothing of it, or were just not concerned about it as it did not help them in any way. Most colonial societies believed that the application of the indigenisation policies would fix the historical wrongs such as inequality, racism and the unbalanced access to resources.

Dangarembga made use of Mai Manyanga's character to portray the black ruling party's attitude towards the country's resources. Mai Manyanga inherited her wealth from her late husband Mr Manyanga, who was also a beneficiary of the scheme. The wealth and influence he had elevated his social status to that of a powerful figure in Zimbabwe. This couple is symbolic of the party that was in the country, whose power and influence resulted from the freedom fighters and their victory over the Rhodesian colonial government, thereof, attaining independence and the indigenisation process. Christine seemed to be quite aware of how people like the Manyangas accumulated their wealth after independence. She sarcastically referred to it as "doing business." Therefore, "doing business" is a euphemism that Zimbabweans commonly used after Independence to refer to corruption and extensive looting of the country's resources. Christine claimed that prosperity after Independence was a reserve for a few people who were like her uncle while, but the opposite for the real liberators who are the freedom fighters, like her. This can be seen as cyclical evocations, except that in this case roles switched, the indigenous people who were practising corruption against one another.

Moreover, Christine's view of the independent Zimbabwe explains the systematic corruption in the country that only a few individuals benefitted from. She referred to it as "indigenising anything" (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 77). This was a new form of consciousness for the country

and also another path to success other Zimbabweans had taken for Tambu. In opposition to what always knew, the majority of the Zimbabweans who were rich, did not acquire those riches through hard work but had benefitted from a grand false scheme of indigenising the country.

Therefore, *This Mournable Body* critiques the liberation struggle and its implication on those that fought for it. The author specifically uses the character of Christine to clearly expose the failures of the liberation struggle to live up to its expectations. This character is quite vocal and interrogative of the government, as well as, how it failed and betrayed the spirit of liberation. Christine revealed to Tambu that despite being taught not to be selfish, the war was full of lies, as those that were benefitting were not the actual liberators.

Netsai was living in abject poverty with one leg after losing the other during war. She also had two liberation daughters, Concept and Freedom, who needed to be taken care of, fed and provided for in her handicapped situation, an example of the feminisation of poverty. It is ironic how people like Mr Manyanga who were never at war or in the bushes to fight for independence ended up being the beneficiaries of the liberation struggle. A clear description of Mai Manyanga's home depicts a great deal of wealth and prosperity that usually comes with high social and political positions, but the property just has telephones that are abandoned and not working (Dangarembga, p. 28). Mai Manyanga explains to Tambu:

“Those phones you are seeing... are one of the many things my husband was working on before he left me” (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 28)

In this case, the telephones can be interpreted as metaphorical, in the sense that the country's post-independent projects and infrastructures were abandoned by the post-independent leaders. Conversely, Mai Manyanga's office indicates prosperity that resulted from victory to power

and influence. In addition, the office is a representation of the attachment Mai Manyanga had with the former colonial masters. For example:

“There are copper plaques depicting proteas, springboks and blazing flame lilies, the blossoms of Rhodesia, as well as shields proclaiming the year, location, and purpose of the many conferences Mr. Manyanga attended” (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 32)

In addition, her sons were portrayed as equally successful as they drove Mercedes Benz, Volkswagen, Cressida and BMW vehicles. Ignore also drove a Porsche, which his brothers were envious of. Mai Manyanga was portrayed as a sign of corruption and economic inequality in a postcolonial Zimbabwe. The novel metaphorically portrays the country’s infrastructure in a bleak state. For example, the swimming pool that was no longer in use questions the existence of some of the projects that were in the country. Most of them were constructed for luxurious representations but not because they were a need. Mai Manyanga noted that her boys (Praise, Ignore, and Larky) did not use the swimming pool. Making the swimming pool a symbol of the unnecessary projects that the leaders set, of which in the postcolonial times, did not benefit average Zimbabweans. Larky questioned the motives behind the swimming pool investment:

“I told them, Mai, Baba, start with lessons. For swimming. Not with a pool. That’s how to start. But these parents of ours, do they listen? How many times did I fix it? I’m sick of maintaining this place when she can’t do anything for herself!” (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 45)

The bleak state in Zimbabwe was exposed through Mai Manyanga’s garden which Tambu depended on for her daily meals. The vegetable leaves and stems were yellowish which showed the deficiency of chlorophyll and nitrogen. This indicates that they were not being taken care of and Mai Manyanga admitted that the gardener had been neglecting his duties. As she handed a bunch of yellow vegetable leaves to Tambu, she also encouraged her to harvest them for her

daily meals. Tambu direly needed them to keep on going because of her impoverished condition. The garden can be interpreted as the source of livelihood for the Zimbabwean citizens who the government, represented by Mai Manyanga, had stewardship over. Hence the yellowing of the leaves shows the government's negligence for the projects that sought to help the citizens, who are represented by Tambu. Even with the services being in poor conditions, the citizens rely on them for their survival in trying times.

### **5.7.2 A depiction of racial discrimination through the female characters**

Kinloch (2003) reveals that racism is an issue that was institutionalised in Zimbabwe, thus the legitimisation of a range of racial stereotypes. Zimbabwe is a multiracial country that still has a legacy that was left behind by colonialism. The relationship between the black and the white races maybe tense and is portrayed through the characters of Tambu and Tracey Stevenson. The relationship between these two characters goes back to their high school years at Young Ladies' College of Sacred Hearts, in *The Book of Not* with a few flashbacks in *This Mournable Body*. The two ladies can be said to be binary opposites who portray the black and white races in a colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe.

In several if not most multiracial countries, the black and white races live in competitive environments, socially, and politically. Moreover, one of the colonial and postcolonial features that explains why a black Zimbabwean is disadvantaged in the country is racial capitalism. A black Zimbabwean has to make a living and survive in a society of white supremacy and hegemony. Being deprived of many things that a white person easily gets, and this was depicted in the text through the colonial education system that Tambu and Tracey went through. The high school they both attend was a multiracial government institution yet it mainly had white students and only five black African girls were made beneficiaries of the scholarships to attend

this school. Making the school a symbol of the colonial government where racial conflicts and white supremacy principles are promoted.

A notable form of discrimination and victimhood that Tambu experiences in the school is when she attains the best O-level examination results, but her award is given to Tracey Stevenson, who is white and came second, instead of her. This is the perfect example of racial segregation that was depicted in the novel, awards were not given on merit but according to an individual's skin colour. This echoes Fanon's (2008) claim that "they are the instances in which the educated Negro suddenly discovers that he is rejected by a civilisation which has none the less assimilated" (p. 69). And through the protagonist we can confirm that despite her education at an advanced level and being in possession of the same or better qualifications as the whites, she will could not procure the white people privileges, Tambu's struggles never came to an end.

A black person was condemned to failure than a white person in both colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwe depicted in the texts was a society that nurtured the struggles and failures of the black people. The racial discrimination at Tambu's high school and Tambu's misfortunes at Steer et al are examples. When Tambu graduated from the University of Zimbabwe, she could only get a job as a copywriter at an advertising agency that was owned by whites. Contrary to Tracey who had the same qualifications as her, she was part of the board executives at the same company (Dangarembga, p. 183). In addition, Tambu became a victim of racial discrimination again when her work was stolen and given to a white officer in the company, who ended up receiving her award. She put in the work and effort only for another person to take the credit for it. Therefore, meritocracy is a misnomer in a multiracial society that is presented in the novel, where black individuals are judged and evaluated based on their skin colour and not their qualifications or skills.

The government's indigenisation process was a system that the postcolonial Zimbabwean government used to avenge the racial oppression that they had endured at the white people's hands as they claimed ownership of assets and wealth. This resulted in many of them running away from the country like Peacock. Another issue that surfaced in Zimbabwe was xenophobia. Having acquired freedom and eliminating oppression, most Zimbabweans, had the belief that the jobs and resources in the country therefore belonged to them and not foreigners like Mai Moetsabi. As a result, people attacked her shop and made sure to jeopardize her business (Dangarembga, p. 197). It is ironic how the same black people who were crying about being racially abused and discriminated by the whites, were the same ones who were abusing and discriminating other black people in the country.

Nyasha and Tambu are presented as the black educated elite and part of the intellectual quarter in a post-independent Zimbabwe who endure the consequences of a post-independent country's challenges in order to find its feet after the white colonial masters' departure, this group of people had/has to struggle for survival. Despite attaining University qualifications, during the time the country needed people to work so as to sustain itself, the two characters were unemployed and are forced to endure the misfortunes that come with their situation, namely poverty and disillusionment.

In another incident, Mrs Samaita was shocked after scanning through Tambu's qualifications and that she was still in Zimbabwe (Dangarembga, p. 86). According to her, Tambu would have easily flourished and developed had she moved to Botswana or South Africa, the same way other educated Zimbabweans had done. Zimbabwe's economic debarring of black Zimbabweans is portrayed through the hardships that Nyasha and Tambu endured. According to Fanon (2008), "economic exclusion generates from the fear of competition and the need to protect poor white class and prevent them from sinking lower." Therefore, the promotion that Tambu was supposed to receive by merit but was given to a white male colleague demonstrates

the cyclical economic exclusion of the blacks in a postcolonial corporate environment in Zimbabwe.

Dangarembga made use of the female characters to give agency to a postcolonial Zimbabwe, they intersected with various aspects of the country and this allows us to see how the country's attributes defined them. Tambu's character exposed how Zimbabwean women struggled with racial inequalities, Netsai and Christine showed us how the failed struggle and progress of Zimbabwean female ex-combatants were presented in the text. And finally, Mai Manyanga's character as Mai Moetsabi is used to expose the indigenisation process, including its weaknesses such as corruption and also to portray the country's struggle with xenophobia.

### **5.8 Zimbabwean women empowerment and agency**

*This Mournable Body* portrays characters that are binary oppositions of the protagonist, Tambu. These characters are used to contradict the female body that Tambu personifies. The Zimbabwean woman is associated with resilience, a strong- will, courage and determination. And these are the characteristics that Aunt Lucia, Mai Moetsabi, Bertha, Christine and Mai Manyanga possess. Plausibly, one cannot associate such characteristics with Tambu as she feels self- sufficient to face and deal with her own problems. Tambu may idolise the Zimbabwean woman and her image of power and autonomy but she admitted to being far behind that threshold (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 169). The only consolation that she may have is that she is a black Zimbabwean, thus bears an advantage over Tracey Stevenson, as she is a white Zimbabwean.

As for Aunt Lucia and Christine, they are used to elucidate the female body and they provide a new understanding of the female body as a body full of strength and determination in their role in the liberation struggle. Boehmer (2005) asserts that the post-independent African literature has dominantly linked the struggle for independence to male personalities. And the

reason behind this phenomenon is that African male writers have dominated the literary tradition and have made African female characters invisible. Stratton (2002) asserts that, “Considering their invisibility in dominant critical tradition, it is not surprising that women writers have not gained submission to the literary canon.” Therefore, Dangarembga’s *This Mournable Body* is an attempt to provide life in African literary tradition by giving her power and voice.

Aunt Lucia, Christine, and Netsai are portrayed as ex-combats who went to the bush and joined the Guerrilla warriors in fighting for Zimbabwe’s freedom against the colonial Rhodesian forces. Their involvement can be interpreted in two ways; firstly, they endured pain that came with it as depicted through Netsai who lost her leg at war. Aunt Lucia’s child gets shot by a Rhodesian soldier, when he goes to untether the cattle. Both Aunt Lucia and Netsai endure personal and direct loss at war. Secondly, the war crafted a new body out of the initial woman that went to war. The new body is a strong, military trained woman who is not scared by fear. After facing blood and death during war, nothing can move her anymore. The historical period that was spent in the bushes during war by African women transmitted vital survival tactics on the female body, which helps her to confront oppressive patriarchy and the postcolonial outcomes such as poverty and unemployment. These women are products of modernisation. Through modernisation, social changes will be introduced and therefore motivating women’s needs for free choice roles. It will allow women to intersect in the roles that were traditionally meant for men.

The new body is far from being afraid of men as depicted through Christine’s confrontation with the bouncers at a club after Tambu disturbed the peace. Tambu reports:



“Your companion (Christine) plants her fists on her hips and informs the bouncers she is an Independence struggle ex-combatant. Moscow trained” (Dangarembga, 2018 p. 79)

Both Christine and Aunt Lucia can confront their problems and overcome them because of their experiences from fighting for their country's independence. The struggle trained and conditioned them to endure and overcome any hardships. Once upon a time, the colonial woman was associated with connotations of weakness by the patriarchal and colonial forces. Joining the war was an act of subversion, which metamorphosed the female body opposite the expectations that had been set in a male dominated society. When Christine talks about blood, which is symbolic of suffering, to Tambu, in what seemed to be a therapeutic session for Tambu who was suffering from depression, as a result of giving her all in acquiring education, only for her to struggle to secure employment afterwards, she makes use of her war training and experience to encourage her. Christine says:

“There's one kind of blood, not many like some like to say. We saw it seep from every wound. And those who couldn't run knew how, after they saw it. It's true, Tambudzai. If you've seen blood, you know about running” (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 69)

Christine admitted that the suffering that they endured gave the strength to run away from it. According to Lionnet (2018), suffering becomes the consequence of a spiritual quest which drives the female body to exile in search for lost identities. A metamorphosed female body is what results from this, she conquers all that caused her pain and suffering. That is why the text associated the power and autonomy traits of a female body with Aunt Lucia and Christine who went to war. In their world, impossibilities do not exist. For example, Christine reminded Tambu that Netsai, with her one leg, had carried some of the gifts from home that would be taken to her in the city. Aunt Lucia sums up this new found strength of the female body by

declaring that she is a fighter and could face any *tsotsi* even if he was holding a gun (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 151). This new female body that was crafted in the text is the one that overcomes masculine brutality in order to assert a reputable place in society. Aunt Lucia's story should serve as an inspiration to every African woman, as she chooses not to give up on herself but continue fighting for herself no matter the cost.

Aunt Lucia's story began in *Nervous Conditions* where she was a victim of sexual objectification, and then transcended to *The Book of Not*, where she became a freedom fighter and finally in *This Mournable Body*, she emerged as a strong woman, who is independent and owns her own security company. The company AK Security is an idea she thought of while she was still at war and eventually actualised it. She is proud of herself, which is evident when she saw Tambu in a grey uniform and the company logo that she designed. A feeling of self-satisfaction came rushing through her because of her achievement. She managed to overcome poverty and unemployment despite not being as educated as Tambu. Seeing women like Aunt Lucia and Christine consoles Tambu and gives her hope that one day her problems will be stories of the past. Aunt Lucia and Christine serve as models for all the strong African women that are and will be referential points for women in oppressive societies. Their triumphs are triumphs for the oppressed female bodies.

The powerful female body as a site of resistance is also presented in the novel through the characters of Mai Manyanga and Mai Moetsabi. Katrak (2006) refers to these two characters as "the politics of the female body." The two characters are "in a continuous process of decolonizing their bodies from cultural ties that deny them access to wealth and prosperity because they are women. Moreover, the sexual inequities and cultural differences have played significant roles in dominating and exiling women" (Katrak, 2006). Through struggling to acquire prosperity and wealth, the two characters resist cultural subscriptions of their bodies. Mai Moetsabi is a hardworking business woman who owns a boutique and eventually becomes

successful. In the novel, she is referred to her as the “Queen of Africa” which is metaphorical of economic prosperity of the female body in a postcolonial society. She also becomes a referential point for Tambu, that a woman can achieve anything she wants. Tambu states:

“The question of who can and cannot, who does and does not succeed, returns to echo ominously, bringing bitterness into your soul, you doubt that, were you put to such a test, you would find inner resources to triumph as Mai Moetsabi” (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 199)

The female body that these two characters depict is strong and stands against forces that attempt to consume them, they also serve as models that should be emulated by African women who in similar societies. In this case, the body stops following the societal norms and expectations, and reconstructs a new personality that allows it to conquer its oppressors. From the above analysis of the text, it can be interpreted that the female body is portrayed as an active site of resistance from double colonisation. The resistance started with a body in exile, not wanting to acknowledge its status and then began a path of reconstructing and re-craft itself. By re-crafting the “othered” body to one that could be identifies with pride, the female body in the novel conquers the legacy of colonialism and patriarchal forces which at one point were the reason behind its abject state. This part of the analysis focused on the metamorphosis of the female body (African woman) throughout her struggles and pain that were caused by patriarchy, cultural restraints, poverty, unemployment and most of all, colonialism.

## **5.9 Chapter summary**

This chapter examined and analysed how Tsitsi Dangarembga used the female body to expose the struggles and pain of women in a postcolonial independent society, in *This Mournable Body* (2018) which completes a trilogy that began with *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and its sequel, *The Book of Not* (2006). This study guided and contextualised the female body within

postcolonial interpretations as a subject of conquest, control, and manipulation by ruling or dominant forces. With regards to this study, the female body can be understood as a representation of an African woman that is struggling to survive in a postcolonial society, where she is surrounded by nervous conditions such as patriarchy domination, racism, capitalism, xenophobia, unemployment, and poverty. Therefore, the study drawn up from assumption that the novel portrays the female body as a double colonised subject, she suffers s a body that is degenerated by patriarchy and colonial legacies.

This chapter was guided by the intent to identify, examine and analyse the depictions of the female body that were portrayed in the novel. Moreover, this literary investigation also involved an interrogation of the author's second person narrative and its relevance in providing agency to the female body. Guided by the theoretical lenses of Africana Womanism, STIWANISM, and Nego-feminism it is evident that the struggles, pain and survival strategies of an African woman are depicted in the text. Through the protagonist, Tambu and the other female characters, namely, Nyasha, Aunt Lucia, Bertha, Mai Manyanga, and others, the novel exposes how an African woman suffers in a postcolonial society and how she finds methods to conquer all or some of her problems brought by political, social, colonial and cultural constraints. My analysis demonstrates that the women in the text were portrayed as suffering subjects that had to understand and metamorphose themselves into bodies that only they could be proud of.

Tambu was depicted as a character that experiences a physical and emotional breakdown unlike in *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*. She is portrayed as a body that succumbed to patriarchal forces and the legacies of colonialism, but was determined to overcome in Dangarembga's previous works. Additionally, other characters such as Gertrude and Mako present the female body as an object of physical and sexual assault, as well as, objectification by the male oriented society. Most importantly, Tambu's character, should be analysed as the

text's prime character of the consequences of the struggles of the African woman. In the text, her story presents her as suffering from a mental imbalance and depression, which are outcomes of a society that is socialised to oppress women in twofold: patriarchy and colonial legacies. When she struggles to find herself, the female body is presented as an object of resistance that is mirrored in internal exile where she defies her uncanny environment in order to overcome her struggles in the postcolonial society.

Furthermore, the female characters are presented as finding new identities of themselves in the context of roles and their places in society. A mental imbalance is used as one of the characteristics of a woman on a mission to vanquish the problems and obstacles that torment her as a result of colonisation. By treating the imbalance as a form of internal exile, this analysis reveals that the character detaches herself from her disconcerting situations and moves to a place where there is peace, freedom, and autonomy. Tambu's mental breakdown is examined as an element of crafting a new identity, refuting patriarchy and colonial outcomes, and finding a route that leads her to attaining her freedom. Her mental imbalance is what leads her to a more opportunistic path of her life.

The novel also crafted a model Zimbabwean woman as a process of metamorphosing a female body. The presentation of new roles depicting deflections from socio-cultural expectations and empowering the female characters, the novel crafts a new version of a woman in the postcolonial society. This woman possesses characteristics such as strength, resilience, economic prosperity in social and economic places. This becomes a weapon of overcoming patriarchy and colonial legacies. Aunt Lucia and Mai Moetsabi's successes in security and business fields depict the hardworking image of the Zimbabwean woman. Aunt Lucia and Christine's military strengths and affiliation are a depiction of the African woman as devoid of socially constructed roles and immense strengths that they can unleash. So they are now what we call (S)heroes.

Notably, the analysis of this text finds that the female body is reflective of the body of post-independent Zimbabwe. The female characters are a representation of Zimbabwe's history of pain and disillusionment during the post-independence era. The female characters and the events that surround them in the texts are analysed as symbolic of postcolonial Zimbabwe. For example, Tambu mirrors Zimbabwe struggling with disillusionment from the optimism that was shared at independence as it grapples to attain a positive bearing. As a victim of racial discrimination, Tambu is presented as a symbol of the larger body of Zimbabwe that plunged into racism as a result of colonialism. Nyasha and Tambu frustrated hopes in education and employment depict the disillusionment that most Zimbabweans suffer from. Mai Moetsabi's depiction as a victim of xenophobia shows the country's ugly image of hatred and dissent for foreign nationals as a result of colonisation.

Dangarembga applied the second person narration in the text, therefore, the narrator is identified by the "you" pronoun. This technique deviates from the first-person narration that she applied in the first two novels, mainly to relate the story of the same protagonist, Tambu. Therefore, the analysis finds that the second person narrative successfully de-familiarises the readers from who are made to identify and interrogate the identity of the "you." Through this the story can have multiple narrators. The analysis also revealed that Tambu is the narrator and therefore projects her problems and the narrator's role of to another narrator by making use of the "you" pronoun. This allows the readers to identify with the narrator, ascribe to her and then engage in the narrative as narrators and characters outside the text.

This investigation of the second person narrative also it had been employed so as to support the African woman. The novel narrates the struggles of women in colonised societies. By making use of "you", the female characters gain their agency through the eyes or perspectives of the readers. As a result, the ability to tell the story of African women who are suppressed by

patriarchy and legacies of colonialism stops being the narrator's role but is transferred to the audience.

## CHAPTER SIX

### FEMALE STRUGGLES AND VICTIMHOOD IN *SHE NO LONGER WEEPS*

#### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an understanding of Dangarembga's play, *She No Longer Weeps* (1987), through the application of three theories (Africana womanism, STIWANISM, and Nego-feminism). It presents the analysis and interpretation of the play that was written after the author's realisation of the women's involvement in the liberation struggle of Zimbabwe. The play focuses on a daughter who battles with her parents for social morality in a new independent Zimbabwe. The chapter also provides a plot summary of the text (written play) to give primary knowledge of the events that took place in the text, as well as, the cultural and political background of the play which tells the time and place the play was written. Through the analysis of the selected text, the researcher attempted to expose Dangarembga's intention behind the play through both the female and male characters. Socio-cultural, patriarchal, gender inequality and post-colonial issues towards men and women are laid bare, exploring how the novel participates in the representation and reflection of the feminisation of poverty and victimhood. Through the analysis, the chapter also examines the ways the author applied to present the cyclical and constant causes of gender related challenges. It also explores the effectiveness of the three theoretical lenses, mentioned above, in the analysis of the novel.

#### 6.2 Plot summary of *She No Longer Weeps*

*She No Longer Weeps* is a play that is centred on a young female university student named Martha. She fell head over heels in love with a male colleague, with their affair resulting in a pregnancy. This pregnancy set off different responses as Martha's father was a reverend minister and also a typical symbol of patriarchy. He chased her away from home as she had



brought shame and disgrace to the family. In the beginning, her mother would plead with him for him to be considerate of their daughter's delicate situation, but eventually switches sides and supports her husband to implement his decision. Martha ends up moving to her boyfriend's (Freddy) home, where she is mistreated and unwanted as she is considered a hindrance to his multiple relationships with other women. She takes care of all the house chores despite being heavily pregnant. Freddy's sex partners (Gertrude and Chipso) relentlessly throw insults at her, forcing her to run back to her parents' home. This time the parents were loving and concerned but it was only temporary. When Freddy wanted her to come back to his home, she refused, and because the father was mainly concerned about his reputation, he asked her to move in with some relatives so that he could preach freely.

After giving birth, Martha took her destiny into her own hands by furthering her education, securing a job and moved out to live on her own. Martha pampers, loves and cares for her daughter so much. Eventually, she develops hatred for men due to her past experience with Freddy. Martha gradually developed an attitude of using men to her seeming advantage such as satisfying her sexual needs. Her estranged boyfriend, Freddy, returned to claim his child after seven years, despite being married with a family of his own. In his fight to claim the child, he pointed out to Martha that the law supported him as he was the man. He took the child away without her knowledge. When Martha's parents visited her at her place, he also showed up. Out of anger and motherly passion, she picked up a knife to stab him. Martha also invited thugs to beat him up and then invited her father to call the police as he always stood up for what is right.

### **6.3 Description of the play in the context of a woman's writing**

The playwright employed social drama so as to expose and address relevant societal issues. Just like in her trilogy; *Nervous Conditions* (1988), *The Book of Not* (2006), and *This*

*Mournable Body* (2018), the play serves exactly the same purpose. Tsitsi Dangarembga is from Zimbabwe, which is the setting for the play, *She No Longer Weeps*, which was written during the postcolonial era of Zimbabwe, in 1987. The play deals with gender relationship issues during the post-independence era, as well as, patriarchy that is deeply rooted in Zimbabwe, just like most African postcolonial societies. Which is depicted through the character of Freddy, the antagonist in the play, as he takes advantage of women. The playwright presented cultural and patriarchal issues and their place in the life of an African woman. Sexually immorality which was prevalent at the time that is under review and in Zimbabwe, was not left out in the play. Dangarembga wrote about the cons of her culture and also highlighted the pros, giving a fair idea of how she upholds her culture and the realities that come with it. The projections of how women are marginalised and stereotyped in the Zimbabwean society is depicted through the female characters in the play. These projections make use of strains of African feminism (STIWANISM, Africana womanism and Nego-feminism).

#### **6.4 Deconstructing the feminisation of poverty and victimhood through the female characters in *She No Longer Weeps***

The aim of this analysis is to explore issues of gender, class, and cultural experiences of the Shona women. It will give a critical character-by-character analysis of *She No Longer Weeps* (1987) from an Africana womanism, STIWANISM and Nego-feminism point of view of women's nervous conditions. The main argument of this analysis is based on the notion that even though gender oppression against women is highly discouraged worldwide and in the process of being eradicated, unequal power relations between men and women continue. Women continue to suffer from the feminisation of poverty and nervous conditions surrounding them. The analysis of *She No Longer Weeps* (1987) employed a character-by-character analysis of the female characters as this allows the researcher to explore the role of women in the play, as well as, expound on how patriarchal oppression fosters discrimination

and victimisation against women. The norms that culture has set, regulate women as being subordinate are to be investigated.

#### **6.4.1 A depiction of resistance, determination and woman's self-definition through Martha's character**

The play focuses on the protagonist, Martha, a university student who falls pregnant. As a result, her parents and the man responsible for the pregnancy reject her. As depicted in the play, Martha pleaded with Freddy to accommodate her because soon they would both be working which will mean they will be able to take care of their child

You've got a good job and if things work out, I'll have finished my degree by this time next year. Just think, we'll be family already. Oh, Freddy, it's not so bad. It'll be all, everything will be just fine." (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 108)

This dialogue portrays Martha as she was desperate to secure a future for her child, her potential family and herself by making sure that she finishes her education. Martha's plea to Freddy demonstrates a woman who is looking for a partnership considering the circumstances that were surrounding the unborn child, the ramifications of dropping out of school, and the parents rejected her. She elicits hope in the audience or readers that the looming change in Freddy's social and financial standing holds better chances for her, the unborn child, and her potential family. This represents social transformation and partnership from Ogundipe-Leslie's STIWANISM theory. In as much as Martha appreciates her mother's sacrifices, including those of the women of her generation to keep a home intact, she decided to not follow that same path because she was of the belief that the years of serving men as women were long overdue.

... To be a woman is no longer a crime punishable by a life-time of servitude to a man. I know that in your day there were many pressures that prevented a woman from becoming independent. I know there were not even women who could be independent

because they couldn't work for a wage or salary, but people saw to it that women would remain dependent because that was the only way of thinking that people knew then. . . I don't have to be tied by those beliefs because I can support myself and I will not sacrifice myself to a man's eye just because society says I ought to. I'm as much a part of society as any one of you where I see that change needed; nothing will deter me from making that change in my own life or from working towards achieving that change. (Dangarembga, 1987, pp. 123-124)

Martha did not believe that she needed to be married in order to be satisfied. She says:

You grew up in a world where women were made out of lace vests, or at least they pretended to be. But today we are not afraid to let it be known that we are flesh and blood too, so the problems of the flesh are our problems as well. We are not above them, so we must fight. (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 120)

Martha further adds:

You see, mother, I discovered that the object of life is not to get married like they taught you, but to celebrate our existence. (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 121)

Through this, Dangarembga uses Martha to demonstrate the changing phases that are associated with generational transitions of womanhood. Hence, her emphasis that her phase was one where men are not the only ones considered to be human. Thus, the same problems that confront men can confront women too, the same way women have dreams to pursue, whether married or not, or mothers or not.

I don't believe that just because I'm a woman I must sacrifice my potential to looking after some idiotic man and his off-spring. . . (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 122)

Africana womanism, a theory that consists of the mothering and nurturing characteristics is also depicted in *She No Longer Weeps*. Martha pampers her daughter and provides the best of care for her. Clearly exhibiting her mothering and nurturing nature, contrary to what her mother had shown her. Indirectly, Martha was telling her mother and other women of her generation, that the true pride of any mother, was or is her children.

Remember one thing, my love, my daughter is mine, mine, mine. She's all I have, the one thing I love. (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 129)

After giving birth, Martha furthered her education and managed to secure a job, moved out and lived on her own. Africana women are ambitious, which is evident in Martha's life. She understood the situation that she was in and therefore set goals for herself, then through hard-work, she fulfilled them. Martha escaped from the shackles of the feminisation of poverty and nervous conditions surrounding her, this was her survival strategy. Because she is an African mother, she instilled a similar value in her daughter, to be strong no matter the circumstances.

I think she deserves lots of presents. All the years I've been telling her that if she's a good girl and does what Mummy tells her, that is, if she gets good marks, sticks up for herself at all costs and doesn't cry even when she gets hurt, then I'll give her lots of presents. (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 128)

When Martha decided not be Freddy's wife and also take care of her daughter as a single mother, it can be said that African women can detach themselves from a marriage but never motherhood. She eventually developed hatred and disregard for men because of her past experiences with Freddy, and in subtle ways, her father. After becoming independent, she seemingly started using men to her advantage for sexual needs. This can be said that tables turned, something that Freddy was doing with Gertrude and Chipso. It is also evident in *This*

*Mournable Body* (2018) where women were objectified by Shine. Tambu recorded that he took different women to his room all the time for sexual pleasures.

“You are something I need from time to time for purposes that you should understand well. After all, you are a man.” (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 129)

When Mrs Mutsika and Mrs Chiwara asked Martha to talk to their girls, from their association, but she refused. These two characters represent western feminists and their expectations of African women. Western feminists are of the belief that once an African embraces feminism, she is ready to let go off everything and follow their beliefs, but Martha proves them wrong. She pointed out that their situations could be similar but are not the same, and therefore will not be used as a tool that manipulates people in a situation she used to be in. through this, Dangarembga successfully coordinated both sexes and two generations. Martha is for equality between the two genders, in relation to Freddy and her father. She was used as the voice of African feminists who are fighting for a place in all areas of the global development, it be social, or economic, or political. Martha’s actions are evident of STIWANISM, she understood the female struggle, nervous conditions and agency from the perspective of African feminism that depends on the commitment from both genders, and not a woman affair as emphasised by other feminisms. According to Freddy:

“You don’t know your place in this world, which is underneath. You thought you should be on top”

Martha’s response:

“No, what I wanted was side by side” (p. 135)

The portrayal of the female characters

This section focuses on how female characters were portrayed in the play by the playwright. The significance of this is to investigate how Dangarembga displayed support for her female characters and how their characters were used to promote a worthy course. The characters of the play were portrayed in different ways.

Martha who is twenty-year-old lady and also a third-year student at the university, is introduced as a pregnant woman at the dawn of the play. She can be described as a rebellious child because she was not ready to follow the status quo. Just like Tambu, the protagonist from *Nervous Conditions* (1988) she strives to become successful, except that she manages to overcome all her limitations and ends up an independent woman, unlike Tambu. She also makes sure that everyone is aware of her generation. She tells her boyfriend, exposes the society's matrons' deceit, tells her mother of their differences, as well as her father. Martha tells her father:

“How shall I speak to you? With smiles in my voice although my heart is breaking? No today I will tell you, you had a daughter, but am becoming a woman, and things are changing. To be a woman is no longer a crime punishable by a life-time of servitude to a man.” (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 123)

Martha's character is quite outspoken, she lets out her thoughts and opinions. At one point Freddy told her that she behaves like she was a man.

You wear trousers like a man, you drink like a man, you argue and challenge men as though you were not a woman yourself. (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 107)

In most African cultural settings, women are not supposed to talk back to men, even if they are older than them. During a verbal disagreement with Martha, Freddy told her that she thinks too fast and talks too much. A virtue her mother possessed but she did not. According to Freddy, all these attributes were as a result of education, but unfortunately, the kind of education that was not applicable to any home but was only good for earning money, a “nervous condition”

“What you don’t know is that that education of yours is good for only one thing . . . it lets you earn money. That’s the only reason why men like women like you, otherwise you are useless.”

Martha broke free from the cultural and societal constraints of a woman’s submission to a man and to the home. In the beginning, she made it known that she was not ready for children and gives the impression that the baby only belonged to Freddy alone, but eventually she embraced her responsibility as a mother and tells Lovemore that:

. . . my daughter is mine, mine, mine. She’s all I have, the one thing I love.  
(Dangarembga, 1987, p. 129)

Initially, Martha was desperate to get married to Freddy because of her condition and also as a way of attaining respect from the society. A marriage is only engaged when a man presents a head drink and pays a dowry or bride price for the woman’s hand in marriage, therefore co-habiting is not marriage as in the case of Freddy and Martha.

“MARTHA: [Stands to look out of the window] They say you are my husband.  
[Silence] They say a woman’s place is with her husband. They won’t let me stay at home.”

“FREDDY: So where have you been staying all this time?”

“MARTHA: With my sister. But my father found out and told her to send me away and her husband said she should obey my father so she sent me away . . . and here I am.  
[She pleads with him.] I’ve got nowhere to go, Freddy. They say I must be with my husband.”

“FREDDY: I’m not your husband. I haven’t married you.” (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 107)



In order to be respected in an African society, a woman should be referred to as man's wife, like Martha asserts:

“They just want me to be Mrs Somebody Mrs Anybody will do, just so I'm respectable and people can't talk.” (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 107)

Martha wished she had waited and done the right thing, which was to get married before getting pregnant. Her pregnancy made her lose her family when her parents threw her out of their home because of the dishonour she had brought onto the family. Even her sister and her husband did not want to offend their parents, so they sent her away too. She expressed her desperation to Freddy who was not ready to settle down with her:

MARTHA: But you must, Freddy, please, you must. It will not be difficult or expensive – my parents are only worried about the rumours – you know how people are, they are talking already. All my parents want is for me to be married so that it's all right for me to have my baby. They won't charge much; they'll make everything easy for you. [Getting hysterical.] No one will refuse anything you say. They just want me to be Mrs. Somebody . . . Mrs. Anybody will do, just so, I'm respectable and people can't talk. Jesus, Freddy, the way they go on you'd think they'd never done it themselves. “What I know,” says my mother, “is that when a woman is old enough she gets married so that she can have her babies.” (Dangarembga, 1987, pp. 107-108)

Through this, she captured the perception that her parents and the society had about her condition. Her family clarified to her some of the canons of womanhood. Mrs Mutsika described her as someone who had achieved too much for her status as a woman. Whereas, Mrs Chiwara claims that she is rude and unfriendly, even mentioned the absence of a man in her life. After her experiences, she developed hatred towards men but also proved she was not against marriage and will also not be seen as someone who hated men.

I'd tell them that it's much easier to be a domestic slave to a man than it is to take responsibility for your own life, because when you are a domestics slave your problems aren't your own-they all come from your master, your man, and because the problems aren't your own, you don't have to solve them. All you have to do is go to your women's clubs and talk about how much you hate men on the whole and especially your husbands... (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 132)

Martha thinks of herself as a naïve and headstrong lady. She counted to Freddy her struggles during her pregnancy, the courage and hope she had for herself.

. . . In my third year when I was pregnant I got no help from anyone – as for you, I didn't see you that whole year, not even once. That was bad time for me, you know. Even my parents wanted nothing to do with me. I was young and headstrong and naive. I desperately needed something to hold on to, but I had nothing except myself. Still, I survived. (Dangarembga, 1987, pp. 134-135)

She goes on to tell him who he was and what he wanted from her, and that she did not need any man to achieve her goals. Just like she did not hope to use her association with men for material advantage and gain respect in society. Despite him telling her that she needed company from men, she told him that there were a lot that she could get if it was related to them satisfying her sexual needs. He then resorted to blackmailing her that he would take her daughter away, and tells her that her place in the world was underneath and not on top, accompanying her responds that she wanted side by side.

“FREDDY: . . . You don't know your place in this world, which is underneath. You thought you should be on top.”

“MARTHA: No, what I wanted was side by side” (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 135)

Freddy also told her how other people referred to her:

“They call you the cold, bitch, the proud pussy” (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 136)

During a visit from her parents, Martha’s father acknowledged his daughter’s hardworking nature because it allowed her attain and achieve a lot in society and life. When he asked her about his grandchild’s whereabouts, her mood changed and she responded sarcastically, even where she knew that Freddy had the little girl at his home, and asked him to accompany her to find the child. In a one breath she told her parents, including Freddy, that she had turned into a bitter person because of what they had done to her.

“MARTHA: I am not being thoughtless. I have thought about this for a long time. For eight years I have thought about how Freddy has ruined my life. Because of him I am an outcast. Because of him people say I am “that” kind of woman. Because of him I must live my life in loneliness and unhappiness. Before he came back into my life at least I had a child. I had something to fight for, something to live for. Now I have nothing. I have nothing. It doesn’t matter what I do (p. 139). At the end Martha stabs Freddy and asks the father who believes in the right thing to call the police. . . It is done. Father, you were always strong enough to do the right thing. Phone the police. Tell them to come and take me” (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 139)

Martha only became a bitter person because of the cultural constraints and nervous conditions she was enduring because of her parents, Freddy and community. Martha was a victim like many other women like her in her society. Despite her struggles, Martha found her way out, because of agency; she had to find survival strategies. That is why she acquired her education and secured a job, that way she could take care of her child. It can be said that by stabbing Freddy, Martha had ended patriarchy and her daughter could be raised in an environment that is free from the nervous conditions caused by patriarchy and culture.

#### **6.4.2 Martha’s mother as a victim of a degrading patriarchal society**

Dangarembga, presents Martha's mother as an elderly woman that advocates religious and cultural morals. She was against her daughter for falling pregnant before marriage because it was a problem for her husband who was a reverend minister. As a result, she calls her daughter a wicked girl. Martha's mother can be described as a typical African woman that firmly conforms to tradition with the submissive nature of a woman to her husband. She is always a supportive wife and does not go against her husband's words.

“MOTHER: So you will go back. [It is a statement. Without waiting for an answer she goes to lay her head on Martha's shoulder. Martha remains motionless.] I knew you would be sensible. You have always been sensible, and good too, except for your running around with this man. Come, [she begins to pack, turning the clothes already in the suitcase out in order to fold everything neatly] we must pack quickly. You must be gone before your father returns. Otherwise he will get angry. You know what he is like when he is angry. That is part of a woman's job, you know, protecting her man. You have to make sure he never loses control of himself.” (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 119)

The above quote tells the reader how she runs her home and who she is. Dangarembga provided a vivid portrayal of Martha's mother as a woman who does not tolerate immorality. It is evident that the woman knew her daughter and she made it clear by noting the change her daughter went through after seeing Freddy. In as much as her motherly instincts may have been working, she did not want to offend her husband by provoking his wrath. She was supportive of her daughter, but like most women would do, she supported her husband. Apart from appeasing him over their daughter, she also did not want to lose her husband. In most African societies, marriage is treated like one of the highest achievements a woman could attain. Divorced women are considered to be bad or evil. Hence, Martha mother was avoiding to fall into that category. Just like she also made it clear that it was a woman's job to not make her husband angry and make sure he did not lose control of himself.

“MARTHA: Ha! So you must control him because he can’t control himself. And who controls you?” (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 120)

It could be said that the mother was trying to make known some supernatural capability of the woman in her home, which is an ability to keep the man controlled. Perhaps trying to tell her daughter that every woman has a natural power from God given innate qualities, that if used in the right way will give her control over her home, that is including her husband.

“MOTHER: You must just accept, my daughter, that by their nature they cannot take responsibility for themselves. Even when they are great men and achieve wonderful things they need to be controlled just like children. But it is only a wise woman who can do it.”

“MARTHA: Ts! And how does she do it?”

“MOTHER: By keeping quiet day and night and watching, watching what her man does, letting him enjoy himself like a child who does not know that soon it will be time to go home. Then, when the time is right, a wise woman knows that her hour has come.”

Martha’s mother’s character is representative of a traditional society, whereas Martha’s depicts a contemporary society

“MOTHER: Ts! You are right, my child, this is the difficulty, that that hour does not come early. But there is no other way. A woman must be patient and strong and bear her life bravely. If God is willing her time will come. And if he chooses not to bless you in this life you can be sure of your reward in the life to come.” (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 120)

To a degree, this is a situation of a mother educating a daughter on the expectations of every woman towards her home, including the virtues of a woman. With virtue comes a reward,

which most women are aware of, which explains their will to go through it all in order to attain it. The play later reveals that the mother's support for her husband is firm; she is a victim of the patriarchal society.

#### **6.4.3 Gertrude as a representation of desperate women who devise survival strategies in a patriarchal society**

Gertrude is a young woman who is also Freddy's sex partner. According to Freddy, she is a nice woman who does not shower him with demands, just like she does not expect him to marry him unlike Martha. Joe refers to her as a nice bitch. The description of Gertrude as being "nice" is based on her acceptance of the position the patriarchal society places her. In order for her to enjoy the company of a man, she has to avoid doing what men dislike, and that includes not expecting a man to marry her, see her regularly, take her seriously, or talk to her. She visited Martha to inform her that she was having an affair with Freddy and ask her if they could share him.

Dangarembga portrays Gertrude as an extremely crass and uncultured character yet men run to her when overwhelmed by Martha. After expressing how difficult they find Martha, they go to Gertrude for comfort. She plays the role of a therapist to them, they dump their emotional baggage at her, and she is a haven to escape their realities and responsibilities, (p. 94).

"GERTRUDE: . . . Hey, woman, our men don't care for this-just let them drink and let them fuck. Let them fuck anybody and everybody and they'll stay with you forever."

(Dangarembga, 1987, p. 114)

It is evident that Gertrude is of the belief that in order to keep a man one should not just sleep with him but permit him to do so with other women as well. Underneath this, there is a polygamous ideology in her mind. There is a belief that there are more women in the world, therefore, some women believe that men should be shared. Just like others who believe in the

myth of the emergence of polygamy. She may not have a problem with Martha, but she wishes she could share Freddy with women. Some African cultures and religious spheres are permissive of this.

Gertrude also tells Martha of the things Freddy does not expect her to do, in this case, Freddy and Joe did not want her to have an encounter with Martha as she would talk too much and in the process reveal to her some of the things they do away from home. She revealed to her about the several ladies he had.

“GERTRUDE: About the other women. There’s hundreds of them. But you’re no fool – I’m sure you know already so it doesn’t matter if I tell you. Anyway, what’s wrong with being the hundredth woman, it’s like that for everyone – share and share alike. If you want a man you just have to settle for half or a quarter or tenth. That’s not much when they are so little to begin with, but you don’t joke with a woman. A desperate woman will take even a hundredth. Anyway I don’t blame you. I would also be desperate if I was in your position. She describes Freddy as a whore. . . Freddy is loose. If they call men whores, Freddy would be a whore with capital letters” (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 115)

Freddy ended up name calling Gertrude, he called her a whore and also made her aware that he only used her for his sexual pleasure. Gertrude’s character is a product of a society that thrives on degrading women and treating them like second-class citizens. She is a representative of the desperate women. What drives these women is desperation to devise ways of surviving within a system that is characterised by patriarchy and feminises poverty.

Dangarembga also uses Gertrude’s character to highlight the disparity in the use of demeaning sexual words to describe women compared to men. Gertrude is referred to as a “whore” and a “bitch” because she has multiple sexual partners, whereas Freddy, who also has multiple sexual

partners, does not have a demeaning label because he is a man. Through this, Dangarembga explores the double standards of society, where dictionary definitions that are used to shame sexual behaviours are gendered. The words such as “whore,” “slut,” and “bitch,” their definitions in the dictionaries begin with the description, “a woman that...” instead of “a person that...” Therefore, Gertrude is the epitome of society’s unfair treatment of the same behaviours that are exhibited by both genders. Men are encouraged and are permitted to get away with the same behaviours that women are condemned for.

The societal expectations regarding a woman who qualifies to be in a marriage are too high, or perhaps too low to make marriage attractive to women. One will have to forfeit educational endeavours, deprive oneself of personal pleasurable activities, for example choosing what to wear, which results in women suffering from nervous conditions. The marriage institution represents a hindrance in a woman’s life. Therefore, it is for this reason that Gertrude does not like accommodate the idea of getting married albeit subjecting herself to a life of desperation.

Gertrude is forced to live a life of victimhood. Self-actualisation cannot be achieved by women within the cultural status quo because of the constraints dictated by the society. In the case of Gertrude, she embraced the puppet lifestyle in order to secure the continual pleasure provided by men even if she had no control of her sexual life as the men are the ones who determined when they could have sex. As a result, Gertrude ended up having multiple sexual partners, through this she had some control with regards to who she would be involved with but the aspect of when still remained the men’s prerogative.

Therefore, her consciousness that she was sexually objectified is not enough to empower her to shake off the shackles under which she was. At one point, she confrontationally told Freddy that he “just loves the way she opened” for him. She realised that she was not more than an object that was meant to quench the sexual desires of men. However, she was fully aware of



her dilemma. The competition for men was stiff, hence she advised Martha to not find anything wrong with being the hundredth woman.

Any attempt to moralise sex and marriage as an institution was an exercise in futility. Gertrude pitied Martha who held idealised perceptions of marriage. At the same time, she ridiculed her for trying to cling onto a failed model. Gertrude might be seen as floating above the patriarchal system, but the reader can see her suffering from verbal and physical abuse in the hands of the very same men who claim that she was a “nice bitch.” Dangarembga’s portrayal of Gertrude serves to bring out the ugly consequences of patriarchy. Her loss of self-esteem and acceptance of a life of servitude as her escape, contrasts sharply with Martha’s indignation.

#### **6.4.4 A representation of Chipo as a powerless sexual object**

Chipo is presented as a restless mistress, who wishes to be with Freddy but chooses to be the other woman instead. Unlike Gertrude, Chipo expresses the need for partial emotional provision, when she asks Freddy to tell her that he loves her and he does not, she still chose to stay. In addition, she fell in love with Freddy. Freddy promised to marry her and Joe described her as a lovely lady. When she found Martha in the bedroom, she called her a whore.

“CHIPO: Then you must control your whores. There’s one in your bed waiting for you.”

(Dangarembga, 1987, p. 118)

Even after finding Martha in the bedroom, she still wanted to be with Freddy. When he raised his hands to hit Martha, she stopped, and it was not because she was helping Martha, but rather being sarcastic.

“CHIPO: [Who has been watching with great interest] Leave her alone, Freddy. She is not worth it. You’ve said it yourself many times.” (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 119)

After Freddy beat Martha, Chipo is described as watching with “great interest.” Although Martha was in the room and even after witnessing him hit another woman, Chipo still chose to stay with him. This is a depiction of how some women are willing to stay with a man they know is abusive to other women and how these women perpetuate patriarchal systems by turning a blind eye, or by permitting abusive male behaviour. Chipo believes that she has Freddy’s heart and attention, and therefore does not stop him when he beats Martha. After Martha left, she remained in the same bedroom that another woman had been in before, and she and Freddy silently undressed. The silent undressing of both characters in the bedroom portrays their desperation and brokenness. Freddy is broken because of his abusive character but Chipo is broken because she chose to stay. When Freddy expresses his vulnerability to her, she draws his head on her lap and sings him a nursery rhyme. Which is ironic because she sympathises with a violent individual and not the victim. This is an indication of how society is unforgiving to women.

#### **6.4.5 Mrs Mutsika and Mrs Chiwara depicted as perpetuators of patriarchy and the society’s know-it-alls**

These two female characters are presented as female activists from Women’s Association for the Protection of the Illegitimate Mother (WAPIM). Their mission is to empower young girls who are single mothers. The two women once approached Martha to talk to the girls and empower them to work hard and live lives that are not dependent on men. Martha did not agree to this but instead said she would advise the girls to stay home until someone came to marry them. They wished Martha would encourage the girls to revolt against marriage even though they were married themselves.

“I’m Marceline Mutsika, Mrs Mutsika, and this is Susan Chiwara, Mrs Chiwara. We are representing the Women’s Association for Protection of the Illegitimate Mother”  
(Dangarembga, 1987, p. 135)

The first words Mrs Mutsika utters in the play present her as a judgemental character. Her words “Hello, Mrs...err, Miss...err, Martha” (p. 135), portray her as a woman who already had a preconceived degrading perception of Martha because she was not married. Dangarembga comically portrays her, even after being corrected by Martha on how she should address her; Mrs Mutsika’s response shows her pity for Martha because she is just “Martha” with no title to make her socially approvable. Mrs Mutsika’s character is of a socially cautious woman who is against breaking the status quo. This is because her society prescribes marriage gives women the respect they need to be of value, hence she emphasises the fact that she is married. This also explains why she does not mention her maiden name when introducing herself and Mrs Chiwara; she just mentions her first name. This is an indication of how she finds validation in being married and does not find wholeness in her single identity. Mrs Mutsika considers being unmarried as being a victim. Hence, she believes her organisation is an important humanitarian effort because being an unmarried mother is embarrassing to her.

“MARTHA: I’m sorry, I can’t help you. I don’t want to become a public figure and I certainly don’t want to speak for women who don’t want to be spoken for. They’ll hate me for my success as they hate you for your families and husbands. I want to be left alone to live my life, that’s all.”

Despite these women being married, their marriages were not ones to write home about, that is why they needed someone to advise the young girls to not get married and also be in their situation. They also considered Martha to be better than them in every way. Martha is considered as the one who will be able to change the conditions of the women in their situations in as much as they are the leaders.

“MRS MUTSIKA: Are you sure you cannot? A woman like you could do a lot to improve the condition of such unlucky women in this country. You know very well

these girls could not get married... You yourself know there are no men. That is why these women are so unlucky. So how can you advise them to get married” (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 138)

Mrs Mutsika and Mrs Chiwara exhibit compliance to women’s subordinate roles through their hyper-femininity. This is why Mrs Mutsika describes Martha’s role as a single mother as an “unfortunate experience” and a “struggle,” and single mothers as “unlucky women” and “poor things.” When speaking to Martha, she hides her passive aggression with terms of endearment such as “dear.” Mrs Mutsika tries by all means to make Martha feel inferior as she considers her as an unconventional woman. Mrs Mutsika and Mrs Chiwara’s characters are a depiction of the traditional neo-colonial standards of black womanhood. The name of their organisation also has a negative connotation of single mothers, referring to them as “illegitimate mothers.” Dangarembga depicted these two characters as perpetrators of patriarchy in their glorification of the gravity of men’s presence in women’s lives. Their function is to maintain and uphold the patriarchal system.

### **6.5 Diction and gender stereotyping**

The way that words are employed and placed play an important role in the analysis and interpretation of a text. Diction focuses on defining things such as the setting, imagery and characterisation. According to Hornby (2006), stereotypes are fixed ideas or images that numerous people have of a particular type of person or thing, but it is often not true in reality. *She No Longer Weeps* (1987) depicts its female characters as subjected to certain stereotypes that exist generally in African literature and society. These stereotypes do not only show how men perceive women, but also how some women view other women. A general perception that one has of another person is very important. Dangarembga did her best in bringing out some

of these perceptions or images that some men have about women as well as women towards other women. Diction is the tool that was employed in projecting these images.

*She No Longer Weeps* is a play that is asking for social change in several areas of society. The play can be read and interpreted as a social satire and a political satire. Satires expose certain individuals, institutions, or even a society for certain wrongs or weaknesses. The play calls for social change in the homes and families. The play also exposes the Zimbabwean government's failure to empower women during the time it was boasting about strides that were created to promote the women in the society, in the 1980s. Dangarembga was complaining about the Zimbabwean government not having had done enough as much as it should have. Because the socialist ideals of equality in the 1980s did not include women, the playwright was arguing that the gender power relations talk tokenistic. Therefore, she took it upon herself to attack the government's empty promises on women empowerment.

However, the play mostly depicts the gender power relations and the civil war in homes or families. Dangarembga targeted her exposé on the patriarchal society that was presented by both the male and female characters in the play. These characters include Freddy, Martha's mother, father, Mrs Mutsika and Mrs Chiwara. These characters and institutions encourage the enslavement of the female character much to the liberated Martha's displeasure, whose goals differ from and are not completely welcomed by everyone else. Martha's father, the reverend, condemns her actions when she does not return to her former boyfriend. He was more concerned about what the society will say if they found out that a pastor's daughter fell pregnant out of wedlock. Because her mother was socialised to accept the woman's place in society, she supported her husband's decision for Martha to go back to Freddy, even though he had disowned her when she was pregnant.

Mrs Mutsika and Mrs Chiwara's women's organisation reinforced the struggles of ordinary women by confirming the patriarchal society's perception of women. Hence, Martha refused the organisation's help when the two women approached her and encouraged her to talk to other "unlucky girls" like her. According to Mrs Mutsika:

we have a lot of unlucky girls in our care...if you would come talk to them about how things are for us women and how these problems can be overcome...you must tell them not to give up, that is only the beginning of their struggle (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 36)

Martha refused to talk to the girls as it did not add any value to the woman's quest for freedom. She did not behave like the rest, at a point, she rejected her father's advice to go back to Freddy, who did value her as an equal. Freddy viewed Martha as a second-class citizen who should be taken advantage of and used whenever it suited him. This is evident when he called Martha a prostitute.

... you want to know? I tell you... you are a bitch and only a bitch ... (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 12)

Freddy was enraged by the fact that Martha could stand up for herself and was independent, she did not depend on him for support or sustenance. He was used to Gertrude who he treated like a sex object, he only went to her when he wanted pleasure. Freddy would boast to his friend that unlike Martha:

Gertrude likes me because she doesn't expect me to marry her. She doesn't even expect me to see her regularly, she doesn't expect anything from me all she wants is for me to make love to her when I feel like it (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 13)

Gertrude was a nice woman to Freddy as she permitted him to do as he wished with her and she would not complain like Martha. She did not subvert the patriarchal society's expectations.

In order for the society to consider Martha as a good woman, she had to be attached to a man such as Freddy. Martha's father demonstrated this through his advice to her when he asked her:

Tell me this child, what you think that you a woman can do in life if not take care of a man in life? (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 27)

Martha rejected this view and carved out her own space as an educated and empowered woman. The climax of the play is reached when she killed Freddy and did not weep or show any remorse. This can be considered as her turning point in her deliverance from the oppressive patriarchal society. Freddy's character represents the patriarchal society, and in order for one to be liberated, he had to be killed. Normally, when someone kills someone, they regret the act or show some remorse even when it is done willingly. But this was not the case with Martha, her character is presented as though she was celebrating instead of mourning the passing of Freddy. He was killed because he came and took the child he had neglected before she was even born back when the mother was in university. Martha refused to be a victim from the time he impregnated her. She raised the child as a single mother, finished her university education and became a successful lawyer. This does not solicit sympathy but serves as motivation to the reader. Her celebrating Freddy's death was actually her celebrating the death of patriarchy, she managed to overcome her oppressor and socio-cultural limitation.

Martha's character is quite significant in several ways. Her character carries the theme of social change in the play. Dangarembga was exposing the problems that come with patriarchy, a system that belittles and suffocates women in the play. There was is an urgent need for change or transformation in the way the society operates and that change can only triumph if courageous people like Martha challenge and interrogate the society's structures.

With regard to *She No Longer Weeps*, if normalcy is Martha struggling and accepting her place in a patriarchal society is considered the normal. What would be normal in Martha's case would

be being grateful to Freddy for coming to take his daughter that he had neglected when it suited him best. It would be for Martha to return to Freddy as advised by her father even if he called her all the bad names such as “bitch.” All the other female characters in the play, would be playing encouraging roles, this is inclusive of the two women who represent the organisation that stands for single struggling women. Their actions will only perpetuate the status quo instead of encouraging it. Social change will not become a reality for as long as women accept the natural situation and conditions in life. Society can only change if new agents such as Martha are introduced in society. She had to be the odd one out in order to achieve social change otherwise she would have been part of the socialised women or the society that sees her as an object only fit for the kitchen and the bedroom. Martha is a representative of a new and better society in Zimbabwe. Her killing Freddy affirms the belief that patriarchy is natural and that as a woman she should accept her situation as the kitchen and the bedroom. She refused to be patriarchy and the society’s victim. As a woman, she defied the odds and rejected the belief that women should be limited to staying home and taking care of children and husbands, not be educated or employed.

The women in *She No Longer Weeps* were subjected to some stereotypes that exist in African literature and societies. These stereotypes show how men perceive women as well as, how other women view their fellow women. A stereotype that is presented in the text is woman’s image as a “bitch” basically a female dog. Using this word with reference to a person or an animal itself is disparaging in most if not all African cultures. When the term “bitch” is used in reference to a woman it is synonymous to a prostitute or a loose woman. In the text, Freddy refers to Martha as a bitch. A woman he once upon a time had professed his love to and had also gotten pregnant.

“FREDDY: . . . I’ll tell you . . . a bitch. Only a bitch will do that. You are a bitch, Martha. Never forget that.” (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 107)



In the text, Joe, Freddy's friend also uses the same term to refer to Gertrude in a conversation with Freddy.

“JOE: . . . Gertrude is a nice bitch.”

Freddy concluded that:

“nice women are bitches and I like bitches because they do not make demands on me”

(Dangarembga, 1987, p. 112)

It is evident that whenever the word was used, it was to refer to women who were at a low level of education and still needed empowerment. An example would be, Martha, despite that during her time with Freddy, she was in university, they were not at the same level. Freddy was with her for sexual pleasures and he also needed someone to take care of his home. And as a result of all these roles, Martha was placed in a vulnerable place in Freddy's eyes and in reality. Furthermore, Gertrude did not make any demands on Freddy and that is why he liked her. As for Chipso, who was also in a similar situation, Freddy promised her marriage which never came to being. Both Gertrude and Chipso felt threatened by Martha's presence in Freddy's life, as they were both suffering at the grip of patriarchy and Martha had found a way to escape suffering from nervous conditions.

Martha's mother is a stereotype that firmly sticks to the cultural belief that women should endure pain, struggle and be submissive to men. She also does not understand why her daughter refuses to endure all this as a woman. She wonders:

“And what kind of love is this that cannot endure a little pain?”

She was of the belief that for one to be said to be in love, a woman should suffer and endure pain. In other words, she was merely advising Martha that a woman could not survive without a man even if the man abused her as a bloodless object. Therefore, Martha's behaviour at this

moment can be saluted as her character embodies a liberated and empowered woman in an African society.

## **6.6 Work as a solution to socio-cultural limitations**

In African literary works, culture has its pros and cons. An evidently, the negatives of culture affect women the most. According to Asiedu (2015), it is true that women and men have had places allocated, but the women were allocated the subordinate position. Both male and females have their roles that they should play. Women have been wired in a certain way and even when in leadership positions or anywhere else, they bring a certain perspective to bear because of their gender. Patriarchy has the main focuses, which are importance, dominance, superiority of the males over females. As a result, so much focus has been placed on the males. Men are considered to be stronger physically than women. And most family lineage is carried on through the male. The text exposes that patriarchy has not been of any help to women. Instead, women are made to feel less human and men are quick to point it out. Women want to be part of the developmental processes of the men but not to be degenerated or belittled by the men. Another cultural issue that is depicted in the text is the lack of recognition of the labour women put in. In the case of this text, the context covers child bearing, domestic duties, their career lives, as well as, their academic aspirations. Domestic duties may be a requirement of every woman, they should not be used as tools of oppression like what Freddy made Martha endure.

## **6.7 Africana womanism, STIWANISM and Nego-feminism perspectives depicted in the play**

Africana womanism, Nego-feminism and STIWANISM are theoretical frameworks that can be applied in the analysis of gender power relations in an African context. As theories in this study, they accommodate the characteristics of an African society that are unique and different because of its cultural, political, historical and social background. They also focus on the experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of African women, it calls for the liberation of

African women and other women of colour within their families and cultural, as well as, traditional settings. Africana womanism privileges the family and argues that families should be cherished over unnecessary alienation of institutions, which work best when women and their male partners live peacefully together. The three theories are acceptable to the African women in African settings, settings that encourage negotiation, accommodation and independence between women and their men. According to Hudson-Weems (1994), Africana womanism is rooted in the thesis that western feminism which tends to be radical is not entirely relevant to Africana women. Which Ogundipe-Leslie (2011) supports with the birth of STIWANISM that move away from defining feminism and feminisms in relation to Euro-American feminisms that exclude men in the gender equation. Nnaemeka (2013) Nego-feminism then comes into play in order to negotiate, it becomes a guide dealing with feminist struggles that occur on the continent and it considers the implications of patriarchal tradition and customs, and it aims to dismantle and negotiate around them. The theories' point of departure is that the issues that are affecting women can be solved within the family and African context, not outside. The theories prioritise on family and co-existence of women and men, as well as encourage women empowerment.

According to Hudson-Weems (1994), Africana womanism is made up of 18 characteristics of what the theory aims to achieve. These characteristics include; self- naming, self- defining, family-centred, flexible, wholeness, adaptability, authenticity, black- female sisterhood, struggling with males against oppression, male compatibility, recognition, ambition, nurturing, strength, respect for elders, respect, mothering, and spirituality. African womanism and STIWANISM are against the perpetuation of women's struggles, pain and oppression. Both theories encourage women to be ambitious, while also recognising men in the society as vital friends who should take on the responsibility and commitment together with the women to change the status quo. Martha's character supports these theories to a certain extent as she is

an ambitious, strong, self-defining, and partner seeking woman, not forgetting that she is motherly and nurtures her daughter. Martha also portrays qualities of Nego-feminism as she tried to negotiate with Freddy about him not giving up on them and their unborn child as they were both almost achieving their goals. He was already working, meaning he could take care of all of them, and she was almost done with her qualification, once she was done, she was going to secure a job and therefore help in taking care of them too. Hence, she kept on telling him that she didn't want to be underneath but "side by side."

It can be concluded that inequalities exist between men and women, but such differences cannot be solved by isolating men from women. Both genders do not need to engage in competition. Instead, Africana womanism, STIWANISM, and Nego-feminism are the better routes to take as they encourage that women seek liberation or emancipation within the context of family and African cultural values. Therefore, the two genders should learn to co-exist, accommodate, negotiate and understand each other. Through this, both parties fight the obstacles to human progress and not the obstacles blocking women alone. Despite everything, Freddy was also a victim of a patriarchal society. Through socialisation, he adopted a habit to disregard the interests of women, not that he was born like that. Thus, both the antagonist and protagonist are victims of the same system that taught Freddy to look down on Martha's feeling and interests. A holistic approach is the best solution, and this is best articulated by African womanism, STIWANISM, and Nego-feminism theories.

### **6.8 The depiction of Africana womanism in *She No Longer Weeps***

This section analyses the text *She No Longer Weeps* through Africana womanism features. In the analysis, the theory's will be established. These features inside; a family centred person, in concert with the male in struggle, spiritual, ambitious, adaptable and as a self-definer. The women in the text are presented as suffering from the colonial stereotypes that were brought

by the white colonialists and missionaries, as well as, the imposed Victorian notions concerning womanhood.

### **6.8.1 Playwright as an Africana womanist writer**

It is relevant to note that when colonisers and missionaries came to Zimbabwe, they brought about the Victorian ideals to the Africans and the colonised began to think that they were traditional standards of living. In *She No Longer Weeps* (1987), Dangarembga presented two generations of women, Martha and Martha's mother. Martha being the woman who believes in herself, in change and is also outspoken. She calls for societal change in her own ways and her views differ from those of her mother. She represents the new woman who is strong and self-defining as opposed to being shaped by patriarchy in post-colonial Zimbabwe.

Martha defies the colonial expectations of womanhood as she is against domestication. Furusa (1996) states that colonialism placed Zimbabwean women into restricted roles of wives and mothers. She was confined to her home, with her main area being the kitchen. Limiting an Africana woman to the kitchen meant that she would be submissive in all the other areas of life, mainly the economic sphere, politics and decision making. Zimbabwe attaining its independence meant the beginning of a new era in the lives of women and the society, an end to the old master's ways.

### **6.8.2 An Africana woman is a self-definer**

Martha defies the society's expectations of a woman by defining herself in an unexpected manner. The process of self-defining started when she was wondering if she was going to spend the rest of her life knitting like her mother and the other women. That is when she decided she could not live like that:

“... but no, I can’t. I don’t have time to knit or look after Freddy. I haven’t got time to look after Freddy’s baby either” (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 6)

According to Hudson- Weems (1994), asserts that “from a historical perspective, the Africana woman has always managed to eke out a separate, private reality for herself and family, regardless of that defined by the slave master.” Which is evident in Martha, who manages to draw out reality for herself, one that is different from the Victorian principles of womanhood.

The duties of knitting, taking care of Freddy, and making and looking after babies demonstrate domesticity which had been imposed on African women by their colonisers. Therefore, Martha, distanced herself from such roles that degenerated her to being passive and being restricted to the kitchen and the bedroom to make babies. During the Victorian era, women owned no possessions, everything belonged to their husbands, including the babies they birthed. Martha felt also felt that her child belonged to Freddy and not her. But her way of thinking eventually changed. It is evident when she says:

“The child is mine” (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 6)

At this point, Martha had started to see things in a different light, she wanted a part for herself as well in terms of what was to be owned. Her mission was to do away with domesticity which restricted her from owning and establishing a new life in a post-colonial Zimbabwe, which would give her the chance to fully express herself and grow. “Her mother and her mother and the rest of them” portrays the Africana women who are restricted by the heavy chains of colonialism they are bound to. These women have been historically defined by patriarchy and through socialisation, and patriarchy still defines them. Which is proven by what Freddy says to Martha:

“What sort of a woman would drink? You are a bitch Martha... You wear trousers like a man, you argue and challenge men as though you were a man yourself”  
(Dangarembga, 1987, p. 8)

The quote above reveals that there is what he considers an ideal woman and Martha was not that woman. Freddy wanted to define his female partner on his own, thereby denying his partner to define herself in a way that suit her. Freddy added that Martha thinks too fast and talks too much, which shows that he felt intimidated by her confidence and the way she always stood up for herself. To him, a good woman is characterised by silence, thus having a voice was problematic because colonialism was associated with female subjugation and that was deeply rooted in his mind.

It is the duty of every Africana woman to define herself, as foreign eyes cannot fully define her. Martha was determined to define herself despite the fact that Freddy said he married a good wife who did what he wanted. This is evident when she told Freddy that:

“Whatever I am, or whatever I do it’s what I believe is right” (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 9)

This meant that Martha had decided to see herself through her own eyes not see herself through the eyes of patriarchy. Martha’s mother was in support of patriarchy, she re-enforces her husband’s words. However, there was a point that she realised that what her daughter was making sense in what she was saying, but she felt she had no power to implement it. Martha went on to define herself in regard of sexuality, she told her father:

“No, today I will tell you had a daughter, but, I am becoming a woman and things are changing.” (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 27)

Colonialism negatively affected the black women and the society as a whole. Being a daughter portrays the image of women as perpetual minors. Women are perceived as legal minors from

when they are born to the time of their death. When Martha differentiates being a daughter and being a woman, she is expressing her concerns about how women were treated by men. She wanted to rub off the status of women as perpetual minors. By doing so, she was self-defining and other women in general.

### **6.8.3 An Africana woman is ambitious**

An Africana woman is ambitious, meaning that she is determined to be successful in everything, even if she has is faced with obstacles, she will overcome them. This woman is always hopeful for better things to happen and better days, and these characteristics that Martha possesses. She demonstrates her ambition from the time she was staying with Freddy to the time she went back to her parents' home. She told her mother:

“I have my priorities and I know my limitations. I know I must work hard. I must get my degree and live a productive life” (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 25)

She goes on to further say:

“I am as much a part of society as any one of you and when I see that change is needed, nothing will deter me from working towards achieving that change” (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 25)

According to Hudson-Weems (1994), ambition and responsibility are very important in the life of the Africana woman, for family to depend on these qualities in her. The sense of responsibility she has for her family is paramount and so she creates a private space for herself in the midst of chaos, confusion, and congestion. She could be washing dishes, feeding the baby and preparing dinner. Martha is determined to see her life changing for the better despite the situation she found herself in, considering that she was pregnant, Freddy did not want to marry her, and her parents did not want to accommodate her in their home. They preferred she lived at her husband's home as they saw her as a disgrace.



Usually, a woman in her situation would lose hope, looking for assistance everywhere and begging or in a confused state that she cannot escape, Martha took it and handled it differently. She is strong and finds a way out for herself. She was hopeful that better things would eventually come. Martha may have been ambitious but not her mother. She told Freddy that he had a good job, and if things worked out around the same time the following year, she would be done with her degree and they would both be earning a salary. This shows that she had hope for her own family and still believed that Freddy, their baby and herself would be a family around the same time the following year. She did not only have hope for money and employment but a family too. Martha even included the baby in their lives which shows ambition to have a family, although Freddy disappointed her later on. Because of the high sense of responsibility that she had; ambition grew. She knew she had to take care of her family and that she had to help her husband financially as well.

#### **6.8.4 An Africana woman is family centred and in concert with the male in struggle**

In an African community, family is very important. Dangarembga shows the importance of family in her text, *She No Longer Weeps*. The text portrays Martha as a young lady who proclaimed her love to Freddy and is affectionate to him. Martha displays her willingness to support Freddy in different areas of life. She admitted to still caring for him.

“Perhaps it wouldn’t be so bad if I went back- he’s sometimes sweet and gentle with me. It really surprised me that a man could be so warm and hold me softly, and it’s so nice, so nice to lie there cuddling and kissing in bed” (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 1)

Through this, Martha shows the readers the affection that she shared with Freddy, it was the kind of affection was more like a new discovery about men as depicted by the statement she uttered, “it really surprised me that a man could be so warm and hold me softly...” The psychological effects of colonialism are exposed. According to Hudson- Weems (1994), family

is where the male obtains his initial exposure to an environment of support, love and affection. Colonialism created a negative image of the African man, rendering him incompetent of showing affection to a woman. Such characteristics were believed to make a man weak and feminine. Macho presentations of men were considered ideal. Furusa (1996) asserts that the British replicated and enhanced the European cultures with the colonised Zimbabwe's geopolitical and mental spaces, therefore systematically transformed the way Zimbabwean men and women experienced their relationships together within the time and space to replicate western notions. Consequently, men were socialised to be strong, aggressive, and not to show emotions.

At this point, Martha was starting to realise that it was possible for a man to show such characteristics of affection which were generally perceived as feminine. However, because of the colonial stereotypes that are fixed in the minds of African men, they will not leave their violent nature. With the hope that Freddy could change, Martha went back to him but ended up finding out that he had not changed or was even worse. For her own sake, she moved out, hurt, heartbroken and disappointed and suffering from a nervous condition. She really wished to be part of a family and a society but she was relegated to her own space by her own parents, as well as, the society, which toughened her. She was not only betrayed by Freddy, but her family too. Her desire to be part of a family is depicted when she wrote to her mother asking her to ask father if she could come back home, as she felt lonely and scared. Previously in the text, she says to Freddy:

The baby will be six months old this time next year. Just think we'll be a family already  
(Dangarembga, 1987, p. 10)

When talking to Gertrude, she says:

I love Freddy and he loves me, that's why we'll get married. We are very good friends, and the baby (she pats her stomach contentedly), the baby just makes things a bit more difficult. You see, I thought in a year or two Freddy would be able to settle down and cope with a family (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 17)

From analysing what Martha said to her mother in the text and what she had told Gertrude, one can conclude that she was not fighting against families and men, but rather wanted companionship, which is a characteristic of an Africana woman, Martha was fighting against the feminisation of poverty and victimhood. Hudson-Weems (1994) asserts that "while the concern for the survival of her family, both personal and collective, are of utmost importance to the Africana womanist, the mainstream feminist is self-centred, interested in self-realization and personal gratification". In addition, an Africana woman is more concerned about her whole family rather than herself and her sisters. Martha's character seems to be more concerned about the family, herself and the society. Her wish was for the society to change for the better.

The female characters in the text are all presented as individuals that worry about their families, which is depicted by Martha's mother, Mrs Mutsika, and Mrs Chiwara. Mrs Mutsika and Mrs Chiwara do not expect the girls to get married, even though they, themselves are married. When they asked Martha to talk and prove to the girls and advise them that there was life outside marriage, she disagreed and told them that if she were to talk to the girls, it would be to advise them to stay home until the local teacher or doctor brought the money for *roora*. This proves that Martha was not against marriage. In a way keeping them from being another statistic that falls under the feminisation of poverty and also keeping them from having to deal with nervous conditions.

It is clear from the way Martha's mother supports her husband that she considers marriage to be important. When she kept on sending her daughter back to Freddy, it was her way of

showing that she wished to see her happy in life, at least as a married woman and also as a way of protecting the family's name and its image as her husband was a reverend. Martha's willingness to support Freddy financially shows that she would stand by her man in all forms of struggle that he might encounter. Martha's mother also helps in preserving her the image of her husband who was about to lose it because of their daughter who had been impregnated out of marriage and still chose to stay away from the father of her child.

#### **6.8.5 An Africana woman is spiritual and adaptable**

Africans have a spiritual being that they all believe in, which is depicted in *She No Longer Weeps* through Martha's mother this can be seen as their way of survival and agency. She is a spiritual woman who believes in God. She acknowledges his presence in most of her conversations by mentioning him when advising Martha. When she encourages Martha to be a good wife to Freddy, she guarantees her that God would reward her. She says:

If God is willing, her time will come. Moreover, if he chooses not to bless you in this life you can be sure of your reward in the life to come (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 23)

It is believed that one day, God will come and take His people to heaven, and His people are those that do His will and that He will punish all those that do not do what He says, hence when Martha disagreed that she was not Freddy's wife, her mother told her that:

“...and then you would be punished and we would be saved” (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 26)

This shows that she was a highly spiritual individual who valued matters that involved spirituality, hence she always made reference to them when she spoke to her daughter about getting married to Freddy. An Africana woman is characterised by spirituality, she demonstrates a definite sense of spirituality, a belief in the higher power that transcends rational

ideals which is ever present in the African culture (Hudson-Weems, 1994). An Africana woman is comfortable with her family around her, she does not demand her own space away from her family. Martha ends up having her own space, not because it was what she wanted, but because of the circumstances that were surrounding her. Initially Martha wanted to live with Freddy, then she wanted to be part of her own family even after being sent dismissed from home. This shows that she was willing to establish herself even in Freddy's home, even after moving out of his home, she was determined to live with her parents and establish herself, but her father sent her away. According to Hudson-Weems (1994), a true Africana woman demands no separate space for nourishing her individual needs and goals.

The other female characters in the text live with their husbands, and Mrs Chiwara and Mrs Mutsika who show that they have other activities to do outside their homes, activities that allow them to express themselves and earn money, exemplify this. These two women prove that women do not need their own space, outside their homes to prove themselves. It is possible in their homes and with men in the picture too.

It may be concluded that even though *She No Longer Weeps* has and is widely considered a feminist play, it contains features of Africana womanism. Feminists under normal circumstances would support lesbianism, however in this play; Martha did not attempt to do so. She may have been disappointed by the father of her child, but she went on to fall in love with Lovemore, contrary to what we would have expected, which is her being discouraged to get involved with men completely because of her anger over her failed relationship with Freddy.

Because Martha killed Freddy, it can be argued that she does not conform to the principles of Africana womanism, as his death would mean the end of patriarchal domination and the act of killing would imply extreme rebellion. Moreover, this study argues that when she killed

Freddy, it symbolised the end of the colonial stereotype that had been brought by the missionaries and the colonisers, bearing in mind the time and setting of the text. Zimbabweans had just attained their independence from their colonial masters. A new era that Zimbabweans were embracing, total independence from the oppressor. Because feminism is a Western ideology and the fact that Dangarembga considers it to be alien, therefore she condemns it and does not celebrate it. It can be argued that she is a womanist writer.

## **6.9 Chapter summary**

Dangarembga's portrayal of the female characters demonstrates that she was not writing just for mere entertainment, but as a lens into the prejudiced positions of women in a postcolonial Zimbabwean society. Her writing exposes the nervous conditions, survival strategies and agency that are endured by each female character at the hands of socio-economic issues and the after effects of colonialism. Just like in her trilogy (*Nervous Conditions*, 1988; *The Book of Not*, 2006; and *This Mournable Body*, 2018), Martha suffers psychologically after having attained what she thought was a weapon to fighting the gigantic patriarchy, more or less the same way Tambu, the protagonist from the trilogy, does. Therefore, Dangarembga's characters end up being paranoid as they try to negotiate their ways out of several traps they found themselves in.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore the feminisation of poverty and victimhood in Dangarembga's print oeuvre, examining the cyclical evocations of nervous conditions, survival strategies and agency. Henceforth, this chapter aims to conclude the study by providing a summary of the findings.

This chapter covers a summary of the research findings, in the summary of findings, the relevance of the research findings is made in the context of the theoretical frameworks. The reasons behind the disparities between men and women are explored. The chapter also explores gender roles and culture, generativity and stagnation of the female characters, love and belonging, gendered education in a patriarchal society, gender differences in assertiveness. Lastly, the inequalities between men and women are then explored and divided into four subheadings: colonialism and patriarchy; gender roles and stereotypes; power distribution and decision-making; and women marginalising other women.

#### **7.2 Summary of the research findings**

##### **7.2.1 Reasons behind the disparities between men and women in the four texts**

It can be inferred that disparities between men and women exist, in both old and new societies, but such inequalities cannot be solved by separating men from women or by demonising the new ways in favour of the old. It is more reasonable to strike a balance. Culture is dynamic as its faucets do not change, but it is its application that is versatile to change. In the African culture, taking care of family is expected and it is considered normal and chivalrous, it does not necessarily matter who does it, whether male or female. This is depicted in Dangarembga's

*The Book of Not* (2006), through Babamukuru who got Tambu educated so that she could take care of her family later on.

Men and women do not have to compete because African societies and cultures thrive on unity and not antagonism. One should not allow his or her needs to go above those of the community as it can be disastrous. This is evident when Babamukuru, the only driver with a car that was present at the *Pungwe* is beaten to a pulp as requested by Mai Tambu. In the end, he called upon his own inherent humanity and empathy in order to drive Netsai to the hospital regardless of his injuries. The spirits' disapproval is also evident when cultural norms are violated and when human life is taken as petty. African people will always be individuals who are shaped spiritually, socially and aesthetically through their connection to each other and their land. Africans can only triumph together, and one's death affects them all to a certain extent.

The struggles and nervous conditions that African women endure may not be answered by mainstream feminism. Rather, African womanism, it encourages women to look for liberation within family context and African cultural values. Therefore, there is need for coexistence, accommodation and understanding between both genders, modernity and tradition. Through this, both men and women can fight the obstacles to human progress and not only women breaking free from the shackles that are holding them back. Babamukuru and Mabasa are examples of men who are also victims of the patriarchal society, their sense of entitlement and arrogance in twisting the system to their own advantage is warranted and inherited from the need to survive in an oppressive colonial system that erased their culture. Both men continued the oppression after independence because they had no reason to bring an end to a system that they benefitted from. They also knew no other way to behave, one can only govern as one was governed. Because of wrong socialisation, men have been taught and have learnt to disregard the interests of women and vulnerable groups, not that African societies are crafted as such.



Tolerance, reconditioning, as well as, reacceptance of the African mind-set could be a way of advancement.

### **7.2.2 Gender roles and culture**

Gender roles are social encompassing a range of behaviours and attitudes that are considered acceptable, appropriate, or desirable for a person based on that person's biological or perceived sex (Alters & Schiff, 2009). The components concerning these gendered expectations may differ from culture to culture, whereas other characteristics may be common throughout different cultures. According to Blackstone (2003), gender roles are determined by the expectations that individuals, groups, and societies have of individuals based on their sex and on each society's values and beliefs about gender. Gender roles result from interactions between people and their environments, and they also determine the type of behaviour that is believed to be appropriate for each gender. The society's beliefs about the differences between the genders is what defines the appropriate gender roles. In the case of the selected novels, from the trilogy, Nyasha and Tambu, including Martha from *She No Longer Weeps*, are expected to behave like women in the Shona society. The parents, namely Maiguru, Jeremiah, Mai Tambu, Babamukuru, Martha's mother and father, all teach their children the values and norms of the Shona people in different ways, through instructions and also by demonstrating. Through this, Nyasha, Tambu, Nhamo, Chido and Martha established their identities. According to Ogundipe-Leslie (1994), people's identities are determined by the cultures they carry.

Gender roles and culture are connected. In addition, parental socialisation has an effect on child outcome as children's roles are determined by the society. Which explains how Tambu, Nhamo, Nyasha, and Martha are socialised, it also proves that gender is a social construct. Children's roles are determined by the society and in the process, male children are given social

power and dominance. Culturally, women are supposed to stay at home and education is considered to be a male preserve. This is presented in the four novels, as Tambu, Nyasha, Martha and Chido are expected to get married and look after their children and husbands. However, the women from the novels challenge this notion. Nyasha and Tambu's lives can be traced in the trilogy, from childhood up to adulthood. Their lives do not completely differ from Martha's life. Their identities are transformed through gender roles and socialisation.

There is a lack of physiological and safety needs in the lives of Tambu and Martha, that is why both characters have no motivation to think of love, or get a husband. According to Tambu,

“You do not think of love, being obsessed only with what the gentleman can do for you, how the widow's son will be insurance against your absolute downfall”  
(Dangarembga, 2018, p. 43)

When Tambu was at Mrs Manyanga's house, she considered getting married to one of her sons so that she could overcome her predicament of poverty. However, she did not go through with her idea as she was not motivated, so it did not materialise. Tambu did not have good relationships with people, she had lost connection with her parents, which resulted in her alienation.

Unlike Tambu, Nyasha did not lose connection with her family. Nyasha also marries a man who loves her and does not treat her like his property, like most men in patriarchal societies do. She got married to a white man who believes in gender equality, he helps her in the kitchen, with the children, as well as, the writing club amongst many other things. Nyasha is from a loving family, her writing club is her other family and source of strength as she gets to help other women receive emotional support amidst their suffering. This writing group was a form of therapy for these young women, including Nyasha. This was her way of recovering from the trauma she experienced at her father's house.

### 7.2.3 Generativity vs stagnation

Tambu's life is portrayed as stagnant, unlike Nyasha's life. She is presented as a generative and creative young woman. The writing group can be seen as a medium for change. The type of change that STIWANISM and Africana Womanism advocate for in order to deal with gender social ills. Nyasha created an environment that promoted women empowerment. According to Ogundipe-Leslie's (1994), STIWANISM, "our dependency complex, built into us from early childhood socialisation is certainly one of the weaknesses to be combatted." Ogundipe- Leslie advocates for positive transformations that allow women and men to change their mind-sets. Oppressive practices should be challenged. Martha, Lucia, Maiguru challenge the patriarchal and colonial systems to achieve positive change.

Through the writing club, Nyasha develops a sense of being part of a bigger picture, it is a success. Therefore, this success leads to Nyasha feeling useful and having accomplished something. Similarly, after Martha fell pregnant, she felt unwanted by the parents and Freddy, and like she was a disappointment. So as a way of making something of herself, she furthered her education after giving birth and managed to secure a job afterwards. In the case of Tambu, she failed to find a way to contribute hence she became stagnant and unproductive. She disconnected from her community and the society as a whole.

Mid adulthood, Tambu has nothing to nurture or leave behind when she dies. In *This Mournable Body*, Tambu is portrayed as poor and jobless, she lives an unproductive and stagnant life. When she manages to secure a teaching job at a school with the idea of socialising or imparting good moral values the children who are disruptive, she ends up abusing one of them and causing permanent disability. Consequently, she lost her job in a short period of time, which results in her getting a breakdown and hallucinating. Tambu has nothing to give back to the community and also does not have a good relationship with any of her family members as

she had abandoned her family at the village. This is why she failed to construct an independent identity.

Tambu's breakthrough only comes when she was living with her cousin, Nyasha, after being admitted at a mental hospital for some time. Eventually, she met her high school classmate, Tracey who employs her in her tourism company. This is the only time that Tambu became productive at work and in her life, but even with that, she still failed to self-actualise. The job gave her a good home, car and a salary, which made her develop a sense of being part of a bigger picture. However, she does not visit her family at the village and still remains single. She only went to the village for a lucrative tourism business that her company had suggested. This was the only time she bought things for her family after working for Tracey for some time.

The socialisation Tambu went through and the post-colonial situation in Zimbabwe are the main causes of her stagnation. Tambu was an outstanding learner at school, but due to the racial discrimination she endured at work plus gender discrimination, she was crippled. Consequently, the education system at Sacred Heart, is not only crippling, but disempowering. Because Nyasha did not abandon her heritage, she managed to find a balance in her life. Even when she got married, she married a white man the traditional way in the village, her *lobola* was paid. The culture of paying *lobola*, is a culture that also contributes to the marginalisation of women. In some instances, once a man pays *lobola*, he marries the woman and feels he has rights over her or do what he wants with her. In a way, the woman becomes his property which he bought. In the trilogy, Maiguru is an example, Babamukuru takes her whole salary and uses the money to develop his own family. Maiguru does not receive any credit for her financial contribution. Maiguru's place is just in the kitchen like she is not educated.

Furthermore, Tambu's adult life is lonely, she thinks low of her Zimbabwean culture and prefers the white people's culture. The white people at work and school are all racist, which

leaves her stuck between two worlds. Tambu fails to build a good relationship with her family and the black girls at school as she considers them to be primitive and at the same time, those she considers to be civilised (white people) do not think she is better than any black person. Hence, she is discriminated against as a black person just like the rest. After securing a job, her life continued the same way, she did not go home and does not send anything at home. The socialisation that she receives at Sacred Heart College is that black people are inferior to white people and that her culture is primitive. This leaves a negative impact on Tambu and pushes her away from her family to the extent of her failing to help her family from poverty when she gets employed.

Nyasha is an intelligent and inquisitive young lady. After her studies she married a white man and has two children. However, Tambu was not pleased with the situation she found Nyasha in when she visited her home. In as much as Nyasha is presented as an educated woman, she struggled in life. Nyasha's white husband was not wealthy like the society expected of white people, the couple was struggling financially. Tambu was surprised by the fact that Nyasha behaved like everything was okay, even though her situation with her husband was not as bad, considering the situation in Zimbabwe at the time. All Zimbabweans were negatively affected, as there were limited employment opportunities. In order to secure a job, one had to know someone somewhere, like Tambu, who managed to secure a job at the advertising agency because she knew Tracey.

Despite everything, Nyasha manages to have children and create a group, and in turn has something to give back to the community, she has people to nurture and mentor. Nyasha is happy and satisfied with her marriage, as well as, her life. However, she is mostly concerned about the plight of Zimbabwean women, therefore, she teaches young women how to write and at the same time helped them find their voices. Nyasha's socialisation, which from the perspective of a Shona devotee such as her father, was bad, but turned out to be an advantage

after all. Through her exposure to another culture, she could critically analyse her own Shona cultural practices. Nyasha could choose and hold on to what she thought was beneficial and ignore that which did not benefit her. Because of this, Nyasha managed to be progressive and generative in life, something the three theoretical concepts advocate for. In conclusion, the analysis indicates that in order for the female characters (Tambu, Nyasha, Martha) to achieve their goals, their basic needs needed to have been met.

#### **7.2.4 Love and belonging**

Love and belonging involves one feeling like they belong, in other words, one requires interpersonal relationships which motivates one's behaviour. From the trilogy and *She No Longer Weeps*, Tambu and Martha's physiological and safety needs were not met in their lives. Hence, they do not think about love or committing to a man.

“You do not think of love, being obsessed only with what the gentleman can do for you, how the widow's son will be an insurance against absolute downfall”  
(Dangarembga, 2018, p. 13)

As depicted in *This Mournable Body*, at Mai Manyanga's house, Tambu considers getting married to one of the Manyanga sons so as to overcome her predicament of poverty. However, Tambu does not follow her line of thought, as she is not motivated. Tambu did not built good relations with good people and as a result lost connection with her parents, she was alienated. Something that is similar to Martha's life, her parents forced her to go back to the father of her child who was mistreating her because they believed that was the acceptable thing to do in society as she fell pregnant out of wedlock. The push from her parents along with other women in the community did not bring her closer to them but rather pushed her away and as a result, she became alienated.

Nyasha on the other hand, did not lose connection with her family. Unlike Tambu and Martha, Nyasha married a man she loved and did not treat her like he owned her like most men in patriarchal societies do. Nyasha marries a white man who seems to believe in gender equality.

### **7.2.5 Gendered education in a patriarchal society**

*Nervous Conditions* (1988) presented the Shona society as one that considers school or education as masculine. The boy child, Nhamo was sent to school and the girl child, Tambu was asked to stay home and take care of the household. Maiguru can also relate to this form of marginalisation that is experienced by Tambu. Babamukuru and his family disapproved her studies. It was only when Tambu's brother, Nhamo, dies, that Babamukuru brings up the issue of emancipating that branch of the family that he considers Tambu.

“It is unfortunate that there is no male child to take this duty, to take the job of raising the family from hunger...” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 56)

It was this point that Tambu's father agreed and stated that Tambu's sharpness with books was useless to them as it would only benefit strangers. Both Jeremiah and Mai Tambu are in need of help from Babamukuru who is well- educated and is working to take their children to school as they are poor and none of them completed school. They had already forced Tambu to drop out of school before Babamukuru's return from Britain. In a flash back in *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Tambu mentioned that her mother had only gone to school till grade seven then she got married, her poor father was happy to marry her off because he was going to receive cattle in return as *lobola*.

Tambu was not happy about being confined at home as she had dreams of becoming somebody in future. Tambu's motivation was Maiguru, she was a teacher at a mission school. When Babamukuru raised the question of who would take the family out of poverty, he looked at Tambu and saw a girl child, forgetting that his wife, Maiguru, was a teacher. This serves as

enough proof that women too, are capable of providing for the family if given the opportunity to nurture their potential, just like men. Jeremiah believed educating Tambu would only benefit the family that she would get married into and not them. This is a STIWANISM concern, as education would not just benefit others but it would benefit her too as it would allow her to become independent. Education is a human right. The girl child is also a human being that deserves to have her own life and that is what STIWANISM and Africana womanism advocate for. The belief that girl children should be provided with education only when the money is available or when there is money to waste or when there is no work to be done at home, farms and markets should be changed.

Tambu was only permitted to go to school when her brother died. She started her story in *Nervous Conditions* (1988), with a shocking statement. She says

“I was not sorry when my brother died” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 1)

Tambu was benumbed in the face of her brother's death. She shows no emotions or human warmth. Tambu was hurt that she had been denied her right to acquire an education because of her femaleness. Childhood experiences affect one's psyche and development. The hatred Tambu developed towards her father and brother was as a result of the unfair treatment she had received as a girl child. Before Babamukuru gave her an opportunity to go to school, Tambu had found an alternative to get herself enough funds to pay for her own primary education at Rutivi. Tambu grew maize that she sold to raise school fees.

Tambu believes that the only way for her to escape from the suffering of womanhood and poverty is through acquiring an education, but unfortunately Jeremiah believes education will make her quite useless for the real task of feminine living. In *The Book of Not*, Tambu proves that she has a sharp brain for school, commitment and determination and should not be limited to the kitchen only when she can do so much more. As a girl child, Tambu is expected to learn



everything feminine from her mother and from the women around her. These feminine roles include child rearing, cooking, cleaning and cultivating the fields, of which these are the tasks we see Tambu doing when her brother went to school and she did not. STIWANISM, Africana womanism and Nego- feminism are not against girls and women performing domestic chores, however, they argue that these roles should not be forced on them to the extent of them failing to participate in other things that interest them and that could be beneficial to them, such getting an education or a formal job. An example of these three theoretical concepts is depicted through Maiguru, who holds a master's degree and works alongside Babamukuru as a teacher at the mission school. With her qualification she qualifies for a leadership position and should not be discriminated against for being female.

Because of her education, Tambu in *This Mournable Body* (2018), secures a job at an advertising agency, then a teaching job, then moved to Tracey's Tourism Company. Without an education, Tambu would have never been able to get any of these jobs. There may have been times that she was unemployed, but this was due to other factors such as racism and the economic system in a post- colonial system Zimbabwe. Denying a girl an education but allowing a boy to get education simply translates to inequality, which results in inequality between men and women. This also means that men will be employed in formal labour markets and only men will have the knowledge to make decisions at home as well as, national level. Therefore, in order to tackle inequalities between men and women, both boys and girls should be given their right to an education.

#### **7.2.6 Gender differences in assertiveness**

Apart from education, a character that is assertive is associated with being masculine, or showing confidence or a forceful personality. Nyasha, Lucia and Martha are very assertive, hence they are considered to be deviant by the Shona society. these three ladies are outspoken

and stand up for themselves. In the patriarchal culture women are expected to be silent and passive members of the society, as well as, allow men to be in charge of everything. Babamukuru considers this assertiveness to be “a disease which should be cured even if it meant violent intimidation.” Babamukuru physically abuses Nyasha in an attempt to silence her but she does not conform.

Nyasha is an open minded and assertive girl who is well aware of women’s plight which is perpetuated by the Shona patriarchal culture. She is also aware that her mother, Maiguru, is entrapped in her marriage even though she does not speak out. According to Ogundipe- Leslie (1994), “African women need to educate themselves about the rights and responsibilities of liberal democracy in a modern nation-state for the woman as an independent individual and not as a dependent” (p. 211). Nyasha rebels against societal expectations of how women should behave. Girls are socialised to be passive and boys are socialised to be dominant, and Nyasha is well aware of this.

In *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Nyasha came back home late at night from a dance and Babamukuru condemned her to whoredom. Nyasha did not accept this and answered back, which made him furious and beat her severely.

“You must learn to be obedient, Babamukuru to Nyasha and struck her again... if Nyasha was going to behave like a man, then by his mother who was at rest in the grave he would fight her like one” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 117)

After the fight, Nyasha stood up and walked out of the room. She is a proud girl. As for Tambu who was present when all this transpired, she thinks:

“Making her a victim of her femaleness, just as I was victimised when Nhamo went to school and I grew my maize. The victimization, I saw, was universal. It didn’t depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition... men took it

everywhere with them. Even heroes like Babamukuru did it... but what I didn't like was the way all the conflicts came to this question of femaleness. Femaleness as opposed and inferior to maleness" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 118)

Despite being well- educated, Babamukuru, is also patriarchal. Education did not change him completely. Tambu and Nyasha are very conscious of the victimisation of women and girls.

"They think I am a snob, that I think I am superior to them because I do not feel that I am inferior to men" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 200)

Nyasha did not have a sense of belonging to the Shona culture. Being herself was a battle.

Babamukuru was treated like a hero by his family except Nyasha who did not treat him as such. At some point Tambu wondered why. Even when Babamukuru praised Tambu to be a decent girl, Nyasha does not change the way she conducted herself. She was fine with the way she was; she had a way of looking at things which made it difficult for her to be impressed by Babamukuru. Nyasha's British socialisation opened up her mind to the issues of gender in her culture. Nyasha expressed to Tambu how she did not want to be anyone's underdog and trapped, with the patriarchal culture controlling everything she did (Dangarembga, 1988, p.188). Nyasha spoke like this because she knew how her mother was trapped in her marriage. STIWANISM, Nego- feminism and Africana womanism looks at them, the lack of choice in a marriage which still plagues women's lives.

Lucia and Martha are different from all the other female characters in the selected novels in as much as they are both socialised with the Shona culture. Lucia and Martha are women who are quite outspoken and for this reason they are not accepted by their societies. With time, Lucia managed to win over Babamukuru's respect because of her firmness and outspoken manner. This shows that even when favouring the male, the community's culture is not rigidly dogmatic, it can accommodate change. Babamukuru found a job for her at the mission school

and she went to register herself in grade one so she could learn how to read and write so as to better herself. STIWANISM argues that culture is dynamically evolving and certainly not static, and that culture should not be immobilised in time to take advantage of women as most men in Africa want it to be.

### **7.2.7 Inequalities between men and women**

Inequalities between men and women are quite evident in different structures of the Zimbabwean society, including the Shona culture. Girls and women are marginalised and boys and men take advantage. The theoretical concepts that were used to analyse the inequalities between men and women are not against men but they advocate for a balance or coexistence between both genders. This section of the study focuses on analysing the causes of inequalities in the selected works by Dangarembga. In the same vein, this analysis was done on novels that were carefully selected in order to trace the characters' lives from childhood to adulthood, in their homes, community, at schools and in their work places.

#### **7.2.7.1 Colonialism and patriarchy**

Inequalities in the Shona culture were mainly caused by colonialism and patriarchy. Colonial racism and patriarchy reinforced the notion of self and other. The novels *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and *She No Longer Weeps* (1987) were both set during the period that Zimbabwe was still under colonial rule of Britain. In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu, the protagonist, in a flash back takes the readers back to the past when her grandmother told her of how the colonisers came to Zimbabwe and how that impacted the lives of the indigenous people. Tambu's grandmother narrates:

“Wizards well versed in treachery and black magic came from the South and forced and forced the people from the land...there was less and less land for the people”  
(Dangarembga, 1988, p. 18)

Indigenous people had to settle on barren land that the wizards would not use. Which meant that black people had to depend on white people who were now dominating their land. This also affected how black people viewed themselves. Nhamo and Tambu considered their tradition to be inferior and the English ways to be superior, hence they both enjoyed each of their stays at Babamukuru's house.

As for the inequalities that already existed, they increased with the patriarchal system that came with the colonisers. The colonisers also brought their religion hence the missionary schools were run by the Christian Church. Colonialism itself was a masculine system. Because of the economic and food insecurity, men had to go work on the wizards' farms.

“the white wizard had no use for women and children. He threw my grandmother and her children off the farm” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 18)

In other words, Tambu's grandmother had to struggle in order to provide food for the children and herself in a country where all fertile land was owned by white people.

Boys and men were favoured by the colonisers, when the European missionaries arrived in Zimbabwe, they took boys like Babamukuru to work for them on their farms and also educate them at the missionary school which they had set up.

“they set him to work on their farm by day. By night he was educated in their wizardry” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 19)

The practice of educating boys whilst girls and women were left to work in the fields and at home continued even in post- independent Zimbabwe. Babamukuru's future was certain compared to that of any woman his age or even older.

Women and girls are 'othered' in the Shona society. The Shona culture is patriarchal. This is depicted in *Nervous Conditions* (1988), at Babamukuru's welcoming party, invited guests

moved into the house according to their patriarchal status, and behind them were the relatives of a lower strata. Tambu had to give water to the male relatives first for them to wash their hands before eating, and this was done in a descending order of their seniority, only after they were done did she give it to the females, starting with her grandmother then the aunts.

Women suffer subordination in this culture. At Babamukuru's party, it was the women who prepared the food, the women had to serve the food, starting with the men and ending with themselves. In as much as Tambu and other women worked so hard to prepare the food and to serve it, they ended up not eating any meat. Only gravy was left for them after serving the men and the older women. They do not complain as they are socialised to understand the situation. Whereas, Nhamo was enjoying the benefits of being a boy, he received a share of the meat. Women and girls are the "other" people, there is no equality. The selected theoretical frameworks seek to give African women and girls senses of self-worth and not the opposite.

In *The Book of Not* (2006), Tambu endures colonial racism at Sacred Heart College, she is one of the five black girls who were awarded scholarships to learn at a white only school. The five African girls are segregated at this esteemed Christian school. The girls slept in what was referred to as the African dormitory which was far from the white people, lest they soil them. Even when Tambu becomes the best performing student in her class, the award was given to Tracey, the second-best performer. One can just imagine how demoralising this may have been for Tambu who had worked so hard to get the award that was then given to another. The racism did not end there, it is repeated when Tambu was older at her work place, the advertising agency. Tambu was supposed to receive an award for writing so well but alas a white male was given the award for an advert Tambu had written. Her heart broke and she quit her job. In both scenarios, white people did not want to accept that a black person, a black woman, was equally human, intelligent and could do the same job or even better than a white person. When Tambu quit her job, despite being well-educated, she struggled to find another decent job, the next

good job she managed to secure was at Tracey's company, her former classmate who had taken her award.

However, Tracey was using Tambu to get to the land and the resources of the indigenous people at Tambu's village for the profit of her tourism business and it did not go well as the villagers did not trust white people. According to STIWANISM, the issue of women has to be looked at in the context of race and the struggles that bedevil the African continent today. It advocates for the liberation of the whole of Africa. One may thus argue that gender inequalities do not exist just because of socialisation but because of other factors as well, namely racial discrimination and segregation.

Colonialism attempts to deny all attributes of humanity to those it suppressed. In *The Book of Not* (2006), the binary opposition, black and white, civilised and uncivilised, and rich and poor, are created at the Sacred Heart College. Tambu wanted to associate herself with the whites and the "civilised" as she considered her fellow blacks to be of a lower status. She regarded herself highly as she came from a modern house at Babamukuru. Unfortunately, the white people did not see the difference between the black girls and her. The time that Tambu used the white girls' toilet, she was caught and humiliated for doing so. They were all called to the principal's office for a hearing. This socialisation that Tambu and the other black girls get at the college causes them to develop an inferiority complex, and this psychological situation can either motivate a person to work hard or demotivate the person entirely. In this case, it makes Tambu work even harder but her hard work was not given the acknowledgement it deserved. STIWANISM states that this situation should change as it inhibits the progress of these African girls. Racism destroys confidence in these young ladies and the effects are long lasting.

In *This Mournable Body* (2018), Tambu is traumatised because of several reasons. As a woman, her experience of post-colonialism differs from that of a man. Tambu and the women in her

family display some sort of “nervousness” of the post- colonial conditions. With tenacity and bewilderment, they negotiate race, class, gender and cultural change. Tambu struggles to find her place in society as well as, her identity. Racial inequality frustrates her. On the other hand, she does not want any association with her “primitive” family. She thinks low of her culture and this is why she did not accept mealie meal that her mother sent her even though she needed it. In *The Book of Not* (2006), Tambu says:

“I suffered secretly a sense of inferiority that came from having been at a primitive scene” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 28)

Tambu was referring to the scene that Babamukuru was punished by the villagers for taking her to Sacred Heart College. Babamukuru was suspected to have connived with the colonisers.

When Tambu was a teacher in *This Mournable Body* (2018), she fails to cope with the children she was teaching. Tambu tried to socialise them with the principles she had been socialised with. However, the children were different and their world was different. In this case, she failed in her self- given responsibility to correct society for they did not listen to her. Tambu failed to relate to the children as she had been socialised in a Christian school and a patriarchal society, systems that both supported the subordination of girls and women. However, the girls in her class were different, they were free willed and empowered. Nevertheless, the empowerment Ogundipe- Leslie (1994), advocates for is not one where young girls get older men as boyfriends to buy them material possessions as it was with Tambu’s learners, but one that has a positive transformation in society. Tambu came from a background where children, especially girls, did not have choices.

Tambu and Nyasha both struggled to accept, create and understand their identities. Nyasha failed to adjust well to the Shona patriarchal culture. She was always caught in conflict with her father who wanted her to be silent because she was a girl. Nyasha was stuck in a state of



unresolved and warring emotions. Her ungrounded identity resulted in isolation and loneliness, which led her to suffering from an eating disorder and mental illness. The pressure to embrace change and to remain true to herself traumatised her. Nyasha then alienated herself as she does not approve of the Shona culture's patriarchal practices. Furthermore, her peers do not fully accept her because of her personality. She suffers from anorexia as a result of not eating well, she used her body to rebel against the patriarchal system.

After the holiday of meeting (the primitive scene) it was difficult for Tambu to relate to anything at school. She was struggling to focus well on her studies. Tambu was constantly absent minded in class as she was thinking of her sister who ended up having only one leg and her uncle's beating. Tambu claimed that while she went on planning her life, her life was planning on insurgence. The meeting at the village left Tambu with fear, she imagined her sister hopping with one leg and making an appearance in class. She would close her eyes to stop herself from crying in class and also avoided answering questions that had been asked by the teacher, lest tears fell. Tambu claimed that if she kept her eyes closed, she would not do well but rather face a life time of being nothing, like Mai Tambu, and that was because of her sister. Tambu was not in her normal state of mind, she did things she failed to understand, such as fighting with the hostel matron and also her teacher. This condition she was in, hindered her from progressing.

In addition, Mai Tambu was not supportive, she did not give her emotional support she needed when she was at school, when she was being racially mistreated, or when she was alone. Mai Tambu's bitterness was a frustration that resulted from the evils of colonialism. She did not see any good in Western education. She thought it was a way of colonising the minds of the natives and a strategy of destroying family relations. Whereas, Tambu saw her mother as a barrier that was standing between her and her education. Even though Tambu received the best education at the mission and at the college, her adult life was full of difficulties. She was not a successful

woman that she had always wanted to be, she was unemployed, poor, homeless and lonely. Tambu had no social life and all these problems together culminated to her second breakdown, she became mentally ill.

Tambu's condition was multifaceted, her country was in a bad condition as it had been damaged by the colonial violence. Employment was hard to come by as the government had done very little in that area for the black people. Most black people did not have good housing and the land belonged to the white people. These are some of the conditions that the selected theoretical concepts say should change as they hinder the African women and girls from self-actualising. Moreover, abandoning her roots was another mistake as one's past always shapes the identity in the future. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994), states that "African women in general wish to retain certain features of their traditions, those that are positive for women." As for Tambu, she was lost in a dual world. The post-colonial effects, apart from her socialisation had a negative impact on her and the woman she grew up to be.

#### **7.2.7.2 Gender roles and stereotypes**

Part of the major contributing factors of gender inequality are gender roles and stereotypes. The Shona culture like many other African cultures, has certain behaviours and roles that are expected of boys and men as opposed to those of women and girls. Girl children are expected to look after children, cultivate fields, cook and clean. Whereas boys are expected to look after cattle, collect firewood, and plough the fields. In *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Tambu was encouraged to learn how to cook and forget her books because she was a girl and she would not cook her books for her husband. This implies that a woman is supposed to cook and a man cannot cook. Tambu was being prepared for marriage. However, she had other goals in life, her goal was to be independent and not dependent on a man for everything. She was after

positive change, something that is advocated for by the three theoretical concepts, for African girls, to be self-reliant.

In the text, *This Mournable Body* (2018), Netsai's children mastered cooking, cleaning and fetching of water. Even when Tambu went back to visit her family after many years of being away from home, she found them cleaning. Like their mother, Netsai, who gave herself to her husband prematurely, her girls are likely to follow suit and end up in premature marriages, for children learn from the women around them. Netsai's girls need positive influences and examples in order for them to be freed from the bondage of domesticity; they require women who are empowered as role models. The place of women is in the kitchen in this culture. According to Nyasha:

“I always suspected kitchens aren't what they are made out to be. Poor Mai Taka! It should not be a prison sentence. No woman should have to go in them unless she is willing” (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 124)

Nyasha was of the idea that the kitchen responsibilities were not supposed to be forced onto any woman. Forcing a woman to do domestic chores is not what STIWANISM, Nego-feminism, and Africana womanism advocate for, but instead for women's democracy and autonomy. One should pursue an area of her interest so that positive progress in the African societies can be achieved. Nyasha pursues writing, she is empowered. Her writing empowers other women and therefore bringing positive transformation in the lives of fellow African women. Nyasha does not become the person the Shona society prescribes for a woman; she follows her dreams and she is happy.

*She No Longer Weeps* (1987) calls for social change in various levels of society. It can be read as a social satire and on the other hand a political satire. Satires are about attacking certain individuals, institutions, nations for certain identified follies or weaknesses. Dangarembga

made use of this text to call for social change in homes and/or families in the Shona society. The text can also be said to be attacking the Zimbabwean government in the 1980s for its failure to uplift women at a time when the government was boasting about strides made to promote women in society. The author seems to be complaining that the Zimbabwean government had not done enough as much as it should have done.

The subject of Dangarembga's attack is the patriarchal society that is best presented through both the male and female characters in the text. These include Freddy, Martha's mother and father, Mrs Matsika and Mrs Chiwara. All these characters seem to encourage the enslavement of the female protagonist Martha, whose approach in life differs from the rest. As a pastor, Martha's father disapproves of her actions when she refuses to go back to Freddy. He was more concerned about what the society would think and say if people found out she had a child out of wedlock. Mother's mother who was also socialised to accept the woman's place in society supported what her husband had asked of his daughter, even when Freddy had disowned her during the time of her pregnancy. Then the women's organisation represented by Mrs Mutsika and Mrs Chiwara also reinforced the ordinary woman's suffering by confirming the patriarchal society's view of a woman. This was the reason why Martha refused to help the organisation when they asked her to talk to other "unlucky girls" like her. Mrs Matsika says:

"we have a lot of unlucky girls in our care...If you could come talk to them about how things are for us women and how these problems can be overcome...you must tell them not to give up, that is only the beginning of their struggle" (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 36)

Martha did not accept this invite as it did not add any value to the woman's quest for freedom. Martha's behaviour was clearly different from the rest. Freddy did not value Martha as an equal, he saw her as a second class citizen who should be used and dumped whenever he felt like it. This is evident when he told Martha that she was a prostitute. He told her:

“...you want to know? I tell you...you are a bitch and only a bitch...” (Dangarembga, 1987, p. 12)

Freddy was incensed by the fact that Martha was able to stand on her own and not depend on him for sustenance and support. He was used to Gertrude who he would treat like a sex object. Freddy would boast to Joe that unlike Martha, “Gertrude likes me because she doesn’t expect me to marry her. She doesn’t even expect me to see her regularly. She doesn’t expect anything from me, all she wants is for me to make love to her when I feel like it” (p. 13). Gertrude is a nice woman according to Freddy because she allows him to do whatever he wants with her and she does not complain, unlike Martha. Any woman who subverts the patriarchal society’s expectations is dangerous, loose, a witch or a prostitute. So for Martha to be considered a good woman, she has to be an appendage to a man such as Freddy and this is demonstrated by her father’s advice to her, “tell me this child, what you think that you a woman can do in life if not take care of a man in life” (p. 27). Martha rejects such a view and carves out her own space as an educated and emancipated individual. The climax in this play was when she killed Freddy and did not weep or show any remorse, this was her turning point, her deliverance from the oppressive patriarchal society.

Freddy, a representative of the patriarchal society had to die for her to liberate herself. Normally, one would expect some to regret after killing another person even when it is done out of will, but this was not the case with Martha, she seemed to celebrate instead of mourning. Martha raised her child on her own and completed her university education then became a successful lawyer. This solicits admiration and not sympathy from a reader, and her killing Freddy, it is celebrated as she had killed patriarchy, the stumbling block to her success.

Martha’s character is significant in several ways; she is the character that carries the theme of social change in the play. The author was clearly attacking patriarchy, a system that crippled

and suffocated women in the text. There is a need for change and transformation regarding the way the society operates and that change can only come to fruition if courageous individuals like Martha and Nyasha challenge and interrogate the society's structures.

Chores that are done by males are fewer compared to those done by women. Males focus on decision making and dominating women, there is an imbalance in the division of gender roles in the Shona culture. Every time, Tambu would watch her mother work alone without any assistance from her father, she says:

“the thought of my mother work alone, always distressed me” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 10)

Mai Tambu worked hard without complaining in order to feed her children. Tambu joined her mother in working in the fields. Whereas Jeremiah only worked in the fields when he wished and Nhamo would work after school yet Tambu and her mother would work every day from morning. Women are forced to be silent when they get married to an irresponsible man like Jeremiah. Jeremiah was unemployed but he also did not work as hard as his wife did in order to end poverty in their home and send the children to school. Rather he forced Tambu to drop out of school on the basis that she was a girl, he did not care about how she felt as he had no regard for her. This is the mentality that the theoretical concepts aim at changing. They thrive on compromise, negotiating and working together of both genders, as well as, giving African women and girls a sense of self-worthy, effectual and contributing beings. Jeremiah was supposed to work together with his wife for the well- being of their children and for the development of the African society.

Nhamo felt he had the rights to send his sisters, Tambu and Netsai around but Tambu was not up for this. Nhamo had picked up this behaviour from Babamukuru and Jeremiah as that is how they treated women. Women were always serving men. Through the Shona culture, Nhamo

learns to despise his sister hence he treated her with inferiority. This culture is taught to children at an early age. Parents are the first teachers of their children hence they are capable of teaching their male children to value women so that when they grow up, they will never depart from it. It is very important that children, both boys and girls, are taught to work so that so that they are ready to face the world, to be responsible people and to make positive contributions to the African society.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Nhamo's father and family members consider him to be more important than his sisters, Tambu and Netsai. Jeremiah thanks God for Nhamo but not for his daughters. He says:

“I was blessed when I was given that son. Truly, I was blessed” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 46)

Jeremiah went on to feel pity for him as he had to go to school and still come back to work at home. Tambu also went to school and came back to do her house chores, which were even more than those of Nhamo but no one felt pity for her. She was discriminated against. Girl children also deserve to be given equal opportunities as the boys and treated equally with the boys, not like how Tambu and Nhamo were treated. The birth of a girl child should give the parents the same joy they get when they deliver a male child. The mentality and attitude that sons are more important than daughters should be done away with as it is detrimental to the development of the African continent. Some women have also been socialised so much that they have adopted this notion. Daughters should be accepted in societies.

#### **7.2.7.3 Power distribution and decision making**

In as much as Maiguru possesses the same qualification as Babamukuru, the status and position that she holds at work differs from his. Babamukuru is the head of the house and at work too. He is highly esteemed at work and in the community because of his education but Maiguru is

not accorded the same respect. Women are not only discriminated at family level but at work places too. Men hold the power and they always hold the leadership positions whereas women are always given subordinate positions. No matter how educated a woman may be, she will always be treated with inferiority. STIWANISM, Nego- feminism and Africana womanism call for a mental shift on the issues of gender discrimination so that both men and women can be given equal opportunities or can have a balance and work together. Women can pull together with men towards the development of the African society; hence, they should be included in social and political transformation of the society.

Violence against women is used in *Nervous Conditions*, *This Mournable Body* and *She No Longer Weeps* as a controlling tool.

“Nhamo enjoyed taking a stick to her at the slightest excuse” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 10)

Netsai is presented as a submissive girl and Tambu thinks she is a sweet child, the type that would make a sweet and unhappy wife. Netsai was internalising abuse from childhood, that is why she was likely to accept it in adulthood from her future husband. Nhamo was of the idea that what he did was what it meant to be a man, being aggressive and dominant. “Men are not born violent and nor are they inherently so” (Edwards- Jauch, 2016). A boy learns male domination from how older men around him treat women. Jeremiah physically abuses his wife with no regard of the presence of their children in the house. Nhamo was likely to grow up and become an abusive husband, unfortunately his life was cut short. Parents should give good examples to their children.

Men are perceived as the stronger sex compared to women. A man is a strong person and it is believed that where he is there is no hunger, when he fails to find a job and has no source of income, he is most likely to practice gender-based violence. Alcohol abuse and stress are some



of the cause of gender-based violence or domestic violence. Furthermore, men go after women and children who are the weaker vessels. Jeremiah was jobless and he resorted to abusing alcohol and his wife in order to stay in charge.

When a woman is beaten or raped, it is her fault, she is to blame. In *The Book of Not* (2018), Gertrude was beaten publicly for wearing revealing clothes and Tambu witnessed the whole ordeal. However, Tambu did not help her, instead she joined the crowd in mocking her and also picked up a stone to stone her. Although Tambu joined the men and women who were beating and mocking Gertrude, the sight of her filled her with “an emptiness that hurts.” When Mako got raped by Shine at Mai Manyanga’s house, where they were renting, Tambu did not understand, she was reminded of Gertrude and what happened to her at the market. Mako did not do anything to invite being raped, she was in her room wearing baggy sweat pants and a long- sleeved T-shirt.

“with Gertrude, the reason for what happened was clear for all to see. Yet something similar happened to Mako. Your hearts beat faster. You are a woman alone...will your age and general unattractiveness prevent him from coming for you” (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 57)

This clearly indicates that the problem is with men and not with the length of the skirts which women wear. Mai Taka is also physically abused by her husband. He brutally beat her to the point of causing her to miscarry. In as much as he deserves to be arrested, culture will protect him, instead the woman will be blamed for being beaten for not being submissive to her husband. The woman also believed that it was her fault that she was beaten because she hid it from Nyasha, her boss. This is all because of how men and women have been socialised from childhood.

Women live in fear; they are not free. Apart from raping Mako, Shine also brought different women to his room on a daily basis. One of the women was so hurt that she caused a scene in Mai Manyanga's yard. Bertha was presented as strong; she knew the situation of the women quite well. She told Mako:

“Mako, if you ask all the women at your work place, in fact all women, maybe just not Tambu over there, then you will know it's what nearly every one of them puts up with”  
(Dangarembga, 2018, p. 57)

In *Nervous Conditions* (1988), when the decision to send Nhamo to the mission school was made, Mai Tambu was not called to the meeting because only men and not women sit in decision making meetings. Similarly, when Nhamo died, she was not consulted in deciding that Tambu should go with Babamukuru to the mission. In both incidences, Mai Tambu was not happy. She says the “Englishness” killed her son and now they took her daughter. Mai Tambu fell sick as she was sceptical about the European education, hence it was against her will that Tambu attended school at the mission. However, because she is a woman, she was silenced. As the head of the family, Babamukuru made all the decisions and everyone had to obey. The selected theoretical concepts advocate that women be included; in this case all women were excluded.

Maiguru was a teacher at the mission school, she earned a salary but she was denied the power to make decisions over her money by her husband. Babamukuru would decide what she would use her money on as he was the head of the family. Babamukuru supported his poor brother and sisters, as well as, their families with Maiguru's money, which made him get even more respect in the family, whilst Maiguru just submitted and nobody recognised her role. This is the same attitude and mentality Jeremiah and the rest of the men in Tambu's family had. It is also the same mentality Nhamo was beginning to internalise before he died, the mentality of

dominating the women and girls. Maiguru was submissive but she was not happy with the way things were done by Babamukuru without asking for her opinion. Babamukuru would bring people from his extended family to their home. After tolerating this behaviour for a long time, she finally said

“I am tired of my house being a hotel for your family. I am tired of being a housekeeper for them. I am tired of being nothing in a home that I am working myself sick to support” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 72)

Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) states that:

“women should change their mind- sets and challenge these oppressive practices in order to bring positive transformation in the African society. our dependency complex, built into us from an early childhood socialisation, is certainly one of the weaknesses to be combatted.”

In *This Mournable Body* (2018), Nyasha is married with children. When compared to her mother in decision making, Nyasha is freer in her marriage. She does not grow up to be a silent submissive wife like the women in her family. Nyasha always believed in autonomy since childhood. It is evident in her choice of a man that she makes her own decisions without much influence from the Shona culture, she married a white man and not a Shona man. Nyasha’s British- Shona socialisation makes her conscious about the plight of girls and women in her Shona culture. In her marriage, she makes decisions together with her husband, unlike her mother, Mai Tambu, and Mai Taka, who are voiceless. Nyasha is able to pursue her writing career with her husband’s support, her husband probably came from a family where masculinity was interpreted differently. Both Nyasha and her husband seem to get along very well even with their middle class life, they have an understanding. This is what STIWANISM, Nego- feminism and Africana womanism advocate for. When her children grow up, they too

would emulate their parents in decision making, especially the girl. Nyasha's daughter is not pressured to be feminine like Nyasha was when she was young. Nyasha does not socialise her daughter to be submissive and her son to be dominant, rather she teaches them to reason and make choices. Dangarembga was pointing out that the socialisation of children at family level should uphold the equality of boys and girls in order to bring about positive transformation in society.

#### **7.2.7.4 Women marginalising other women**

Women also participate in marginalising other women. They do this unconsciously as it has become part of their culture. Culture is passed on to the young ones, from generation to generation through socialisation. Women are the repository of culture hence they teach their children the norms and values of their society as it was taught to them; they teach them how to conduct themselves and how to behave; they teach the girls to be silent and to be submissive to men.

### **7.3 Chapter summary**

This chapter focused concluding the study by providing a summary of the findings. The chapter covers the relevance of the research findings which are formulated in the context of the theoretical frameworks. The summary of findings drawn from all four of Dangarembga's literary texts were presented under different subheadings for a straightforward understanding of why the feminisation of poverty is an issue in Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole. The reasons why disparities between men and women exist were explored. The chapter also explores gender roles and culture, generativity and stagnation of the female characters, love and belonging, gendered education in a patriarchal society, gender differences in assertiveness. Lastly, the inequalities between men and women were also explored and divided into four subheadings: colonialism and patriarchy; gender roles and stereotypes; power distribution and decision-

making; and women marginalising other women. Every heading provides an explanation of why women in the Shona society fell victim to the nervous conditions surrounding them and what survival strategies they devised in order to escape poverty.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 8.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to explore the feminisation of poverty and victimhood in Tsitsi Dangarembga's oeuvre, *Nervous Conditions* (1988); *The Book of Not* (2006); *This Mournable Body* (2018); and *She No Longer Weeps* (1987), focusing on the cyclical evocations of nervous conditions, survival strategies and agency. The study examined how women in the Shona society were presented in the selected texts by integrating the following questions of the study's analysis. The questions were as follows:

1. How does Dangarembga use fiction to represent the cyclical nature of a suffering woman and her coping strategies?
2. How do the selected literary texts participate in representing and reflecting the feminisation of poverty and victimhood?
3. In what ways does the author present the cyclical and constant causes of gender related challenges?
4. How effective are the Africana womanism, STIWANISM, and Nego- feminism theoretical lenses in the analysis and examination of the impact of the feminisation of poverty on the Zimbabwean society?
5. What sort of theoretical concept can be developed to explain the cyclical evocations of nervous conditions, survival strategies and agency in African societies?

The study applied the concepts: Africana womanism, STIWANISM, Nego- feminism to analyse the selected texts, as well as, how the author presented the problems African women

endure and are enduring through various female characters. This chapter focuses on the conclusions of the study by addressing the research questions and conclusions of the study. The conclusions are drawn from the study's analysis (**chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6**) of this study. The conclusions would reveal whether the previously set research questions (**1.3 Research questions**) have been answered either successfully or unsuccessfully after examining and analysing the selected texts. The chapter also focuses on how the study contributes to new knowledge. Also considered by this chapter are the recommendations that are drawn from the comprehensive study's findings as well as gaps emerging throughout the process of carrying out this study and lastly the chapter summary will conclude the chapter and the study.

## **8.2 Addressing the research questions: A conclusion**

The research was set to determine whether the research questions were satisfied through the analysis of Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988); *The Book of Not* (2006); *This Mournable Body* (2018); and *She No Longer Weeps* (1987). The study was immersed in exploring the feminisation of poverty and victimhood, nervous conditions, struggle for survival and agency in the selected post-colonial autobiographical Zimbabwean fiction. The feminisation of poverty was there before independence and is still in existence even post-independence, and yet this issue remains unsolved. The research questions remained unchanged as initially stated at the beginning of the study and they guided the study to the end.

### **8.2.1 Interrogating the first research question**

- How does Dangarembga use fiction to represent the cyclical nature of a suffering woman and her coping strategies?

The conclusion that this study has made is that despite the hardships, struggles, sufferings and the obstacles that a woman has to endure in order to survive in all four novels analysed, the coping strategies are survival. The four novels explored in this study ultimately paint a picture

of the struggles, feminisation of poverty, victimhood and nervous conditions faced by the Shona women over a 30-year-period, with each novel capturing every detail according to that time or year. Each novel narrates a story of that time and continues into the next time in the next novel. Therefore, with each novel telling a story of the struggles that women were experiencing during a certain period, the author managed to capture the cyclical nature of a suffering woman's nervous conditions and her coping strategies over the years. What stands out strongly is the struggle for survival the female characters have, they face every hardship thrown in their paths but do not lose focus, which is to better their living conditions and lives, even if it means going against the cultural norms.

The study demonstrated how women in the Shona society fight against the feminisation of poverty and victimhood despite the obstacles that may be in their ways. They manage to survive because they claim their place in their homes, community, and work places. The literary texts demonstrated that even in a place where there is no hope, there are ways and opportunities and those who are willing and driven can indeed make or live good lives even without the required support from families, community, education, or society as a whole.

In this study, it has also been found that another survival and coping strategy that the protagonists of the novels applied is that of changing one's cultural identity and views, and also focusing on improving one's life as well as empowering one another.

### **8.2.2 Illuminating the second research question**

- How do the selected literary texts participate in representing and reflecting the feminisation of poverty and victimhood?

The focus and struggle for survival of the female characters as demonstrated in the novels is an analytical response, which provides an answer to the second question. It can be concluded that Dangarembga's novels: *Nervous Conditions* (1988); *The Book of Not* (2006); *This*



*Mournable Body* (2018); and *She No Longer Weeps* (1987), present the lives of the female characters as victims of patriarchy, culture and colonialism, they suffer at the grips of the feminisation of poverty, but there are always ways out, some are for the better some are for the worse. The dichotomous presentation of Nyasha/ Martha as focused survivors and Tambu as a focused victim shows that personal transformation is a survival tool. It can be concluded that Tambu, Nyasha, and Martha's versatile natures and serendipity that the literary critics must amplify, as opposed to the males in the Shona society's mentalities and cultural beliefs that do not assist or cater for the Shona women.

The study has explored these dimensions of life as represented by both male and female characters in order to present life's many opportunities but ultimately emphasising that survival and coping strategies are available and can be used for the better. The reversal of roles which takes place in the trilogy, is when Nhamo dies and his responsibilities as a boy child are given to Tambu and when Martha in *She No Longer Weeps*, completes her studies and secures a job so as to take care of her daughter in place of Freddy, are two of the findings which the study unearthed through the novels. The reversal of roles and appraisal of women's critical roles in catering for their families constitutes some of the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century which need to be embraced in order for the modern families to make ends meet and thereby survive.

In addition, through the novels, it has been found that the power of support groups was one of the coping strategies the Shona women devised to survive the feminisation of poverty, victimhood and the nervous conditions in their society, starting with young girls who are single mothers, the characters embark on a journey which has many obstacles, these groups' mission is to empower young girls and women to work hard and live their lives. What gives these female characters substance is their agency and focus. The female characters transform their titular "victims of nervous conditions" into (S)heroes. From education, formal support groups, focus and purposive living, the uniting factor is survival. Against all odds the female characters

journey with focus and overcome the challenges that were set on condemning them to a life of poverty and misery. They are determined and deal with life head on and the fiction here offers liberating and breakthrough stories that strengthens the readers' own inherent resilient capacities for a successful and better life.

### **8.2.3 Elucidating the third research question**

- In what ways does the author present the cyclical and constant causes of gender related challenges?

This question is concerned with how the author presented cyclical and constant cause of gender related challenges. All four of Dangarembga's literary texts explore the oppressive nature of the patriarchal family structure, culture, a woman's coming of age and social morality in a newly independent Zimbabwe.

The gender related challenges or disparities between men and women which already existed, were increased with the patriarchal system that was brought by colonisers. The Europeans took boys and men to work for them and educate them in their mission schools, leaving the women and children in the villages. Gender roles, colonialism and culture are major contributing factors to gender related challenges. In the Shona culture, as depicted in the texts, a woman's place is in the kitchen. Even though Maiguru is an educated woman and a teacher, she is always in the kitchen serving her husband and children, whereas, Babamukuru is always at the office or chairing a meeting in the village. In addition, there is an imbalance in the way gender roles are divided; women and girls tend to have more responsibilities than boys and men. Men determine the social status of a woman. For example, a woman like Lucia, who does not have any children, is ridiculed and disrespected. Nonetheless, Lucia is resilient and knows how to stand up for herself. Women are also not included in decision-making, Babamukuru uses

Maiguru's money as he sees fit, while Maiguru gets no recognition for her economic contribution.

Power and violence are used in *Nervous Conditions* and *This Mournable Body* as controlling tools. Nhamo learns from his father who physically abuses his wife and practices it on his sister Netsai. Netsai internalises the abuse from men at a young age hence she is likely to accept it later on in life. Children learn how to conduct themselves in society from the adults around them. Women have also connived with men in marginalising the girl child. Women do this subconsciously by the way they socialise their children. They teach girls to be silent and to be submissive; hence, girls grow up with little to no self-confidence. By doing so, they disempower the girl child. The inheritance of property is passed down through the male line, which is also another way of limiting the girl child. The four texts reveal that this cyclical nature can be broken, some of the female characters (Lucia, Nyasha, Mai Moetsabi, Bertha, Christine, Mai Manyanga and Martha) managed to break it, whereas others (Tambu, Maiguru, Mai Tambu, Martha's mother, Mrs Mutsika and Mrs Chiwara, Gertrude, and Chipso) failed to break it. African women may suffer in a post-colonial or patriarchal society but they find methods to conquer all or some of their problems brought to them by political, social, colonial, and cultural constraints

#### **8.2.4 Expounding the fourth research question**

- How effective are the Africana womanism, STIWANISM, and Nego-feminism theoretical lenses in the analysis and examination of the impact of the feminisation of poverty on the Zimbabwean society?

The fourth question focused on the effectiveness of Africana womanism, STIWANISM, and Nego-feminism theoretical lenses in the analysis and examination of the study. Dangarembga's literary texts reflected the destructive impacts of colonialism and colonial education on the

black individual. European colonialism introduced a type of education that perpetuated subjugation, underdevelopment and inferiority in Zimbabwe, or Africa. This European education inculcated into the minds of African school children the superiority of the white race and the inferiority of the black. Therefore, in this educational system, African history and traditions were replaced by European culture and values. Consequently, this left many colonised Africans dissociated from their own cultural roots and assimilated to the Western culture. As an African writer, Dangarembga, fictionally delineated Africana womanism, Stiwanism, and Nego-feminism through her characters who strive to fix the distorted self-image of the African woman and man to regain self-confidence in their past cultural heritage.

In the selected texts, the Shona community is made up of complex hierarchal relations which are distinguished by titles. For this reason, Dangarembga's characters were given names and titles to indicate respect and status in familial relationships. For example, the title "*Baba*" in Babamukuru's name shows respect for an adult male from the father's side. "*Tete*" is another title of respect that is given to females from the father's side like Tete Gladys who is Tambu's father's sister. Furthermore, "*Sisi*" is a title that is given to young unmarried females so as to be distinguished from the married ones. Names and titles are a significant attribute of Africana womanism, which is a sign of respect for elders. Africana women should have names that reflect their authentic personalities and identities relating to their cultural backgrounds. Self-naming and Self-definition are two deeply connected characteristics in creating the identity of Africana womanism. Nyasha, Tambu and Martha are female characters who were exposed to the Western culture through colonial education. That is why all of them suffer from the destructive impact of the colonial educational system; however, they resist being defined by Euro-centric standards. Instead, they struggle to create realities that are compatible with their African cultures for themselves.

The study also employed Nego-feminism that deals with the negative elements in a patriarchal society through compromise and negotiations based on the shared values in many African cultures. Stiwanism was also employed in the study, as it understands the female struggle from an African perspective, which is entirely dependent on the commitment from both sexes, and not just a woman affair. These two theories are the shorthand of gender complementary possibilities surrounding the issues of conflict management and resolution, negotiation, peace. Stiwanism is against the perpetuation of women's struggles, pain and oppression, the theory encourages women to be ambitious, while also recognising men in the society as vital friends and partners who should take responsibility and commitment together with the women to change the status quo. Dangarembga used the character of Martha to a certain extent, to support this theory, this character was depicted as an ambitious, strong, self- defining, and a partner-seeking woman, not forgetting her motherly and nurturing characteristics. Martha also portrays qualities of Nego-feminism as she tried to negotiate with Freddy about him not giving up on them and their unborn child, as they were both about to achieve their goals.

Overall, Dangarembga made a great effort in employ characteristics of each of the theoretical lenses that were applied in the analysis of this study; therefore, the theoretical lenses were quite effective in its analysis. Africana womanism, Stiwanism and Nego-feminism were the best routes to take in the analysis and examination of the impact of feminisation of poverty on the Zimbabwean society.

#### **8.2.5 Construing the fifth research question**

- What sort of theoretical concept can be developed to explain the cyclical evocations of nervous conditions, survival strategies and agency in African societies?

The fifth and final question aimed at exploring what theoretical concept could be developed to explain the cyclical evocations of nervous conditions, survival strategies and agency in African

societies. The study employed Africana womanism, Stiwanism and Nego-feminism in its analysis because only one of these theoretical lenses would not have allowed the researcher to conduct an in-depth analysis on its own. Therefore, all three concepts had to be applied in order to boost the other where it would lack.

Africana womanism is grounded in African culture and Afrocentrism, focusing on the experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of African women of the African diaspora. However, that which is not in contention, is its meaning, a viewpoint of lived experiences of “women of colour” which is not the standpoint of the European version of feminism. It is the philosophy of daring black females on the well-being of the entire Africa- African and African- American communities, adults and children, canvassing support for the importance of the African woman’s path by challenging all the oppressive forces causing every black woman’s struggle for survival, which includes unacceptable stance for poor quality of life of the African woman and family freedom. According to Kolawole (1994), African women “are not seeking to be like men, look like men, or act like men” which is essentially Western Feminism, Africana womanism is not a radical approach, but a feminism that suggests a wide remit and fearlessly fights inequality. Africana womanism advocates for a meaningful union between black women, men, and children, anything African. Akorede’s (2010) analysis of Africana womanism suggests that it merely focuses on the possibilities than duels on an issue or approach; it is fighting a course that it is equally guilty of. Like the Western feminism, it is indirectly a racial affront by being Afro- American and African centred only. It does not accommodate all women, but only women of colour. Africana womanism encourages women to be on their own and not rely on their men or society. This is probably what led to the emergence of other forms of African feminism, such as Stiwanism, which succeeded Africana womanism.

Stiwanism, STIWA for short, is expressed as “Social Transformation Including Women in Africa.” It focuses on exclusion of the African women from transforming the male in the world

feminism. It strives to contest for its inclusion in the world's social transformation by women. It further introduces the concept of partnership with the men, which is not a Western recognition nor is it the concentration of Africana womanism. It discusses the African women's aspirations in life for strategic equal collaborating. The African woman's needs are rooted in her culture. By definition, Stiwanism would appear to have given itself away to sectional racialized issues as well like its former, Africana womanism. Therefore, leaving us with questions, what is the observable difference between the strands of African feminism? In addition, if Stiwanism does not have, what of Nego-feminism?

Nego-feminism is then defined as "the feminism of negotiation; no-ego feminism" (Nnaemeka, 2013). Nego- feminism focuses on issues of peace, conflict management and resolution, negotiation, complementarity, give-and-take, and collaboration. It is an approach for feminist social movements, feminist communities, in its power for both men and women. Which contradicts Western feminism and Africana womanism, it takes it a step further. Its name Negotiation-feminism, not only suggests the broad range of tolerance in one bold sweep, it has eliminated so much of the unfruitful discussions of offensive literatures or embattled conflicts in novels that give the impression that all men are (potential) abusive partners and wife- beaters, or at most, sisterhood or solidarity among women is shown as a possible doubtful source of solace or a vague anchor of hope. Nego-feminism describes a new paradigm that can take us beyond "winners" and "losers" in an endless "gender war."

Overall, this study concludes that all three theories should be used in a complementary manner, that way African women will not seem like problems that need to be fixed but as individuals who are capable of setting their own priorities and agenda. As concluded from this study, each of the concepts that were applied in this study could not be used individually or separately to fully conduct this research. The analysis only became a whole because different concepts were applied and were used in the analysis together. Therefore, there is need for all the three theories

to be used together that way they balance each other where the other lacks. The concepts that are already in existence have failed to achieve gender consensus between African men and women about their agendas and causes. There is also a division between women themselves with regards to these concepts. If women are failing to be on the same page, how can men be accommodated? It seems that there are two types of women in our African societies and this affects any form of African feminism. Firstly, we have the educated and urban type of women who have acquired their knowledge from abroad, and as a result, they want to incorporate whatever they learnt outside Africa in African matters, borrowing ideas. The second group can be called the feminist movement within Africa, their ideas or beliefs are rooted in African culture and lived experiences of African women, and some of these women are not necessarily literate. Their inspiration comes in the importance of women in traditional African societies in terms of food production as well as women's role in the liberation movements against colonialism. Both groups are equally relevant and important; combining their beliefs into a single theoretical concept will be difficult because of their inherent differences. However, despite the differences, movements can unite as long there is respect and genuine efforts to understand each other.

Finally, the study has shown that fiction of the post-colonial, post-independent, cultural and patriarchal issues, if read through the critical lenses of Africana womanism, Nego-feminism, and STIWANISM theories, it will not condemn readers to uneasiness and indifference. Instead, it inspires individuals into action and the fiction becomes a lesson and gives much hope. The texts explored here have illustrated the pervasiveness of agency. The survival and coping strategies are many, in as much as the nervous conditions, which people endure, are many.

### **8.3 Conclusion**



This chapter presented an analysis of all four of the selected novels by Tsitsi Dangarembga, namely; *Nervous Conditions* (1988), *She No Longer Weeps* (1987), *The Book of Not* (2006), and *This Mournable Body* (2018). The novels allowed the researcher to trace the trajectory of the characters from childhood to adulthood, and look closely at their socialisation.

The research found out that women in the Shona society are depicted diversely depending on the socio-cultural background. Dangarembga presented a world before and after independent Zimbabwe (the 1980s) where the main theme were her two protagonists' struggles to reshape women's heterosexuality and femininity in a very religiously conservative society adopted in the colonial era. The social constructions in in the worlds of the selected novels are taken from a Christian religion where women are expected to be submissive to the men in their lives and where they gain communal respect only through marriage. Dangarembga's protagonists, Tambu and Martha are therefore portrayed as they rebel against the restrictive system in their society and they both attempt to redefine womanhood.

The shared themes of womanhood that all the texts possess are the need for a shift of women from the margins of society to becoming priorities economically, socially and culturally. This is the recurring theme whether the setting is in the 1980s or the 2000s, rural or urban, Shona women are still marginalised. At the beginning of the research, the assumption was that most of the studies have not explored the depiction of the Shona or African women's struggles and experiences thoroughly, especially tracing back to before independence and to this day. However, the research found that the author did great justice in representing Shona Zimbabwean women through the characters. Dangarembga achieved this from the diction in each character, to the references the characters make on their environment, whether it is colonial, patriarchal, social or cultural references. Furthermore, the author was able to shatter the stereotypical misrepresentations of the feminisation of poverty. Dangarembga correctly and humorously presents stereotypical, biased and judgemental married women as well as, portrays

contemporary, intelligent and ambitious women, thus correcting the notion of women being unable to work just as hard as men, and that women only belong in the kitchen or women should not get educated, also that both men and women can work together and coexist peacefully in homes or at work places. A realistic illustration of a global community where women face similar struggles but express them differently due to cultural diversity was also provided. Thus, the aim of the research was to examine the cyclical nature of a suffering woman and her coping strategies, including the representation and reflection of the feminisation of poverty and victimhood by the author, was accomplished.

The research therefore uncovered how the author portrayed women in affirming ways, whether the characters choose to rebel or conform. Therefore, the findings prove what Stratton (2002), who was referenced in the literature review, says feminist narratives in Africa serve the purpose of “using writing as weapons to invade the battlefields that had been previously occupied by male writers by way of rewriting and questioning the traditional oppressive conditions specific to their post- colonial heritage in a constantly changing post- colonial context” (p. 67). African female writers are creators and not perpetrators, as they expose the injustices faced by women, which is exactly what Dangarembga did in the four selected novels. Therefore, answering the question of whether the literary texts participate in representing and reflecting the feminisation of poverty and victimhood.

Five questions are listed at the beginning of this research explore the feminisation of poverty and victimhood in Dangarembga’s four novels, focusing on the cyclical evocations of the nervous conditions, survival strategies and agency women in the Shona society experienced and are experiencing. This is achieved through the reading and analysis carried out on the literary texts.

STIWANISM, Nego-feminism and Africana womanism theories are all present in all texts. All texts contain explorations of motherhood and nurture, negotiating, compromise, struggles and needs. Dangarembga hints on the need for men in the lives of women through the supportive Lovemore and Nyasha's husband. The author prescribes solutions, which is evident in how the female characters react to the laid down canons and their situations. Dangarembga uses female characters to send a message to her Western counterparts. This message is though she is considered a feminist, she acknowledges all that the theories stand for, and she belongs to a culture that cannot just be thrown away, rather wishes to handle the situations in a much different way.

Furthermore, going back to when Dangarembga first submitted *Nervous Conditions* for publishing, she submitted to a Zimbabwean publisher and it was rejected. The publisher rejected her novel because the feminist perspective was off- putting to the editor. It was only after the Woman's Press in London, had published her novel in 1988, that her novel was then published in Harare, Zimbabwe. This resulted in Dangarembga being the first Zimbabwean woman with a novel that was published in English. According to Whyte (1989), Dangarembga comes from a highly educated family, both her parents were highly educated Zimbabweans, and the apple did not fall far from the tree. Dangarembga, is highly educated as well, she had "the privilege of a moneyed and intellectual family background" (p. 12).

Therefore, it comes back to my initial observation and understanding; all of Dangarembga's works have been labelled as feministic and have mostly been studied with the radical forms of feministic concepts. Zimbabwe is a conservative and patriarchal society, and patriarchy is inherently flawed. Perhaps, this is one of the actual reasons her first novel was rejected for publication in Zimbabwe. In a patriarchal society, the subjugation of women is a normative constant, women are considered to be assets that should be acquired by the masculine community. This study has clearly highlighted the effects of patriarchy on a woman in our

African society, and as I stated above at (8.1) in our African societies, we have two kinds of feminists, the intellectual and urban feminists and those that believe in culture and tradition entirely. These two groups fail to understand and get along with each other. I am of the belief that Dangarembga falls into the group of the urban and intellectual feminists, she is not against her own culture and tradition, but exposes the injustices the women in her society face on a day-to-day basis. The type of feminist that Dangarembga is, has probably been misunderstood as she has been exposed to the outside world and has borrowed a few qualities outside the continent and has applied them in hers, the immediate reaction people have given her is she is a feminist (Western), which is not entirely correct. The trilogy is considered to be a partially autobiographical work, with Dangarembga being the character of Nyasha. Nyasha endures all kinds of mistreatment because of her double identity, not to say that she forgot who she was and where she had come from. Nyasha eventually gets married and has children of her own, has a group where she helps other women and her husband supports her. These are not the qualities of Western feminism but African feminism. Additionally, this is also depicted in the fourth novel, *She No Longer Weeps* (1987), the protagonist in this novel, Martha is not against men, and once upon a time, had the goal of finishing her education, getting married and having children. Meaning she wanted a life of motherhood and companionship, which goes against any form of radical feminism. All her actions and choices were driven by the society that she was brought up in- patriarchal society.

In conclusion, I would like to state that colonialism and patriarchy brought about many issues in African societies as illustrated by the texts which were discussed in the study. Which comes down to one question, “Is Tsitsi Dangarembga’s work feministic (Western or Radical) or she is just an African feminist trying to expose and correct a wrong that has become acceptable in our African society?”

#### 8.4 Contribution to knowledge

The findings of this study make a unique contribution to the current literature on the feminisation of poverty, nervous conditions, survival strategies and agency, especially as presented by Tsitsi Dangarembga in her print oeuvre, with part of it her trilogy. The findings provide a nuanced understanding of four of her texts studied together, something which had not been done before. The fact that the study focused on Shona (Zimbabwean) women, it adds a new dimension to gender studies in Africa and Zimbabwe in general and literary studies in particular.

By merging Africana womanism, STIWANISM, and Nego- feminism, it is possible to have three theories functioning together and be able to establish links that may exist between the theories used. In the case of this study, it was concluded that the main cause of the feminisation of poverty and subjugation of the female characters, including men was colonialism and patriarchy. It is within the discussion of these major theories in the analysis of the novels *Nervous Conditions* (1988), *The Book of Not* (2006), *This Mournable Body* (2018) and *She No Longer Weeps* (1987).

Furthermore, the narratives in the study drew attention to issues such as gender inequality, racism, patriarchy, class, education and social injustices as experienced by the female characters. The trust of the study was to explore the causes of the feminisation of poverty, the cyclical evocations of the nervous conditions, survival strategies and agency as depicted in the selected fiction. In the case of this study, Dangarembga's literary works presented the male characters as inhibiting the idea of discouraging any efforts of reducing the patriarchal limitations imposed on women in order to improve gender issues by pedestaling the female voice. Moreover, the study found that the African culture also plays a role in failing to empower women, instead it promotes in limiting them, and hence, women perceive the death of

patriarchy as the solution to their cyclical nervous conditions. However, the researcher assumes that Dangarembga was attempting to present to her audience that there is a downside to this strength, but when both men and women work side by side, there will be liberation in the end. Furthermore, the society needs to bring an end to gender biases, gendered education, and gendered assertiveness. The same way the society needs to understand and learn that sibling rivalry is normal and exists, for example (Nhamo and Tambu), the differences or rifts between brothers and sisters are normal. The issues mentioned above are an indication that boys and men are products of their own societies. Their expectations and perceptions of or feelings towards the opposite gender result from their families, communities, societal and cultural norms and values, which they then manifest in public. The researcher assumes Dangarembga, through her texts was communicating or advocating for teamwork and togetherness between both genders. This is further depicted in **Chapter 3** where the author uses Babamukuru to assist Aunt Lucia in acquiring a job, this shows that the men are not really the enemy, without cultural and societal limitations, both genders would probably better or empower each other.

### **8.5 Recommendations for future research**

- Other theoretical frameworks may be considered for future studies in the analysis of the same texts to further magnify the understanding of the four texts.
- Future researchers may also consider carrying out a study on the Shona names used in the texts contextually and how the names play a role in providing a better understanding in the reading of the texts.
- The study also recommends the use of the STIWANISM, Nego- feminism and Africana womanism theories to analyse other African female written novels and a literary interrogation of the animal imageries used in *This Mournable Body* (2018) for a better comprehension in reading the novels.

- The study further recommends that readers of Tsitsi Dangarembga's works employ different literary theories in reading her texts. Reading her texts from one point of view limits the reader's scope together with their analytical capabilities. Furthermore, when women read Dangarembga's texts, they should not view men as the sole enemy, but realise the different forces contributing to their oppression, such as colonialism and culture.
- For future researchers, certain strategies should be employed in liberating women, instead of being on different teams, both men and women should be involved in the fight against any kind of oppression.
- Future researchers could look into exploring the actual struggles women face, their nervous conditions, survival strategies and agency over different periods in Zimbabwean literary texts by Zimbabwean female authors. Thus, interrogating how different generations portray women and men.

## **8.5 Chapter summary**

This last chapter concentrated on the conclusions of the study by elucidating the research questions. The conclusions of the study were drawn from the study's analyses of chapter 3, 4, 5 and 6. Contributions to new knowledge were also explained in this chapter. The recommendations were based on the overall study's findings and the gaps that surfaced throughout the process of carrying out this study.

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