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Women Struggling against Patriarchy and Colonial Supremacy”

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Irene Mokry

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1. Introduction

Nervous Conditions, by Tsitsi Dangarembga, was a pioneer for female emancipation in African literature. In her novel, Dangarembga gives a voice to the lowest strata of African society, a young rural black girl. The narrator, Tambudzai¹, reflects on her experiences growing up as a black girl in a colonial and patriarchal African country. Through the childhood reflections of the narrator, Dangarembga addresses issues of black women in Rhodesia², and exposes their struggles with patriarchy and colonialism. This personal account of a Rhodesian family provides valid political messages concerning female oppression and colonial domination. The complex depiction of racial and gender struggles in a rural African society, written by an African woman, earned her praise from literary critics. *Nervous Conditions* became a classic text among African literature.

When analyzing African literature, scholars such as Irele, Berndt, Gaidzanwa, Mutiso, and Veit-Wild have applied socio-political methods. Abiola Irele discusses approaches of African literature in his work 'The African Experience in Literature and Ideology'. While positioning himself within the sociological field, Irele stresses the fact that there is not one exclusive approach for a subject so manifold such as African literature. Despite his approach, he advises against either extreme standpoint, "formalism or sociologism" (Irele 21). Like Irele, a socio-political approach will be applied in the analysis of *Nervous Conditions* because, as he postulates, "[literature], as the symbolic transposition of lived experience, [...] involves our deepest responses to the facts of human existence" (23). One task of this observation will be to reveal the nuances of the text that are reflective of this unique historical as well as cultural consciousness. Furthermore, Irele emphasizes the importance of extending the analysis of modern African literature to its African experience. This includes taking the author's intention and attitudes into consideration and placing it in the wider social context, as well as analyzing the way a writer "captures a moment of the historical consciousness" (Irele 34). Mutiso agrees that a writer injects

¹ Tambudzai will be referred to by her nickname Tambu in the rest of the paper.

² Under colonial rule (1890-1980), today's Zimbabwe was recognized as Rhodesia.

his judgment and values into his characters and story, to some degree consciously, while working from a framework that is constituted by his present time period and society (3). Another reason that calls for a socio-political approach to African literature is the tradition of African art employing a social and functional task. Traditionally, the African artists are socially committed and create values. They are concerned with helping their people to come to terms with their past and present in order to deal with their future (Mutiso 9-11). "African creative writers see their works as part of the task of creating viable societies from the cultural chaos of the colonial period" (Mutiso 13). Furthermore, we have to take into consideration that we come from a completely different background, raised and socialized in a Western culture. Zimbabwe's history includes colonial acquisition and Western cultural infiltration. The people of Zimbabwe have undergone a long fight for freedom, independence from Britain, and the end of white minority rule. Amongst all these national transitions, women's struggle for equal rights and a self-defined identity swelled up. This struggle finally found an outlet in novels such as *Nervous Conditions*. As Westerners, we are likely to lack information on these socio-historical facts and circumstances which are crucial to see the author's intentions as well as nuances and socio-political interrelations.

Flora Veit-Wild points out the communicative aspect of Zimbabwean literature; "how it was influenced by social and political conditions; and how it responds to given social and political conditions" (Veit-Wild 5). The present study follows these notions that "literature has no autonomy outside reality" and that its analysis aims "to show the literary work as a significant statement with a direct relevance to the African experience" (Irele 41).

The novel's capacity to map and reorganize reality has made it the most convenient medium for African writers seeking to rethink their social worlds in transitional and postcolonial times. As a genre that encourages interiority and accommodates other genres, forms, and voices, the novel opens individual locations of struggle and desire and provides a flexible and discursive space for relating to the collective in new ways. (Wilson-Tagoe 177)

Nervous Conditions examines "how these wider ramifications for women's lives are mapped, interrogated and reinvented" (Wilson-Tagoe 177). Typical for African novels, *Nervous Conditions* addresses the cultural and social changes in society. The sociological emphasis stems from Dangarembga's experience with Rhodesia's large-

scale social and economic changes. Obiechina views the African authors' preoccupation with the influences of social changes as almost obsessive – pressures that demand expression (35). Dangarembga has found her outlet. *Nervous Conditions* illustrates the effects of the social, economic and political situation on the behavior and mental conditions of the characters. The women's nervous conditions result from colonial oppression as well as from patriarchal restrictions (Edwards 103). Unlike Western novels “which tend to externalize internal situations”, post-colonial African texts deploy an internalization of external conditions (Obiechina 262).

The thesis will also apply feminist and postcolonial theories. Gayatri Spivak's postcolonial works popularized the term ‘subaltern’, which denotes “the suppressed or silenced peasantry” (Edwards 100). The subaltern is represented in the novel *Nervous Conditions* by the protagonist, Tambu, and the women in her family. Tambu's mother and aunt, uneducated peasant Shona women, are part of the lowest strata in Rhodesian society. Spivak underscores the silencing of the subaltern woman due to the prioritized postcolonial representation of the subaltern *male* agent (Edwards 100). “If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (Spivak 82-83). Dangarembga, as a third world woman writer, stepped out of the shadow, giving voice to subaltern women. Spivak highlights how patriarchy and colonialism renders women invisible in her famous essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization. (Spivak 102)

The women in *Nervous Conditions* are silenced by the men in their family, and silenced by sexist and racist colonialism. In their search for emancipation they are “shuttling” between tradition and modernization. “In the context of colonial production, which favours white over black, male over female, ‘subaltern’ or secondary, women cannot speak” (Wisker 40). Dangarembga's text modifies such views. Some of her subaltern characters find ways to speak, while others fracture slowly in their attempt to voice their opinions. In the successful case of the protagonist, the subaltern finds a critical voice to reflect upon its creation.

Nervous Conditions critically addresses issues of patriarchy and sexism; is it, therefore, a feminist text? Postcolonial feminists have argued that feminism is a theory with an agenda fit for white Western middle class women. Third world women's feminism comprises different cultural and oppressive situations. The analysis will introduce the theory of womanism and illustrate the womanist aspects of *Nervous Conditions*. In relation to its womanist agenda, *Nervous Conditions* is also a postcolonial text. Postcolonial texts give insight into hitherto unrecorded fields of experience and reverse familiar points of view (Döring 65). *Nervous Conditions* dramatizes the situation of colonized people and "challenges disabling stereotypes and dominant historical perspectives" (Berndt 6). Frantz Fanon was one of the first and few postcolonial theorists who explored colonialism and liberation war in regard to the psychological repercussions (Nicholls 116). However, Fanon is part of "a strand of postcolonial theory" that ignores the existence of women in the analysis of European imperialism (Edwards 99). "[Fanon], and his latter-day exponent, Homi Bhabha, have come to figure quite importantly in the fairly extensive critical work on the novel" (Nicholls 116). Dangarembga engages "implicitly and explicitly, with the work of Fanon, while complicating his male-centred critique from [her] own distinct black feminist perspective" (Plasa 3). Since the 1980s, Bhabha has been an established scholar in the postcolonial theoretic field. From his elaborate works in *The Location of Culture*, the concept of mimicry will be applied in the analysis of some character's.

Postcolonial scholar Trinh Minh-Ha criticizes the strong association of history with truth and story with fiction. The strong connotation between fact and truth renders the story just a fancy (Minh-Ha 120-121). Minh-Ha reminds us that stories, although often not factual, are truthful in character and entail timeless pieces of wisdom (120). In addition, histories are selectively gathered and consciously arranged facts; a process that is seized by the ones in power and excludes subaltern groups. In relation to this, postcolonial theorist Chandra Mohanty stresses the importance of personal experience for theory and political thinking (qtd. in Edwards 101-102). *Nervous Conditions*, in its autobiographical mode and historical setting, presents a link between private experience and political thought. Using elements of her own childhood, Dangarembga tells a story

about the oppressive situation of women in colonial Rhodesia in the late 1960s. Her text becomes a political statement about patriarchy and colonialism. Stone-Mediatore highlights the significance of narratives from historically excluded and marginalized groups such as third world women (1). Dangarembga's novel, as a marginal experience narrative, contributes to feminist democratic politics (Stone-Mediatore 11). Texts of previously silenced people, the subaltern, raise social awareness and give insight into struggles that have been subdued under more dominant struggles. The Zimbabwean fight for national independence suffocated the voices of women and their claims for equality, a dynamic that Dangarembga reverses in her novel. *Nervous Conditions* is a text that "writ[es] African women back into African history" (Stone 114).

2. Patriarchy

In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga addresses the universal issues of patriarchy and female oppression, as experienced in her native country of Zimbabwe. In the 1980s, the time at which this novel was published, these were very sensitive topics. Her "experience-rooted but creatively reproduced narrative" draws attention to gender inequality and "contribute[s] to political thinking" (Stone-Mediatore 5). This chapter analyzes patriarchy as an ideological and social system, highlights its manifestations in *Nervous Conditions*, and examines patriarchal traditions in a Rhodesian Shona³ family. Finally, the chapter illustrates the discrimination female Zimbabwean authors faced in the publishing business, and points out the traditional women characters in Zimbabwean literature.

The term patriarchy has been described and defined in numerous ways (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 106). This mirrors the complexity and interconnection of gender-based power structures and other social phenomena, such as economic class relations and racist oppression (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 106). Certain feminist theories focus on different aspects of patriarchy. Marxist feminism, for example, tends to subordinate the concept of patriarchy in the larger mode of production (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 107).

³ Shona are the indigenous people of Mashonaland, which became part of Rhodesia under colonial rule.

Radical feminism tends to highlight mechanisms of male dominance and female rebellion, whereas social feminism stresses the interconnection of patriarchy, class and racial oppression (Uwakweh 77). For Uwakweh “it does seem, however, that the basic feature of patriarchy is male power over the female. In many African Societies, for example, the patriarchal system defines the inheritance rights of males to children, property, and wife” (78). Anthias and Yuval-Davis agree that the basic premise of the concept of patriarchy is the universal existence of male domination over women (106). In an extensive work on patriarchy, J.C. Smith explores the roots and psychological mechanisms of the most common constructed social order. He explains that patriarchy is based on a social gender divide that is paralleled with the biological sexes. This justification is used to mask social differences as naturally given. However, gender attributions and differences are, for the majority, far from the truth and comprise projected wishes and attitudes (Smith 75). The universal assumption that patriarchy represents is that females are inferior to males and therefore should be dominated. This single and simple claim has structured human’s power relations and society. Smith elaborates on this:

This assumption is not based on fact, as the only qualities in regard to which the male may claim superiority are size, body weight, and possibly aggressiveness. Since it is almost universally rejected that might necessarily makes right, no legitimization of male dominance could be derived from the physical difference alone. Rather, the assumption of male superiority is an integral part of mythic structures which are a product of the psyches of males, and from which input of a feminine nature has been systematically excluded. (Smith 76)

Stories and texts are a common source for a society's culture and myths. The systematic exclusion of women in society, which Smith refers to, can be seen in the discrimination towards female writers in Zimbabwe⁴.

In the development of patriarchy, men presumably extended the physical superiority and inferiority of men and women, respectively, onto psychological attributes and, later on, onto political and moral abilities (Smith 154). This patriarchal development built a male hegemony. Part of male-dominated social hierarchies is misogyny, a belief system that expresses an extreme and universal hatred of females. Masculinity and femininity

⁴ This issue will be further discussed in section 2.7..

describe the pool of attributes that are ingrained in societies as being typical for men and women respectively. They have been fed with patriarchal myths. Smith comments on the interconnectedness of masculinity, misogyny and patriarchy; how patriarchy breeds on misogyny, how misogyny is created by the same myths that patriarchy developed and how masculinity has been defined to a significant amount by misogynistic attitudes (159). Men's need to defend this system has been prevalent in the insistence and protection of their masculinity.

How did men manipulate female minds into being content in an inferior status with limited freedom? Psychological deceptions were used to uphold the willingness of women to follow men's requests. First, the ideal image of human had to become male. This was established via the attribution of superiority and positive dispositions to men, opposed to inferiority and negative dispositions in women. Second, men had to make women believe that as 'the weaker sex' their biological function was to serve men, 'the stronger sex', and that only in fulfilling their destiny they would find happiness and contentment. Third, women were convinced of their limited agency. Myths such as their lack of rationality created incompleteness without men, which resulted in women as dependent agents (Smith 156). These myths were woven into collective thinking and cultural customs, and served to reinforce each other. Patriarchal institutions such as family, religion, monarchy and law have functioned as propagators and upholders of such beliefs (Smith 168). Hence, men and women have been socialized since their birth to believe gender roles as universal or naturally given.

The scholar Ketu Katrak published *Politics of the Female Body* in 2006, an extensive work on postcolonial women writers of the third world. Her book analyzes postcolonial women's issues such as resistance, alienation, tradition and language, always focusing on the female body. Katrak, agreeing with Smith's elaborations, states that society has exercised "psychological and subconscious holds of female conditioning through mythological stories and cultural norms that define a woman as not only belonging to her husband but as not having an autonomous self that can make a life outside of a marital sphere" (10). The socialization of women had included "layers and levels of ideological influences, sociocultural [sic] and religious, that impose knowledge or ignorance of

female bodies and construct woman as gendered subject or object” (Katrak 9). Their mind and body being dominated by men, women are not able to produce their own voice in a patriarchal society. However, Anthias and Yuval-Davis remark how “gender divisions and their practice are fluid”, and therefore have been to a certain extent negotiable, resulting in different degrees of subordination (108). These negotiations and struggles for agency and voice are referred to as “patriarchal bargain” which has taken place on individual as well as collective levels (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 108). The struggles of the women in *Nervous Conditions* present such “patriarchal bargain” where each woman on her own terms tries to renegotiate her situation. Ultimately, the bargain between men and women should settle in a society with equal rights and conditions.

2.1. *Nervous Conditions*: Patriarchal Voices

In 1990, Smith writes that our Western and democratic societies are still infected with a fundamental patriarchal way of thinking (76). Not surprisingly, blatant forms of patriarchy and exploitation shaped women’s lives in colonial and postcolonial countries, such as Zimbabwe, in the 1960s and 1970s. Previously mentioned mechanisms and processes involved in patriarchy are visible in *Nervous Conditions*. Early in the story, the main protagonist, Tambu, states, “[t]he needs and sensibilities of the women in [her] family were not considered a priority” (Dangarembga 12). This comment is symbolic for the sexism dominating the relationships throughout *Nervous Conditions*. One area of the novel, where unequal gender statuses are visible, is the division of work. The workload of women is described as crushingly huge at occasions such as family gatherings. Since it is almost exclusively the women’s job to prepare meals, fetch water, clean the house and wash clothes, they are incessantly working for a large group of people (Dangarembga 136-138). The power relationship between parents and children, however, is universally accepted, although its mechanisms have changed over time. In combination with the myth of male superiority, the patriarchal family has functioned as a fundamental social union of male hegemony: husband dominating wife and father dominating offspring (Smith 79). This patriarchal structure is depicted clearly in the hierarchy of the extended Shona family in *Nervous Conditions*. Babamukuru is the

oldest man among the family that meets regularly, therefore, he is the patriarch, the head of the family. He does not only have control over the children and women of his family but also over his younger brother's family. The patriarchal structure of the family is also shown, for instance, in privileging boys over girls. Throughout the novel the reader is made aware that male offspring in the family are more important than female offspring (Dangarembga 129, 138, 183). This is not just due to immediate patriarchal attitudes, but also due to economic reasons in the larger patriarchal system. For instance, in Shona culture the son inherits the land and, therefore, investment into the son's future is valued. The unequal treatment is seen in the privileging of boys' education while trivializing girls' education⁵. Tambu is told that "even that little money [that her uncle would have to spend after her scholarship] could be better used" for her little baby brother who "is the only boy in [her] family, so he must be provided for" (Dangarembga 183).

The discrimination of women's education links in with the female role. The ultimate goal to be sought by a woman is to be a good wife and mother. Babamukuru often uses the word 'decent' to describe the right behavior for girls and women. When Tambu is offered a scholarship at a Christian convent, her uncle Babamukuru explains to her that such advanced education is not needed since her future job is to become a good wife and mother, and "to be married by a decent man and set up a decent home" (Dangarembga 183). Throughout the novel, the male characters add to this image of women. The gender roles have been shaped by their socialization in a patriarchal society thus inheriting misogynistic elements. Femininity, as opposed to masculinity and as depicted in the novel, describes qualities such as "emotion, compliance, obedience, acceptance, submission, dependency, tenderness, and silence" (Mugambi 204). The traditional characteristics and restrictions of masculine and feminine behavior become apparent when they are transgressed. The female characters are labeled negatively if they do not act in the expected feminine way. Often, their male family members refer to them as 'man' or 'unnatural'. When five-year-old Tambu shows her interest in joining her father and brother on a complicated and exciting journey to pick up their uncle, she is faced with her father's concept of female behavior:

⁵ Education will be discussed further in section 3.2..

[M]y father called me aside to implore me to curb my unnatural inclinations: it was natural for me to stay at home and prepare for the homecoming.

My father's idea of what was natural had begun to irritate me a long time ago, at the time that I had had to leave school. [...] He thought I was emulating my brother, that the things I read would fill my mind with impractical ideas, making me quite useless for the real tasks of feminine living. (Dangarembga 34)

The real tasks of women implied here comprise serving a husband and children in the domestic home. The comment from the father of Tambu suggests that the socially constructed and institutionally enforced role of a woman is natural, which means that it should not be challenged. Although Babamukuru supports the education of girls and women working, this attitude goes only as far as it does not interfere with the care of a husband and children. He also implies that the money earned by a woman is not her's to spend but has to profit her family. The money his wife makes is entirely at his disposal and spent mainly on his family. One night Babamukuru gets into a fight with his daughter, Nyasha, where he scolds her and slaps her in the face. His daughter dares to fight back and punches him in the eye. Her physical resistance contradicts his understanding of female behavior, which is characterized by submission and obedience. Nyasha challenging his authority makes her a man, in his mind, and he cannot tolerate a second man in the house (Dangarembga 117). Obviously, he knows she is not a man and that there is another man, his son, in the house. What Babamukuru refers to here is 'man' as in the cultural, social, and patriarchal concept of masculine behavior restricted to the male sex. Nyasha, confrontational and boldfaced, stands up to him and challenges his patriarchal and authoritative concepts. Tambu's aunt, Lucia, is also referred to as 'man' or 'unnatural'. When she stands up and speaks her mind in front of the patriarchy, they talk about her afterwards as being "vicious and unnatural" (Dangarembga 148). Later in the novel, Lucia tells Babamukuru bluntly her disapproval of his punishment for Tambu. Once she has left, it seems that Babamukuru does not take her seriously, remarking on how she behaves like a man and "she says the first thing that comes into her head" (Dangarembga 174). Lucia does not fit the stereotype of a woman because she speaks up for herself and other women, thus, confronting men and their ideas. Therefore, from a patriarchal view, she is not as nature intended women to be, but rather is acting as if she had the superior status of a man. Her emancipation is feared by the weaker men in her family that are not used to opposition of a woman.

Babamukuru, however, seems to view her more as a freak of nature and not as a threat for his status.

The superiority of men and insignificance of women is mirrored by the narrator when she recounts the great efforts that were made to welcome their uncle's family. First, the reader is told that Babamukuru and his family return from England. However, all the subsequent mentions refer only to Babamukuru. All the efforts made to afford the bus tickets and provisions are only put forward to honor the great Babamukuru who will help the family with his degree. His wife and his children, less important than him, are subsumed under his name (Dangarembga 31-33). A brief passage, in which the narrator analyzes her father Jeremiah, describes how women were seen as possessions with wills that had to be broken:

[Lucia] was a much bolder woman than my mother, and my father, who no longer felt threatened by a woman's boldness since he had proved his mettle by dispiriting my mother, was excited by the thought of possessing a woman like Lucia, like possessing a thunderstorm to make it crackle and thunder and lightning at your command. (Dangarembga 129)

Dangarembga's feminist agenda is very tangible in such descriptions; with a cynical tone, she presents Jeremiah almost as sadist. Furthermore, not only Tambu's education is trivialized. The fact that Babamukuru's wife, Maiguru, acquired a degree as well is so irrelevant to the family that Tambu does not find out until much later. More precisely, her aunt achieved the same qualifications Babamukuru did, a Bachelor's Degree in South Africa and a Master's Degree in England. Tambu is surprised and impressed.

'I thought you went to look after Babamukuru.' I said. 'That's all people ever say.' Maiguru snorted. 'And what do you expect? Why should a woman go all that way and put up with all those problems if not to look after her husband?' [...]
'That's what they like to think I did,' she continued sourly. [...]
'Whatever they thought', she said, 'much good did it do them! I still studied for that degree and got it in spite of all of them [...] . Can you tell me now that they aren't please that I did, even if they don't admit it? No! Your uncle wouldn't be able to do half the things he does if I didn't work as well!' (Dangarembga 102-103)

This conversation turns the reader's attention to the older generation and the problems with which Maiguru had to deal in an even stricter patriarchal society. For the highly emancipated desire to gain a Master degree, she must have faced incomprehension and prejudices in the traditional male-dominated society. Maiguru laments "in England [she]

glimpsed for a little while” the life she could have had if she had not chosen security over freedom and did not have to look after her children (Dangarembga 103). The efforts and sacrifices that are made by women, such as Maiguru, are either ignored or belittled by patriarchal society.

2.2. The Patriarchs in *Nervous Conditions*

Nervous Conditions deploys a feminist agenda. Dangarembga accentuates different manners and degrees of masculinity - “the characteristic performances and attitudes that gendered society attributes to the male” (Mugambi 203). To achieve, command, control, assert, possess and provide are all typical masculine behaviors that can be seen in the novel. Tambu’s brother, Nhamo, boasts about his male superiority most maliciously for his young age. Tambu’s uncle, Babamukuru, is depicted as the ultimate patriarch, while his younger brother Jeremiah, Tambu’s father, displays a patriarchal attitude but lacks rationality and dignity. In Jeremiah’s depiction as dependent and weak, Dangarembga inverts the proclaimed gender characteristics.

With a Master’s degree, Tambu’s uncle is the most educated man in his family. Babamukuru has become westernized in his standard of living and in his career as the headmaster of the mission school. However, he also strictly fulfills the traditional Shona role as the Great Father of the extended family (Chennells 72-73). Babamukuru represents the ultimate patriarch in the novel. In the eyes of young Tambu, her uncle is almost divine. Through Tambu’s perspective the reader experiences the masculine image Babamukuru portrays. His person “inspires confidence and obedience [...] [and his] aura [...] emanat[es] wisdom and foresight” (Dangarembga 44). As the oldest and richest man in the family, it is expected from Babamukuru to help out his brother’s family. However, his generosity turns into autocratic and self-righteous behavior (Berndt 83). He perceives himself as a godlike authority and the sole provider in his family, but conveniently overlooks the fact that his wife’s salary goes towards the family income. Babamukuru displays the typical masculine behavior to such an extent that he becomes a neurotic tyrant (Mugambi 206). He does not tolerate any questioning or objection to his

status, authority and power (Mugambi 206). His overly protective, controlling and authoritative attitudes lead to verbal as well as physical fights with his daughter. Just his presence in the house seems to have a repressive effect on his family. They try not to talk too much or laugh within his earshot. Maiguru defends her husband's often bad and sensitive mood by mentioning the great amount of work he does. Even the masculine trait of achievement is pronounced too much in Babamukuru – a workaholic (Mugambi 206). His inflexibility and presumptuous masculinity only rarely gives way to more sympathetic behavior. Towards the end of the novel, cases such as Tambu's wish to enter the convent and Maiguru's newly acquired assertiveness elicit a compliant side of Babamukuru. This slight change in Babamukuru's authoritative behavior shows that Maiguru's rebellion has an effect on him. Overall, it sends the message that women's passive endurance or acceptance of their inferior status reinforces patriarchal behavior in men. However, speaking up and putting up resistance is a start to alter the power relations.

Although Jeremiah does not always display masculine behavior, he holds strong patriarchal views. Similar to his older brother Babamukuru, Jeremiah ignores his wife's feelings and at times seems to treat her as almost invisible (Mugambi 208). His patriarchal attitudes seem the most obvious in his privileging his son and oppressing his daughter. Except for his patriarchal attitude, Jeremiah is the opposite of his older brother Babamukuru. He is "lazy, self-pitying semiliterate [and] a shameless alcoholic cadger" (Mugambi 208). Jeremiah is highly dependent on his brother's generosity. But he is not ashamed to admit that. In contrast, he praises Babamukuru so ardently as to make it look almost impossible for someone like himself to achieve something comparable. Tambu's father is depicted as "spineless, always grovelling for money [and] doomed to endless poverty" (Veit-Wild 334). Jeremiah displays a "simpering pliability, [...] ready to obey every command issued from his brother's mouth whether or not it contradicts what he himself said" (Holland 126). His own words are often "markedly empty, [...] rehashing clichés, predictable arguments or accuses [and] highly theatrical" (Holland 126). In the case of Jeremiah, Dangarembga applies inversion as a technique of subverting patriarchy. He is depicted as a weak, irrational and powerless person whereas his daughter is depicted as strong-minded and resourceful. However, inversion of sexism is

dangerous in producing the opposite polarization (Stratton 174). Therefore, in the deconstruction of the gender hierarchy one has to move beyond this stage, and construct less stereotypical and more complex male characters which their particular social, political, and historical conditions (Stratton 174). With Babamukuru, Dangarembga has created such a character who, although the patriarchal culprit, is also the colonial victim⁶.

Tambu's brother, Nhamo, shows the most obnoxious masculine behavior. At his young age he has strongly adopted notions of masculinity and the concept of patriarchy. His sexism does not stop at invidious and condescending remarks to Tambu. He actively enjoys commanding and hitting his sisters. His malicious behavior reaches its peak when he steals Tambu's mealies so that she fails at raising money for school. His attitude of superiority increases with colonial pretensions once he goes to the mission school (Mugambi 209). After the first three chapters, the reader empathizes with Tambu's resentment towards her brother. The seemingly offensive opening line, "I was not sorry when my brother died", is viewed in a new light (Dangarembga 1). Tambu's older brother uses his male authority to force his younger sister, Netsai, to fetch his belongings. Nhamo purposefully leaves books or bags at the train station just so he can exercise power over his sister.

At any rate, Nhamo's luggage was never too cumbersome for him to carry. All the same, he would not carry it all himself. Instead he would leave something, a few books, a plastic bag, anything as long as there was something, at the shops at the bus terminus, [...] so that he could send Netsai to fetch them as soon as he arrived home. When he was feeling gracious he would offer to mind Rambanai, who was still toddling, while Netsai ran the errand. When he was being himself he would smirk that minding children was not a man's duty and Netsai [...] would strap the baby to her back in order to fetch the luggage. [...] 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 9-10)

Tambu goes on about her brother's atrocities. He enjoys beating his younger sister Netsai for small reasons. Tambu comments sadly that "in reality [...] [he] was doing no more than behave, perhaps extremely, in the expected manner" (Dangarembga 12). Nhamo is the perfect example of how social expectations of masculinity affect the

⁶ Babamukuru's role in the colonial system is discussed in chapter 3.6..

behavior of young boys. He acts most viciously sexist in front of Tambu, teasing her about her limits and inferiority as girl. With his chauvinistic and condescending comments, he tries to hurt her and break her will. She is a girl and therefore he concludes she cannot succeed, whereas he as a boy was “meant to be educated” (Dangarembga 49). He tells her “she would be better off with less thinking and more respect” (Dangarembga 51). Nhamo has mentally imbibed the traditional gender hierarchy. Tambu argues however, in retrospect, that the illogic of his justifications must have been visible to him:

I was quite sure at the time that Nhamo knew as well as I did that the things he had said were not reasonable, but in the years that have passed since then I have met so many men who consider themselves responsible adults and therefore ought to know better, who still subscribe to the fundamental principles of my brother’s budding elitism, that to be fair to him I must conclude that he was sincere in his bigotry. (Dangarembga 50)

Looking back, Tambu seems to partly excuse her brother’s behavior. The narrator’s attitude implies that in her more mature age she has recognized gender inequality as a fundamental and universal problem. Therefore, she can understand how her brother, being young and inexperienced, parroted patriarchal beliefs. The narrator, when talking from young Tambu’s point of view, uses different terms to refer to female oppression and discrimination, for instance “fundamental principles” in the passage above. She also adopts her mother’s description, “the burdens of motherhood,” or calls it general laws or improper relations (Dangarembga 38).

Chido, Nyasha’s brother, deploys a silent and uncritical acceptance of the patriarchal status quo (Mugambi 209). In his silent acceptance he resembles his mother’s passivity - passivity as an act of complicity, even if one does not agree with society. As a boy, Chido is granted more freedom than his sister. To a much lesser degree than his cousin Nhamo, Chido supports patriarchal notions. When Nyasha tries to laugh off her father’s comment on her ‘indecent’ dress, he turns serious and defends his father’s reasoning. The narrator comments on Chido’s motives:

Poor Chido! I do believe he felt obliged to carry on the tradition in the normal, unanalytic male fashion, because when we refused to be subdued and laughed at him instead, he reverted to his usual lovable self. (Dangarembga 111)

However, after Nyasha's fight with her father, Chido rebukes his sister in a patriarchal fashion when he tells her that she is "the daughter [...] [and that] [t]here are some things [she] must never do" (Dangarembga 119).

A feminist message Dangarembga sends is the universality of sexist attitudes. No matter how educated and sophisticated, fundamental patriarchal attitudes are rooted deeply in the minds of men. To which extent and in what manner they manifest themselves differs among the male characters in *Nervous Conditions*, just as the manifestations differ in reality. Dangarembga does not only provide examples of extreme patriarchal characters like Babamukuru, she also inverts the assumed gender dispositions. Jeremiah, the weak and irrational male character, functions as a comic display of masculine and patriarchal behavior.

2.3. Women: Socialized

However, men are not alone in the adherence to patriarchal myths and traditions. Women are born and raised in a male-dominated society. They imbibe the cultural expectations and yield to the feminine images that are projected onto them. Tambu comments on the women in her family from her more mature point of view.

[T]he sensitive images that the women had of themselves [...] were really no more than reflections [which they] had been taught to recognize [as selves] [and] it was frightening now to even begin to think that, the very facts which set them apart as a group, as women, [...] were only myths. (Dangarembga 140)

Smith sees this creation of self-images for women as a major factor in Patriarchy. He points out that "[w]hile the forms that patriarchal structures take vary from age to age and place to place, they all attempt to achieve voluntary subjugation by diminishing women's sense of their selves" (Smith 157). Tambu further recognizes how these images have been forced upon generations of women and manifested with fear of violation. She criticizes her aunts for retreating to their safe spaces that they had carved for themselves, which they viewed as progressive, but which were within the notions reserved for them. Tambu explains that their actions were led by fear of losing and defending the security these illusions have created in them (Dangarembga 140).

Tambu's mother, Mainini, is a typical example of a woman that has accepted her role and tasks in patriarchal society. She describes "womanhood [...] as a heavy burden" and reasons that the hardship of women derives from their bodily duty to bear children (Dangarembga 16). She does not question the distribution of work and responsibilities between men and women. Successfully socialized, she wants to help her daughter by preparing her early for the "weight of womanhood" and advises her "to learn to carry [her] burdens with strength" (Dangarembga 16). This weight, though, has worn her down and leaves her "thoroughly beaten and without self-respect" (Dangarembga 125). Tambu questions the truth of her mother's beliefs in women's roles since she knows that her aunt, Maiguru, is not crushed by womanhood and is being taken care of by her husband (Dangarembga 16). She elaborates that her aunt lives "in a big house on the mission which [she] had not seen but of which [she] had heard rumours concerning its vastness and elegance. Maiguru was driven about in a car, looked well-kempt and fresh, clean all the time" (Dangarembga 18). The narrator here speaks from young Tambu's point of view and does not yet deal with more complex gender questions. Mainini's lifelong subjection to male superiors has led to passive and dependent thinking. When her sister, Lucia, confronts her with the option of leaving the homestead with her, Mainini has trouble deciding.

Since for most of her life my mother's mind, belonging first to her father and then to her husband, had not been hers to make up, she was finding it difficult to come to a decision. [...] Since when has it mattered what I want? So why should it start mattering now? (Dangarembga 155)

Mainini is not used to her opinion being considered, she is not used to being able to choose for herself. She has been living in a patriarchal family for her entire life and does not see the need to change it, or does not have the strength to change it. She laments that "what [she has] endured for nineteen years [she] can endure for another nineteen, and nineteen more if need be" (Dangarembga 155).

In her development of an understanding of female suppression, Tambu is greatly influenced by her cousin Nyasha, who has realized at her young age what restrictions and injustices make up women's lives. She describes her mother as trapped and feels sorry for her. Tambu does not yet understand why anybody should feel sorry for Maiguru who lives quite a comfortable life compared to her own mother. Her cousin agrees but

adds that “it was all relative and that it all boiled down to the same thing” (Dangarembga 89). Nyasha has an understanding of female suppression whereas Tambu has not yet grasped the larger picture of patriarchy. Nyasha laments:

I don't want to be anyone's underdog. It's just not right for anyone to be that. But once you get used to it, well it just seems natural and you just carry on. And that's the end of you. You're trapped. They control everything you do. (Dangarembga 119)

The word ‘trapped’ is used again to describe the situation of women being socialized into the patriarchal system and unable to break out, while ‘natural’ describes the acceptance of the hierarchy as given and immutable. Fearing she will automatically yield to the oppressing system, Nyasha believes that she has to rebel early on. She refers to the inequality between men and women again when she talks to Tambu about Lucia's situation. She explains that “advantage and disadvantage were predetermined, so that Lucia could not really hope to achieve much as a result of Babamukuru's generosity” (Dangarembga 162). Nyasha goes on that they should thank her father for his generosity “but not make him into a hero” (Dangarembga 162). She also points out the fact that it is necessary for a woman to beg a male superior in order to receive support. Nyasha complains that Lucia has been “groveling ever since she arrived to get [her father] to help her out” and exclaims, “[t]hat sort of thing shouldn't be necessary. Really it shouldn't” (Dangarembga 162). Another instance where we experience Nyasha's progressive views is when her mother leaves the mission for a short time. Nyasha admires her mother for speaking her mind to her husband, and following through with her rebellion. Maiguru tells Babamukuru the reasons for her unhappiness, which he does not understand. She leaves the house the next morning without further notice (Dangarembga 175). Nyasha comments that this is an important emancipative step for her mother. She does not feel deserted by her mother but sees that her mother is trying to save herself (Dangarembga 176).

‘Sometimes I feel I'm trapped by that man, just like she is. But now she's done it, now she's broken out, I know it's possible, so I can wait.’ She sighed. ‘But it's not that simple, you know, really it isn't. 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. So where do you break out to? I don't know, Tambu, really I don't know. (Dangarembga 176)

This passage highlights the universality of patriarchy and male hegemony again, and questions how an individual might break out of the entire system. Maiguru's rebellion provides Nyasha with hope for her own and for other women's futures.

In the process of the story, young Tambu starts to think about male superiority and gender roles. She contemplates that her "discontent had to do with more than [her] brother's annoying manners. Sensing how unwise it was to think too deeply about these things in case [she] manoeuvred [herself] into a blind alley at the end of which [she] would have to confront unfrontable issues, [she] busied [herself] with housework" (Dangarembga 39). When the young girl starts realizing that this is a greater issue, she blocks off and tries to protect herself from a truth that might be too big for her. Ironically, her way of distraction here conforms to the stereotypical occupation of females as constructed by males - housework. During a major verbal and physical fight between her cousin Nyasha and Babamukuru, Tambu's uncle calls Nyasha a whore. This dramatic scene helps Tambu to finalize her thoughts on the issues that she used to be afraid to face:

[...] [H]ow dreadfully familiar that scene had been, with Babamukuru condemning Nyasha to whoredom, making her a victim of her femaleness, just as I had felt victimized at home in the days when Nhamo went to school and I grew my maize. The victimization, I saw, was universal. It didn't depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition. It didn't depend on any of the things I had thought it depended on. Men took it everywhere with them. [...] [W]hat I didn't like was the way all the conflicts came back to this question of femaleness. Femaleness as opposed and inferior to maleness. (Dangarembga 118)

This is the realization that fundamental patriarchal attitudes are a belief system that is manifested in culture and deeply engraved in men's minds. Her uneducated father, a peasant farmer, as well as her uncle, with a higher education in England, voice misogynistic attitudes and patriarchal beliefs. Tambu also realizes how subjugation is chained to the woman's body and sexuality, traditional sites for male dominance. Men have used "the regulation of sexuality [as] one [major] form of control" over women and in particular the female body (Andrade 34). In comparison, Nyasha's brother Chido is subjected to much less control and able to move more freely in public with his acquaintances (Andrade 35).

2.4. Patriarchal Shona Traditions

As Dangarembga illustrates in *Nervous Conditions*, patriarchy was part of Shona culture during colonial rule in the late 1960s, implying that it had already been established in the native society in pre-colonial times. Berndt claims that women's inferior status compared to that of men was already manifested in traditional Shona rules (10). Only men were allowed to own land and cattle, however, women did most of the fieldwork and were the caretakers of children and household (Berndt 11). Women's opinions did not really count in public. "They could influence their husbands in private, but they did not exercise any official power" (Berndt 14). Later on, colonialism added its own type of Western patriarchal hegemony (Berndt 10).

Dangarembga depicts a family gathering that represents traditional sexist customs. Babamukuru summons a group of family members to discuss matters concerning Lucia, Mainini's sister (Dangarembga 138). Lucia, a single woman, was impregnated by either the cousin Takesure, or Jeremiah, her sister's husband. In order to discuss this delicate problem, a 'dare' is held with only the patriarchy present – Babamukuru and his younger brothers, Jeremiah and Thomas. Their sister Tete, which is the oldest woman in the Sigauke family and therefore receives patriarchal status, is the only woman allowed to participate in the hearing (Dangarembga 138). In addition to this group, Takesure as an accused was summoned as well. However, Lucia was not invited because she was a woman. The women have gathered in the kitchen to air their grievances that "a hearing is conducted in the absence of the [female] accused" (Dangarembga 139). The male accused is allowed to voice his story whereas the female accused has no right to voice her story. In *Nervous Conditions*, however, this injustice does not go without resistance. The patriarchal 'dare' is challenged by Lucia.

In the novel, the traditional patriarchal structure of the Shona family is most obvious when it comes to food. First, women are required to prepare the food. Second, the best food is reserved for the males, leaving the youngest female members of the family with whatever is left. In addition, if larger groups eat at the homestead, the women and children usually eat in the kitchen, a symbol of women's restricted space. Tambu

reflects, “there was not enough [meat] left in the pot to make a meal for those [...] who were not dining [in the house]. As a result the youngest of [them] had only gravy and vegetables to go with [their] sadza⁷” (Dangarembga 41). Sometimes the women and older girls have to wait until everybody else has finished eating. Third, the serving order has to be done strictly by patriarchal rank, which privileges men before women and old people before young people. This system is also applied for other traditions such as washing hands in a water-dish (Dangarembga 40-41, 83). Another patriarchal Shona custom depicted in the novel is the extensive praising of the male head of the family especially when he aids a family member. This praise consists of ululations, kneeling in front of the person, clapping of hands and complimentary words (Dangarembga 160-161). Babamukuru is worshipped and venerated by his family as father and benefactor, even as “prince” (Dangarembga 36).

In Shona society, women’s esteem was rated by the number of children and grandchildren in their family, an aspect of most women’s lives they were not able to influence. This tradition is touched on slightly in *Nervous Conditions*. Mainini vents her anger about Maiguru’s aloofness and hints at the reputation that women seemed to have in case they did not give birth to a great number of children; “She steals other women’s children because she could only produce two of her own” (Dangarembga 143). Another typical Shona aspect was the ‘patrilocal’ tradition. This tradition describes the fact that a wife “remained a stranger, an outsider to her husband’s kin [...] [and was] expected to obey first their fathers, then their husbands” (Berndt 13). Maiguru shows this detachment to her husband’s family when she defends her disinterest in the dare, which does not concern her in person: “Am I of their totem? I am not. I was taken. [...] I don’t want to intrude into the affairs of my husband’s family. I shall just keep quiet and go to bed. [...] I was not born into my husband’s family, therefore it is not my concern” (Dangarembga 141). In pre-colonial society, women were accused of witchcraft. Since they remained somewhat alien to their husband’s family and derived from a different lineage, it was easy to accuse them of witchcraft (Berndt 13-14). Lucia is an especially easy target for witchcraft accusations. She is only the sister of Jeremiah’s wife, therefore no blood relative of his family, the Sigauke. In addition, she has an unconventional

⁷ Sadza is a cooked corn meal made of maize, grounded corn.

lifestyle. She is not married, sleeps with different men and enjoys her sexuality (Dangarembga 146). Despite being highly educated and living in a Western fashion, Maiguru is blamed to be a witch due to the facts that she has not produced more than two children and the sudden death of her nephew in her care (Dangarembga 143).

Although patriarchy was established in Rhodesia in pre-colonial times, Palmer and Birch argue that women's positions and rights were better. They assert that women's domestic power was seen as important as men's formal power (Palmer and Birch 31). Their statuses as mothers or grandmothers gave them rights to claim help when they were mistreated, divorced or widowed. Most women grew additional vegetables in their own little gardens with the harvest at their disposal (Palmer and Birch 31). This tradition gave women a source of income which was otherwise unavailable to them. The tradition can be seen in all three generations of women in the novel. Tambu's grandmother had a small vegetable garden, and Mainini cultivates one to help her to come up with Nhamo's school money. In need of money for her own education, Tambu also makes use of this tradition freely accessible to women. At a very old age, women were granted authority as a speaker in the community (Berndt 12). The elderly women, often widows, that received the status of storyteller acquired prestige and power within the Shona community. British officials put an end to this as well as other important traditions for indigenous women. Women that did not give up their position were being chased off their land. British colonial politics molded Shona society in a form that was most profitable for them. The female storytellers did not get any of the few powerful positions in the new colonially constructed Shona society. Unfortunately, after the freedom war this once powerful position for women was not reinstated in its former dimension (Stone 114).

2.5. Women's Situation in Patriarchal Colonial Rhodesia

Palmer and Birch agree with Berndt that native women's lives became more burdensome and less secure once colonial politics and Western culture were imposed (31). Berndt describes how life changed with the colonial laws and forces (16). Due to

tax laws, men were forced to migrate away from their farms and enter the wage labor market. Women's workload increased even more, being entirely in charge of farming. In addition to this deterioration, the Land Apportionment Act forced black people to move to the Native Purchase Areas. These grounds were rather dry and infertile, and made life even harder for native women (Berndt 17). This displacement will be discussed further in chapter 2 in combination with colonialism. In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu's and her mother's days are described as long and physically exhausting. The visits to the homestead by Babamukuru function as examples of both female hardship and patriarchal structures. Babamukuru, Jeremiah, and Nhamo would sit at the homestead talking about the advancement of the harvest and new acquisitions that could be made while the women, Mainini and her daughters were doing the hard work on the fields. When the men "would return to the homestead [...] [Mainini], lips pressed tight, would hitch little Rambanai more securely on her back and continue silently at her labours. [...] [W]hen the sun began to set [they] would travel as briskly as [they] could so that [they] would not be late in preparing the evening meal" (Dangarembga 7).

The experience of colonialism for women was "gender-specific and [included] the control of female sexuality" (Katrak 9). The postcolonial culture was fed by traditional patriarchy as well as new colonial Victorian moralities. Katrak describes how "[s]ocialization patterns combine[d] to have a hold on women even after education, migration, relocation out of the original family and coded structures of morality and behavior" (9-10). "As women's productivity decreased, this led to greater hardship, a loss of prestige, and an ever-increasing workload" (Palmer and Birch 32). Western economic thinking reduced the prestige of women's work because it was unpaid, and the Victorian ideals, such as a perfect woman's job was to stay at home, added to the decrease of esteem (Stratton 8). Christian missionaries also spread the Western type of patriarchy. Women were taught to obey and serve their husbands. The duties and responsibilities as Victorian wives introduced new restrictions for women.

Wifehood often renders women powerless in terms of economic dependency and emotional subservience. [...] as wives, women may subconsciously internalize sado-masochistic roles, and become unable to emerge from situations of physical and psychological battering. Often at the root of these predicaments, lie complex webs of female socializations, and ironically, of patriarchal codes necessitating

female complicity with unequal power relation in monogamous marriage. (Katrak 166)

This passage highlights the interrelatedness of patriarchal institutions such as marriage and other patriarchal myths and customs, and their control over people's minds. Women that ran away from their abusive husbands were punished regularly either by elders of their clan or by British officials (Stone 113). Pre-colonial patriarchy was overwritten by, or interspersed with, colonial patriarchy. Women's suppression and inferior status were renewed (Berndt 19). Third world feminists reveal the complicity of colonial and indigenous patriarchy and how "colonialist or neocolonialist government[s] and local male élites [...] selectively supported [...] cultural practices that serve[d] both their interests" and mystified them as traditional customs (Stone-Mediatore 139). Some women were able to improve their situations, acquire an education at missionaries and obtain jobs as teachers or nurses. Maiguru is one of those women able to profit from an education. She works as a teacher at the mission.

However, the life of rural women had mainly deteriorated. Patriarchal beliefs, as mentioned above, did not value education for girls and women. A woman's role was to cook, clean and look after her husband and children. Therefore, money that was available was used to send boys to school. Often there was either no money left for the education of girls, or the girls were needed on the fields. On average, girls that entered the educational system acquired only three to four years of schooling (Berndt 18). In *Nervous Conditions*, the reader finds out soon that Tambu's family are poor farmers with some cattle and a vegetable garden. When their harvest is poor in Tambu's first year at school, her mother is able to come up with just enough money for her older brother's school fee, and Tambu has to drop out of school (Dangarembga 13-15). When Tambu laments her situation to her father, she is met with miscomprehension and misogynist beliefs. He makes it clear to her that a woman's job is to cook and clean and grow vegetables, and for these chores no education is needed (Dangarembga 15). Tambu's mother understands her daughter's unhappiness to some extent but her way of consoling her daughter is preparing her for the "heavy burden" of "womanhood" (Dangarembga 16). She warns Tambu about the limited options of women, the responsibilities and the hard work as well as the poverty that comes with Blackness in

this colonial society (Dangarembga 16). Money is not the only obstacle for Tambu when seeking an education. *Nervous Conditions* illustrates blatantly patriarchal and misogynist attitudes in Shona society in colonial Rhodesia. In order to keep her in the intended inferior place as a woman in their patriarchal order, men act rather vicious and conniving. Tambu grows her own mealies⁸ in order to sell them and raise money for her own school fees. Once they are ripe to eat, they mysteriously start to disappear. Soon Tambu finds out her brother Nhamo secretly steals her corn and gives it away to other children at Sunday school. Education for girls is also seen as a lost investment by Jeremiah since they marry and move in with their husbands. At the headmaster's office, Jeremiah argues with the headmaster and the teacher, Mr. Matimba, who helped Tambu to come up with the money for her school fees. Although he did not help her in any way, Jeremiah claims her money as his own. He does not want the school to keep it but make use of it himself. Jeremiah is acting according to his patriarchal beliefs. As the male head of his family, he perceives it as his right to claim that money and use it as he wishes. When Mr. Matimba points out that the current investment of ten pounds into his daughter's education will bring more money in the future once she attains a job, Jeremiah responds: "Have you ever heard of a woman who remains in her father's house? [...] She will meet a young man and I will have lost everything" (Dangarembga 30). The motive of Jeremiah's request for the money seems entirely selfish. The reader gets the feeling he will just buy himself alcohol. In spite of the obstacles that Tambu faces as a girl, she acquires an education.

Berndt summarizes the changes of the economic system during colonial rule with their particular hardship on women:

[U]npaid women's work was the economic backbone of colonial mining and commercial cashcrop cultivation [...].social codes of conduct and the idea of prestige within the society increased to be materially defined. At the same time, it was female work that raised the children and fed them with products from female subsistence economy during the absence of men. Women's labour guaranteed the success of the colonial enterprise [...] [b]ut failed to establish any social prestige for the women involved because they were denied the access to cash. (Berndt 19)

⁸ In the south of Africa mealies denotes the corn on the cob.

African women's status was legally settled once unilateral independence was declared; the women were treated like minors. Everything they did had to be approved by a male relative and all their earnings belonged to their male relatives (Weiss qtd. in Berndt 20). The only exception was a criminal act, in which case the African women were fully charged (Berndt 20). This legal fact is not directly mentioned in Tambu's story but a comment by her aunt Maiguru becomes more meaningful, once such a political detail is known. Maiguru tells Tambu that she does not receive her salary. When Tambu inquires if the government takes it, Maiguru gives the vague reply "[y]ou could say that" (Dangarembga 103). This response does not make sense to the reader since she/he has only been told that Babamukuru has control over Maiguru's salary. Knowing that this was actually required by the law, clarifies her statement. In this instance, it is neither socially nor traditionally demanded of women to hand their entire salary over to their men but illegal in any other way. One area where her monetary restriction becomes obvious is Maiguru's dependency on her husband whenever she needs the car to buy groceries. Groceries do not seem to be a priority for Babamukuru at times. When Maiguru is told by her daughter to learn how to drive, she counters that even if she could drive she could not afford it (Dangarembga 104). On the one hand, this implies that Maiguru's mobility is not seen important enough to save up for a car by Babamukuru. On the other hand, he spends a fortune for the wedding ceremony of his own brother. The official laws requiring women to give up their salaries can be seen as the tip of the iceberg in the tradition of oppression of native women and their subordinate status in society, which has been referred to as "second-class" (Uwakweh 75). Women have been silenced by religious beliefs, cultural customs and national laws.

2.6. Women's Situation since Independence

Unfortunately, women's situation in Zimbabwe did not change in the 1980s after the liberation war known as 'Second Chimurenga'. Nevertheless, the legal status of women as minors was abolished, and in 1985 more laws were passed assuring that, in the case of divorce, land was divided evenly between wife and husband. Sexual discrimination in the work field was also prohibited by these laws (Berndt 22). Female guerilla fighters were not celebrated like their male counterparts. In contrast, they were stereotyped as whores and expected to return to their submissive and silenced status as women, just like before the war. "It seems that tolerance towards women who behaved in contrast to traditional female role models was only accepted in times of need [such as the war of liberation]" (Berndt 22). As a repercussion of the discriminative school attendance, the majority of women were less educated and less trained. In the country, women worked the fields just like before independence and produced enough crops to sustain their families. The land, however, belonged to male relatives who profited from crops that were sold. In case the male owner of the land died, the mothers and children were often threatened to die of starvation. Uneducated and poor, the women did not know about their legal rights or did not have the means to attend the respective institutions (Berndt 23). After the war, promises to women were made by the new government, led by Prime Minister Mugabe and the ZANU (PF) party. Women's hard labor would be rewarded economically and gain them higher social recognition. They would be equal to the male workforce and allowed to represent themselves in public spaces. However, when writing her article in 2006, Stone mentions that these promises have not commenced (113). Men still restrict women to "maternal domestic spaces" by arguing that only women are truly capable of housework and the care of children. With this fight for the public approval and esteem of women's *physical* work, Stone comments how far Zimbabwe is away from accepting the value and importance of female *intellectual* work (113).

Since the 1990s, Zimbabwe has had problems with affairs such as domestic "violence against women, teenage pregnancies, the legalization of abortion, sexual education and counseling for girls and boys, baby dumping, prostitution, and the increased spreading of AIDS" (Berndt 24). The continuance of invisibility and silence of women and their

matters, such as domestic violence, is denounced by Berndt (25). In her article published in 1995, Uwakweh addresses in particular the problem of “spousebeating”:

[I]n very recent times, Zimbabwean women are voicing their hardships through organized or individual protests against various forms of male dominance, especially “spousebeating.”[sic] According to a radio documentary program [...], half of all women in [Zimbabwe] are frequently beaten by husbands and lovers. Whereas custom approves of spouse-beating as a corrective measure, and the law-enforcement excuses it, Zimbabwean women are just beginning to realize that it is an illegal practice. (Uwakweh 77)

Berndt resolves that women in the rural areas still have the hardest life (25). Their agricultural work, their care of children and older family members and their housework - for all this they receive neither social respect and esteem nor any pecuniary compensation. In the cities, women are also discriminated in the work place in spite of the law. Women made up only a fraction of paid employment in cities in the late 1990s. In some ways, women’s lives have deteriorated since the pre-colonial era: women’s workloads have increased; at the same time, poor and uneducated women are still exploited physically and sexually. Nevertheless, women have legally become equal citizens and their access to education has significantly improved. Voices of female writers, such as Tsitsi Dangarembga, as well as NGO’s⁹ like the Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association (ZWLA) are crucial in the fight for women’s equal treatment (Berndt 25-26).

2.7. Unheard Voices: Discrimination of Female Writers in Zimbabwe

As a result of women’s discrimination in general, women’s rights have been infringed as authors before and after the independence of Zimbabwe. Their voices were silenced in the field of literature. Marginalized groups such as women pose a threat to the leading ideologies in the way that they introduce new perspectives “on historical events [that] differ [...] from the perspective [which] has passed as the ‘general’ perspective” (Stone-Mediatore 6). Dangarembga’s narrative represents one of those experiences that have been “systemically occluded by dominant discursive logics” (Stone-Mediatore 8). In

⁹ non-governmental organizations

order to appreciate Tsitsi Dangarembga's contribution to the literary growth of Zimbabwe, the hostile social conditions of its publication play an important role. The success of a woman publishing a feministic story in a postcolonial misogynistic Zimbabwe in the 1980s describes a significant advance in gender politics.

Although Zimbabwean women have been equal citizens under the law since the beginning of independence and majority government in 1980, society has continued its discrimination on women. Female writers, usually starting out with the disadvantage of a lesser education, had to face arrogance and misogynistic prejudices by their male surrounding. Veit-Wild gives the following examples:

My main difficulty is that I'm not educated; If I were, I would be doing something better.

My first manuscript was complete when my husband burnt it saying I wasn't giving him due attention.

Being a Shona woman writer, Shona men tend to regard women's ideas, writing or literary attempts as not worthwhile for public digestion. (Veit-Wild 239)

Some of these examples of sexist behavior are quite shocking but provide us with a vivid picture of the suppression of women. Uwakweh sees "the traditional social structure [that] places the female as a 'second-class' being" at the foundation of women's oppression and "the silencing of the female voice" (75). As part of the large patriarchal silencing of women in society, it is appalling but not surprising that women were not given a voice as writers. In an interview in 1991 at the African Writer Festival, Dangarembga stated the problem carefully yet deplorably, "[i]t seems to be very difficult for men to accept the things that women write and want to write about: and the men are the publishers [!]" (George and Scott 311). She laments the circle that is created by gender discriminative publishing and economics and the lack of literary characters to which women can relate (George and Scott 311). Dangarembga experienced this discrimination of female authors the hard way, when she tried to publish her first novel *Nervous Conditions* in Zimbabwe in 1985, and failed. Several publishing houses refused to put her novel on the market. According to the male publishers, her portrayal of women's life was too negative and the story was too openly feminist (Berndt 44). Dangarembga's story was silenced for three years. Furthermore, there has been an

alarmingly small amount of critical attention paid to African female writers, once they achieve to publish their work. After overtaking the first barrier and being able to put their own work on the market, women faced discrimination within the critical literary cycle (Katrak 18-19). Their works were not considered relevant. In addition, if critics paid attention to the writings from women, the critique often seemed superficial and contained sexist prejudices (Katrak 19). Stratton elaborates on this sexist discrimination, or as she puts it, “[how] women writers [were] written out of the African literary tradition” (1). As a result of critics ignoring female writers, the writers were denied representation in the literary canon (Stratton 3). This stresses the criticism that literary canons do not represent objective judgments of relevance, but represent artificially constructed bodies of text that reinforce power structures (Stratton 4). Many female authors, such as Dangarembga, had to be acclaimed by European critics before they were esteemed in their native countries.

Since the late 1980s, the male hegemony in literature has been slowly pushed back by female writers claiming their right to voice their own stories about women. The same year Dangarembga's novel was published another woman, Sekai Nzenza, brought her novel, *Zimbabwean Woman: My Own Story*, on the market. Both texts marked the beginning of a rising significance of female writers and critical female voices in literature. In the 1990s, the Zimbabwean literary circle was joined by such great female writers as Yvonne Vera, Barbara Makhalisa and Vivienne Ndlovu (Berndt 44). In addition, new educational opportunities have opened up for girls and women in Zimbabwe, giving more women the chance to write down their stories (Uwakweh 75). Irene Staunton can be seen as a female pioneer in Zimbabwean Literature publishing. As co-publisher of Baobab Books, and co-publisher of Weaver Press, she has focused on narratives of women, giving them room to voice their stories (Matzke 35).

With the emergence of more progressive presses, such as Baobab Books or Weaver Press, associations such as the Zimbabwe Women Writers, and internationally renowned writers such as Yvonne Vera, the situation has somewhat improved, but it should not obscure the immense difficulties women in Zimbabwe, and indeed all over the African continent, still face when trying to get their work published. (Matzke 35)

Knowing about the treatment of female Zimbabwean writers, the publishing of *Nervous Conditions* and its furthering of the emancipation of women in a highly patriarchal society can be appreciated accordingly. Tsitsi Dangarembga was the first black Zimbabwean female author to publish a novel in English. This voicing did not come without struggle. Dangarembga finished her novel in the early 1980s. After being rejected, the novel languished in a Zimbabwean publishing house until Dangarembga claimed her manuscript back and presented it to a British publisher. Only after Women's Press of London published *Nervous Conditions* in Britain in 1988, was it also released by a Zimbabwean publisher in Harare (Bolzt 20, Matzke 35). Once published, Dangarembga's work received its due attention and appreciation from literary circles internationally. In 1989, it was awarded the Commonwealth Writers Prize for the Africa Section (Matzke 35). Tsitsi Dangarembga is often grouped together with two other renowned female authors, Ama Ata Aidoo from Ghana and Yvonne Vera. They have been pivotal writers in their aim at gender equality in the African society (Bolzt 21). Another detail, Dangarembga was also one of two Zimbabwean authors who first interrogated the psychological repercussions that the clash of traditional and Western culture entailed. More recently in 2002, *Nervous Conditions* was ranked fifth place amongst "Africa's 100 Best Books of the Twentieth Century", a rating initiated by the Zimbabwean International Book Fair (Matzke 33).

It had been a struggle *for women* to publish their stories *about women* in Zimbabwe after independence. However, the percentage of Zimbabwean women able to receive these stories was marginal at the time. The rate of illiteracy was higher amongst women due to the sexist attitudes towards education. A tradition of oral story telling played also a role in the slow onset of a reading culture. Dangarembga explains that reading fiction as such was not a habit in Zimbabwe. Reading was perceived only as part of one's education and improving one's language skills (George and Scott 311). In addition, "high costs of books and shortage of libraries prevent[ed] the majority of Zimbabwean from reading. [...] As a result the writers produce[d] signs which often [did] not get to their real destinations" (Bolzt 19). Nevertheless, once *Nervous Conditions* has reached its intended reader, it is hard to imagine it does not leave a strong impression. In an interview, Dangarembga explains that she feels it is her responsibility to "map [...] the

ground” in order to help women make their own individual choices in these times of social transformation and emancipation (Dangarembga 211). She hopes that the success of her novel gives encouragement to young African women to fulfill their dreams. Dangarembga would not mind functioning as a role model, a crucial aspect that she thinks is missing in the lives of young black Zimbabwean women. One of her aims is to raise ambitions and persistency in young women in order for them to develop their own voices (Dangarembga 211).

However, Dangarembga’s choice of the English language as medium also implies an intended readership that exceeds the country’s borders. As noted above, *Nervous Conditions* successfully reached an international audience. Dangarembga’s first novel was received very positively by literary critics. Since then, *Nervous Conditions* has also contributed a lot to classroom discussions on colonialism and gender politics. Bravman and Montgomery rank it amongst their favorite class texts for the “ways it up-ends a number of standard Western images about Africans and colonialism [...] [and] reflect[s] larger historical concerns that [they] want [their] students to think about” (97). The complexity of the characters and situational impacts forces students to challenge simplified and dichotomous thinking patterns such as African/Western or traditional/modern. Bravman and Montgomery focus their classroom discussions on themes concerning cultural negotiation, hybridity and alienation (98). Other scholars use the novel in the classroom for comparative women studies analyzing the search of identity by young girls (Sizemore 68).

The importance of female writers speaking up and bringing injustice to the surface is a valuable social task that is needed in countries such as Zimbabwe, where women’s rights are still disregarded and violated (Berndt 25-26). Female authors such as Dangarembga are crucial in the rebuilding of the historical narrative of a country via female spaces and voices in their stories, which have been withheld (Katrak 22).

Postcolonial women writers redefine what is politically relevant for their female protagonists. Their work allows a reconstruction of what colonialism meant for women versus men - sexual politics and colonization of female bodies. In their literary representations, race does not subsume gender as is found often in the work of anti-colonial male thinkers. (Katrak 22)

Texts such as *Nervous Conditions* exemplify that women's issues are relevant to a nation such as Zimbabwe and its history. Their personal stories address social injustices and cultural transitions that envelope entire generations and become political matters.

2.8. Women Characters in Zimbabwean Literature: Distorted Images - Male Representations

In 1974, female writers were relatively rare in Africa. In relation to this, strong female characters were only sparsely found in the African fictional world (Mutiso 57). This reminds us that the suppression of women and their thoughts in literature was not limited to Zimbabwe but found in other African literature. As a result of silencing women's voices, female characters had their source in the imagination and attitudes of Zimbabwean men – “a situation that has always questioned the realism of female characterization” (Uwakweh 75). Dangarembga has drawn attention not only to the fact that women have been discriminated in the field of literature but also that the depiction of women, mainly by male authors, has been strongly biased and distorted. Zwicker, reading between the lines of Dangarembga's interviews, is convinced that the “Zimbabwean publishing industry [...] discriminate[d] against writing by women and actively discourage[d] realistic representations of the lives of actual Zimbabwean girls and women” (5).

Rudo Gaidzanwa has published several books and papers on gender-related topics in Zimbabwe and Africa. In *Images of Women*, Gaidzanwa analyzes the depiction of women by African authors in Zimbabwe in order to highlight stereotypical and prejudiced images of women. Novels in Shona, Ndebele and English from the 1960s to the 1980s are examined. Traditional female Zimbabwean characters were defined according to their relationships with men. Their self-image and self-respect was viewed as dependent on their success at their respective social roles, e.g. wife, mother or widow. Women's roles are depicted as supporting, meek and caring for their husbands and children. Reflecting reality, the husbands in fiction were described as absent for long periods due to labor migration, and sometimes starting new families in towns. Under such harsh

circumstances, women in literature and reality were still punished for fidelity. Concerning their children, mothers were expected to put the needs of their sons before any of their own needs. Mothers not fulfilling their roles were described as failures and condemned by society and their own children. Failure of women's roles included, for instance, childlessness and "assertive, unfaithful [or] insubordinate" behavior (Gaidzanwa 11). Women characters that dared to rebel and break the tradition were usually punished and suffered tragically (Uwakweh 76). Furthermore, a combination of Christian morality and traditionally patriarchal attitudes created two stereotypes of female characters: the self-sacrificing and submissive mother and wife, and the immoral and condemnable unmarried or divorced woman (Gaidzanwa 11-13). This divide into decent and immoral women is often paralleled with rural and urban surroundings:

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

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

In the traditional Zimbabwean story, the obedient wife, forgiving all her husband's sins, is rewarded with a 'happy end' at last when her husband returns to her. In contrast, the independent woman who does not subordinate herself to her husband is punished severely for the rest of her life. In the passage above, Gaidzanwa highlights the power literary images can exercise over people's minds. The part stories play in maintaining cultural and social structures should not be underestimated. The rural-urban divide is not addressed in the novel as such. However, prejudices regarding educated women are alluded to and consequently criticized. When Babamukuru objects to Tambu joining a convent for white girls, he argues that too much freedom can corrupt her. Maiguru, disagreeing, responds with the following and reminds him of the same prejudices during their university education:

[W]hen we went to South Africa everybody was saying that we, the women, were loose. [...] It wasn't a question of association with this race or that race at that

time. People were prejudiced against educated women. Prejudiced. That's why they said we weren't decent. That was in the fifties. Now we are in the seventies. I am disappointed that people still believe the same things. After all this time and when we have seen nothing to say it is true. I don't know what people mean by a loose women – sometimes she is someone who walks the streets, sometimes she is an educated women, sometimes she is a successful man's daughter or she is simply beautiful. (Dangarembga 184)

Maiguru complains rightfully how easily women are categorized into decent and loose women, a habit that was common in male writers in the past. Women that become too independent and digress too far from the traditional way are bound to be scorned and labeled 'loose' in reality as well as literature. In addition to women with education, this also seems to have included rich and beautiful women. Katrak affirms that the image of educated women deteriorating morally was prevalent in fiction and film (97). However, Maiguru indirectly criticizes Babamukuru's fixed categories of 'loose' and 'decent' through which he enacts justice. She also exposes the fact that his attitude towards women has not changed over the years (Chennells 73). Maiguru tries to cut the tie that connects the negative connotation of 'loose' with women's education and freedom (Chennells 73).

Another general prejudice that Gaidzanwa found was the depiction of women partaking in extramarital sex as prostitutes, regardless of their financial or social situation (12): "Once women choose to enter or are pushed into sexual liaisons with men they are not married to, they become prostitutes. There is no distinction made between lovers, mistresses, concubines and prostitutes." The conception of women enjoying sexual activities and doing so freely was not possible for Zimbabwean men at that time. In addition, the beauty of women was also seen as something "bewitching and irresistible [to men]" (Gaidzanwa 12). These traditional prejudices are exemplified in *Nervous Conditions* via the character Lucia. Tambu describes her as a beautiful woman who does not hide her enjoyment of sex. This leads to men's conclusion that she must be a witch. Women were also depicted negatively as source and carrier of contagion (Lund 162). Dangarembga hints at prejudices towards women concerning cleanliness. While the men on the bus "gave off strong aromas of productive labour", women's smells were "unhealthy reproductive odours" (Dangarembga 1). Another time, young Tambu conveys that she "knew [...] that the fact of menstruation was a shamefully unclean secret that

should not be allowed to contaminate immaculate male ears” (Dangarembga 71). As in the case of Britannia and Mother India, the image of the woman and mother was also used as national icon in Zimbabwe. However, “the romanticization and idealization of motherhood” is often just a mask to hide women’s subordination (Stratton 172). In the nationalist movement, women were used as images for the country, nation and as guardian of tradition – depictions of “iconic maternal figureheads” (Stone 112). Unfortunately, the symbolic power that was imposed on them during the freedom wars, as well as the physical fighting many women underwent, did not result in an immediate improvement of women’s status after the war.

Uwakweh concludes how “the shortcomings of the male literary tradition in depicting women’s lives realistically strongly call[ed] for a new female voice on the literary scene” (76). He continues that “[t]he female voice promises a fresh insight on women’s reality and experiences that are generally inaccessible to the male tradition” (Uwakweh 76). First, male images of women in literature mirrored male attitudes and judgment of morality. Second, male Zimbabwean authors depicted to a great extent reality that was shaped by patriarchy. Eventually, educated and emancipated women would oppose this male reinforcement of social roles in literature. Unfortunately, attitudes and opinions in society have not changed sufficiently or effectively. The images of women in Zimbabwe in the 21st century have not evolved greatly. They still include largely a combination of Victorian Christian ideals and pre-colonial submissive and reproductive images. This promotes views of women such as the “‘weaker sex’, which only seeks to seduce men, or as the mystical ‘mother Africa’” (Berndt 24-25).

2.9. Dangarembga’s Voice: Sending a Message

Nervous Conditions opens up these restricted traditional and misogynistic views of women and provides us with a new set of female characters in Zimbabwean literature. “The complementary and contestatory voices of Dangarembga’s cast of women resist prevailing representations of ‘African woman’ as victim and replace reductive stereotypes with a full yet subtle spectrum of individual and cultural identities” (Aegerter

231). In *Nervous Conditions*, Mainini, Tambu's mother, represents a character that has lived the way male society expects it from a wife and mother and has been subjected to oppressive rules her entire life. Dangarembga does not glorify her but instead depicts her daily hardship, which is exacerbated by her extremely lazy husband. She depicts a passive and lethargic woman, unhappy with a broken spirit. This is the result of Mainini's correct adherence to the role of a woman in colonial Shona society. Her sister, Lucia, enjoys her sexual freedom as a single woman. In *Nervous Conditions*, she is not punished atrociously or has to suffer severely for her transgression. She is depicted as an independent woman with practical intelligence, which in the end helps her improve her economic status.

Tsitsi Dangarembga tries to capture a moment of female consciousness in Zimbabwean history. *Nervous Conditions* successfully depicts the patriarchal structure of a Shona family in colonial Rhodesia in the 1960s and 1970s, which resulted from the male dominated traditional culture as well as the infiltration of Western patriarchy. Although Dangarembga provides the reader with examples of women suffering from different forms of male hegemony, she does not greatly focus on the suffering but on the negotiations and resistances that the women practice. Dangarembga provides her female characters with ways of resisting their male family members. Female characters such as Tambu give young women different options of agency, and challenge them to reevaluate their lives and search for a voice themselves. Dangarembga provides the reader with Tambu's evolving mental awareness of female subjugation. We experience her early confrontation of this universal injustice and her repression of these 'risky' thoughts. She slowly comes to realize the complexity of patriarchy and to abhor it. The female character Lucia gives women hope and strength to break out of their constricted spaces. She illustrates pragmatic ways of resistance. She effectively manipulates Babamukuru, the male head of the extended family, and thereby obtains her own job. In addition, Tsitsi Dangarembga depicts male characters in an unfavorable and ambiguous light. Jeremiah, for instance, is described almost comically as lazy, irresponsible and feeble in character. The character's roles and functions in the novel are analyzed in-depth in chapter 4.

Zimbabwe is just one of many developing countries where the fight for equal rights for women, in general and in the publishing business, has been a major issue in the last decades. “Male defenders of the status quo talk self-righteously of ‘African tradition’ [while] social and cultural pressures [...] lead [...] women to dump their babies or turn to prostitution” (Palmer and Birch 32). In the 21st century, gender inequality has yet to be leveled in many African countries. However, in some aspects male chauvinism can still be found in developed countries as well. There is still universal work to be done until man and woman are seen and treated as equal. One contribution towards equality is Dangarembga sharing her story. As Stone-Mediatore puts it, marginal experience narratives recreate histories and contribute to political thinking and awareness - the private as political (4-8).

2.10. Womanist Voicing

So far it was demonstrated that *Nervous Conditions* criticizes the injustice of sexism and patriarchy. Therefore, the question arises: Is *Nervous Conditions* a feminist text? In Dangarembga’s view, feminism describes a woman’s consciousness, especially on how much power women have and do not have in society (George and Scott 315). Dangarembga has been grouped among postcolonial feminist authors, and *Nervous Conditions* challenges the notion of subordinate positions of women and empowers female voices previously marginalized (Wisker 155). However, critics warn against “the dangers of universalizing a Western-style feminism” (Nicholls 119). Chandra Mohanty and Gayatri Spivak, renowned postcolonial theorists, criticize that the representation of third world women by first world feminists leads to universalized and monolithic images (Döring 176-177, see also King 57 ff.). Spivak warns against a “homogenized and systematized vision of female oppression [in the third world]”, which has been put forward by many First World feminist theorists (Edwards 100). She highlights the “discursive construction of a particular model of race, class and gender” that constitutes third world women (Edwards 100). Mohanty criticizes the “political project of Western feminism in its discursive construction of the category of the ‘Third World woman’ as a hegemonic entity” (Edwards 101). With the range of Rhodesian women in her novel,

Dangarembga illustrates this criticism. Dangarembga's female characters differ along "religious, [...] cultural [as well as] class lines" (Young 135). Dangarembga comments in an interview that you cannot just divide up the world by gender but have to consider all "the other powers that inform life itself" (qtd. in George and Scott 313). For young women of her generation, she explains that Western theories were an important starting point at the time; however, Dangarembga adds that they have "to move beyond" and "find their own point of departure" (qtd. in George and Scott 315). Western feminism has ignored economic differences and differences in geography, history and culture in the oppressive experiences of third world women (Edwards 101). First World feminism has been found guilty in suffering from an ethnocentric bias (McLeod 182).

For some time now, the proper name, "feminism", has justifiably been viewed with great suspicion in the black intellectual climate of Southern Africa, since even the name "feminism" has historically entailed the sorts of privilege to which black women have not generally had access. (Nicholls 119)

In an interview with Flora Veit-Wild Dangarembga remarks that "white Western feminism does not meet [her] experiences at a certain point, the issues of [her] as a black woman" (qtd. in Nicholls 119). Dangarembga comments on fellow writers, "Western feminist thought was so alien to the thinking of many black women, because it did come from a foreign culture, they were not even able to assimilate it" (George and Scott 315-316). She goes on that the labeling of women as feminists is dangerous as a way of blocking the development of indigenous feminist theory, and agreed that even progressive Western theories can be imperialistic; hence should be interrogated and refashioned (George and Scott 316). Feminism has come to represent a white Westernized construct "which ignores the daily experiences of race and economic hardship" and ignores the cultural context (Wisker 56, 57).

Deborah King stresses that black feminist thought addresses all oppressions and discriminations (43). She comments on the terms double and triple jeopardy of black women, that conceptualize the discrimination by racism and sexism, and racism, sexism and classism respectively. King criticizes the simplicity and additive character of these concepts (47). Black women's oppression cannot be described by such simple incremental processes. Therefore, King coins the term multiple jeopardy to describe an interdependent and interactive model of racism, sexism and classism for black women

(47). This model stresses the multiplicative relationship among these power structures. Although King's analyses refer to Afro-American women, her model of multiple jeopardy can be applied to African women as well. In Dangarembga's novel, the dynamics of the multiple jeopardy of the Rhodesian women is visible. Mainini is the most victimized by the multiplicative and interdependent oppressions. She suffers from patriarchy, the religious, cultural and class differences in her family and the economic repercussions of the colonial racist regime.

Due to the insufficiency of feminist theories, a new term evolved in the 1980s: womanism, coined by Alice Walker, an African-American writer, and Chikwenye Ogunyemi, independently. Womanism compensates all the above mentioned shortcomings of white Western feminism. A womanist "recognizes that [...] she must incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic, and political considerations into her philosophy" (Ogunyemi 64). Womanism is "currently, and with good reason, extolled as Southern Africa women's answer to 'feminism,' since it provides a means of fighting both colonial and indigenous gender-oppression while uniting black communities against institutionalized racism" (Nicholls 120). Black women are not just disadvantaged by being female but also by being black and, often related to these two factors, by being poor (Ogunyemi 67).

Recognition of the impact of racism, neocolonialism, nationalism, economic instability, and psychological disorientation on black lives, when superimposed on the awareness of sexism that characterizes black women's writing, makes concern about sexism merely one aspect of womanism. (Ogunyemi 71-72).

The awareness of the complexity and interrelatedness of oppressive systems provides the womanist with not just the issue of feminism but with the issue of humanity (Ogunyemi 68). Ogunyemi sees the core aim of black womanism as a dynamism of wholeness and self-healing (72).

Ogunyemi further developed womanism into a concept of black female writing in English. Womanist novels possess themes characteristic for feminist novels such as "a critical perception of and reaction to patriarchy, often articulated through the struggle of a victim or rebel [...]; sensitivity to the inequities of sexism [...] or a stasis, signifying the failure to eliminate sexism" (Ogunyemi 65). *Nervous Conditions* possesses all these

themes as discussed so far: the narrator's critical perception of patriarchy, the women's struggle with and resistance to patriarchy, Nyasha's sensitive awareness of gender inequality and her inability to induce a change. However, analyzing *Nervous Conditions* merely in relation to its theme of patriarchy would be a reduction of the novels complexity and frame of reference for which feminism was criticized. Nevertheless, *Nervous Conditions* goes beyond an individualist feminist perspective and analyzes contradictions of African society in a wider sense, looking at race, class and generation (Veit-Wild 338). Ogunyemi stresses the fact that, although womanist novels exhibit such feminist characteristics to a greater or lesser degree, the novels focus on the larger picture (65). Therefore, womanist novels leave another impression on the readers mind. According to Ogunyemi, there are several aspects typically found in black womanist novels. For instance, a womanist novel entails female achievements, is culture-oriented and ends on a hopeful note (Ogunyemi 73-74). Furthermore, women without men play significant roles and, less protected than their white counterparts, grow independent (Ogunyemi 73). Another typical theme in black womanist novels is the mental disturbance. Ogunyemi states that the difference to white madwomen lies in the (sub-)conscious awareness of the black woman that she must survive because other people are dependent on her (Ogunyemi 74). In addition, mental upheavals of black women characters are typically succeeded by "spiritual growth, healing, and integration" (Ogunyemi 74). These typical womanist themes will be pointed out in the detailed analyses of the female characters.

3. Colonialism

Colonialism is one of the most significant factors that shaped Rhodesia's history and its people. *Nervous Conditions* touches on colonial land and educational politics, and their effects on an extended African Rhodesian family. Dangarembga's characters "represent specific, identifiable forms of colonial experience and are shaped by identifiable historical forces associated with colonialism" (Booker 199). Dangarembga anchors her black nationalist agenda within Nyasha's voice. Subsequently, Nyasha's quest for social

justice extends the novels politics from feminist objectives to anti-colonial objectives. *Nervous Conditions*' anti-colonialism is underscored by the reference to Frantz Fanon's work on nationalism. Dangarembga illustrates in the epigraph that she has taken her title from the preface to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*. This explicit link marks the related issues that Dangarembga and Fanon explore in regard to colonialism. Both illustrate the psychological impact of colonial domination, and the construction of a Manichean world and a native intellectual. Western education plays a significant role in *Nervous Conditions*. It comes to symbolize good and evil. For Tambu, Western education leads to emancipation and liberation. For Nyasha, it resembles the manipulation and assimilation of African minds. Mainini condemns the whole 'Englishness' as a lethal disease. A combination of westernized lodging, schooling and colonial ideologies alienates the characters from their Shona culture and family. In order to get an impression of the colonial legacy and the colonial times in which *Nervous Conditions* is set, a summary of colonial history must be given first.

3.1. Colonial History

Nervous Conditions takes place in the Rhodesian communal lands that surrounded the then third largest town, Umtali (now known as Mutare). Rhodesia is recognized as Zimbabwe since its independence in 1980. The road to independence for Zimbabwe was long and painful. The first permanent European settlers invaded the area in 1889 and took over land formerly belonging to the Ndebele and Shona tribes. Rhodesia was established and governed until 1923 by Cecil Rhodes, the owner of the British South Africa Company. His government was able to rule with barely any interference from the British Crown and "by its legislative and administrative actions laid the foundations of a discriminatory society" (Int. Jurists. 4). In what is known as the First Chimurenga, war of liberation, the natives rebelled against the colonial invaders and were defeated by the British South Africa Company in 1896. It is remembered as one of the most violent and deadly resistance wars against colonial rule (Palmer and Birch 6- 7). In 1923 the colonial settlers took over and continued the highly racial politics:

The colony of settlers in Rhodesia aimed to ensure and perpetuate white privilege and control. They dominated access to all resources, such as land, education,

health, training, the road and rail networks, and loans for farming. Inequality was enforced by the settler-controlled parliament, and reinforced by social segregation. (Palmer and Birch 8)

Kwame Nkrumah elaborates on Rhodesia's colonial history in his book *Rhodesia File*. Nkrumah was a significant political leader in the independence struggle of Ghana and became its first prime minister. He published several works and papers on colonialism and African revolution. In *Rhodesia File*, Nkrumah writes that the settler's politics systematically deprived the Africans in Rhodesia of their land and created an "enormous disparity [...] between the quantity and quality of land occupied by Europeans and Africans" (17). The best land "with the best soil and ample rainfall, and the most adequate communications by road and rail" was reserved for Europeans (Nkrumah 22). The worst land, most infertile and dry, was given to the indigenous people. Proportionally the size of the land allocated to the African population was almost 16 times smaller than the land allocated to Europeans (Nkrumah 17). The Rhodesian government often had to make use of direct force to move Africans into these overcrowded areas (Int. Jurists 13). In 1930 the Apportionment Act legalized these highly racial land regulations. This resulted in the majority of African farmers being only able to cultivate land "at subsistence or even below subsistence levels" (Nkrumah 17). While the African land was overcrowded, European land lay bare, reserved for future European immigrants. Nkrumah describes the situation the following;

The European farms are immense in size: over one-third of the European holdings consist of farms of more than 20,000 acres in extent. All land occupied by the European settlers is consistently under-farmed, only some three to four per cent of it being fully cultivated. In contrast, the African farms are small and declining in productivity because they must be of necessity overfarmed. (Nkrumah 138)

Further economical suppression was established for indigenous farmers that were able to produce for commercial sale. They were paid less for their crops than their European counterparts. These economic politics of the settlers assured that African farmers would not be able to compete with Europeans and cheap African labor was available (Nkrumah 22).

In the beginning of the novel, the reader is introduced to colonial history. Tambu recollects her dead grandmother's history stories which give an allusion to the injustice

indigenous people underwent and the repercussions they had to endure. Tambu received these 'oral history lessons' about the colonial settlers during the work in her grandmother's garden. Tambu's recollection of them tells us that her family used to be quite rich for their society's standard, living in a different part of the country where the land was fertile. Tambu's great-grandfather owned "many fat herd of cattle, large fields and four wives who worked hard to produce bountiful harvests. All this he could exchange for cloth and beads and axes and a gun, even a gun, from the traders" (Dangarembga 18). However, once colonial settlement politics start, their circumstances change. Tambu's grandmother perceived the colonial settler's as people with evil magical powers and filled with greed:

Wizards well versed in treachery and black magic came from the south and forced the people from the land. [...] [They] were avaricious and grasping; there was less and less land for the people. At last the people came upon the grey, sandy soil of the homestead, so stony and barren that the wizards would not use it. There they built a home. (Dangarembga 18)

Tambu's grandmother continues that her husband, attracted by the "wizards' whispers of riches and luxury" started working on their farm and realized that they had turned him into their slave (Dangarembga 18). One day he was able to escape and, leaving behind his family, fled to the goldmines in the south, where he hoped to make good money quickly but where, as it turned out later, he had been killed. Tambu's grandmother and her children were driven away by the farmer and returned to the homestead where she had to support her six children. When she heard about wizards that are supposed to be different and holy, she brought her oldest son, Babamukuru, to their mission and begged them to educate him in their ways and customs. In the end she was very proud of Babamukuru and his success in their schools and wizardry.

Tambu compares her grandmother's stories several times to romantic fairy-tales:

It was a truly romantic story to my ears, a fairy-tale of reward and punishment, of cause and effect. It had a moral too, a tantalizing moral that increased your aspirations, but not beyond a manageable level. [...] Yes, it was a romantic story, the way my grandmother told it [...] the message was clear: endure and obey, for there is no other way. (Dangarembga 19)

The grandmother's romanticized way of telling their history masks the strategic decision she has to make in a colonial world with few options (Young 151). The moral that Tambu

perceives in her grandmother's stories is to subject oneself to the people in power and work hard. As a traditional Shona woman, these principles were what her grandmother lived by. She was subjected to male and colonial domination. Tambu does not criticize her grandmother for her subservient morals. Quite the opposite, she praises her as a smart and anticipatory woman that knew that traditional ways of living were becoming uneconomic and she had to prepare her children for this new future. In her subservient way, she successfully carried out her plan. The fairy-tale way of telling and perceiving atrocious and exploitative colonial history creates bitter irony. The text clearly expresses that the poverty of Tambu's family is a direct result of the colonial displacement politics.

3.2. Colonial Education

The drive for education is a prevalent theme in *Nervous Conditions*. Education is valued amongst the parent generation and sacrifices are made in order to provide their children with education. The youth generation strives even more for education and good grades. Tambu perceives education as an opportunity to fly from poverty and patriarchy. She has to overcome misogynist as well as fiscal obstacles before she can go to school. An obstacle that all Africans had to overcome in order to get an education was the basic racism in Rhodesia which prevented Africans from gaining equivalent training to Whites. Education was highly selective and only a small group of talented Africans were chosen to build up an élite.

The black community was discriminated profoundly in regard to education, first by the colonial government and then by the illegal white minority government. Rhodesia established a system similar to the Bantu education system in South Africa which aimed to produce simple laborers. Lack of governmental funds left education, to some extent, in the hands of church missions. The government very slowly started to build schools for black students. "While making a show of racial equality it [was] carefully designed to serve the labour needs of the white minority without threatening the privileges of the white working class" (Int. Jurists 19). Segregation was part of the school system. While public schools were entirely segregated, private schools were allowed up to 6 per cent of

African students (Int. Jurists 19). These 6 per cent were carefully selected. As depicted in the novel, only the most promising African students with the best grades were given this opportunity. Dangarembga discloses these racist odds. Tambu tells us that “only two places [were offered by the convent to] all the African Grade Seven girls in the country” (Dangarembga 181). Understandably, this does not seem fair to her. However, Tambu is one of the selected girls and enters Sacred Heart, a Christian convent for girls.

Education was compulsory for white children, of which about 80 percent completed secondary school. Less than 50 per cent of black children were able to enroll at primary school, and just one per cent of them attained graduation from secondary school. Overall, “[t]en times more money was spent on each white child than on a black child” (Palmer and Birch 34). Rhodesia’s goal was to create a “small and predominantly white élite” (Palmer and Birch 34). This segregationist school system, perpetuated by the Smith government, denied education to Africans that could not pay their school fees whereas Europeans in the same predicament were given options (Int. Jurists 20). In 1966, the Rhodesian government worsened the discriminatory situation for Africans. They assigned the entire financial responsibility for the education of their people to the local African communities. The only governmental monetary support was to be taken from African taxes and would not exceed 2 per cent of the Gross National Product (Int. Jurists 22). The differences in the quality of European and African schools are pointed out in *Nervous Conditions*. “[E]verybody knew that the European schools had better equipment, better teachers, better furniture, better food, better everything” (Dangarembga 182). Knowing about the division of money in the educational system, this statement can be readily believed. In addition, the government tried to channel the money towards primary school education for Africans in order to prevent the number of Africans gaining a higher education (Veit-Wild 180-181). The new policies also prevented the Churches to build new school facilities for Africans or “extend the levels of scholastic achievement in those schools already in existence” (Int. Jurists 22). Dangarembga refers to the colonizers politics of education in mentioning “the strategically small number of Form Three places the Government gave [them]” (109). At every grade examinations were held to screen out as many pupils as necessary (Veit-Wild 181). Talking about Nyasha’s Form Two examinations, the reader finds out that

children which do not pass the exam are forced out of the school system. The fears of white working and middle class Rhodesians lead to even more discriminative education policies under the illegal white minority government (Veit-Wild 181). Dangarembga mirrors the degrading colonial attitudes towards the natives. Tambu recollects the story of her uncle's education. She remembers how he was compared to fertile land from which the colonizer would profit; "They thought he was a good boy, cultivatable, in the way that land is, to yield harvests that sustain the cultivator" (Dangarembga 19). The low number of Africans enrolled at school can definitely not be traced back to their lack of desire. For them it was the gateway to the new European society and professions that promised a certain status and security (Int. Jurists 21). As a result of the discriminative educational politics, the African population in Rhodesia stored a "long-suppressed thirst for knowledge" (Palmer and Birch 35). This "thirst for knowledge" is vividly depicted in *Nervous Conditions*. Tambu's struggle for education mirrors an entire people's struggle for education.

3.3. Nervous Conditions

Dangarembga clearly relates her novel to the literature of anti-colonialism and postcolonialism. She takes her title and epigraph from Sartre's preface to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*. Frantz Fanon was a francophone pioneer in the area of *postcolonial* theory, before the term was even coined. He addressed issues such as power and violence of the colonial setting in political and psychological terms (Döring 51). Sartre wrote that the colonized cannot choose between his own culture and the Western culture - he must have both and his mind starts splitting (17). Therefore, "[t]he status of 'native' is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among colonized people *with their consent*" (Sartre 17).

Dangarembga rewrites Sartre's singular form of nervous condition into a plural formulation (Andrade 50). This plural usage conveys two different meanings. It suggests that more than one character suffers from a nervous condition, and that the conditions that affect the people negatively are multiple. Although Nyasha's mental state is the

most severe, the other characters also suffer from strained nerves. The multiple factors that produce these nervous conditions are the power systems that oppress the native; the combination and interrelation of racism, colonialism, and poverty; and the additional oppression of women through sexism and patriarchy. Sugnet believes that Dangarembga also plays with the double meaning of *nervous*, because of its use in everyday language to refer to a state of anxiousness as well as in medical jargon to describe pathological mental conditions (Sugnet 35). Although Sartre remains unmentioned by Dangarembga, the epigraph elucidates that the phrase derives from Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. However, Dangarembga cuts the phrase short and leaves out "*with their consent*" which implies the complicity of the colonized in their colonization. Babamukuru, Chido and Nhamo seem to give a coerced consent to their assimilation into the colonial hierarchy. Their status as agents of colonial hegemony might be psychologically grueling but they seek it out because it provides them with privileges, material rewards and apparent security (Sugnet 38). But how freely do we act in a situation into which we are forced, where we do not have fairer options, where we are degraded and manipulated? Dangarembga's omission of Sartre's addition shows her disagreement with the complicity of the colonized. The situation of the colonized is particularly confusing and contradictory because the colonizer dictates him to aspire to be European – using colonialist strategies – while he insists on the irredeemable inferiority of the native (Booker 191). Hence, the colonial subject is torn between the loyalty for their traditional culture and the desire to become part of the Western, modern culture of their oppressors (Booker 191). After the colonial subjects were persuaded to embrace the superior European culture, they realized that they would never be accepted as European (Geller 147). They found themselves outside of both their original culture and the colonizer's culture. This complex situation can lead to the acceptance of the ascribed inferiority in the native.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon analyzes the relationship between colonial and anti-colonial violence, national identity, liberation struggle and the psychological repercussion on the native. Critics agree that Dangarembga redefines Fanon's insights (Andrade, Booker, Sugnet, Zwicker). Fanon's and Dangarembga's works share the depiction of the constructed native intellectual and the interest in psychological effects of

colonial oppression and domination¹⁰ (Zwicker 10). “Also like Fanon, [Dangarembga] is concerned with power relations as they filter down from the macro-politics of regional domination to the micro-politics of family life” (Geller 147). The mental disorders Fanon treated during the Algerian War of Independence were results of the specific colonial situation and cultural conflict (Nicholls 116).

If the symptom is culturally produced, it has a socio-economic history, and more importantly, a subject-specific politics. It cannot be reduced to normative criteria; its uniqueness admits of the ideological particularities that work in and through differently classed, racialized, and gendered subjects. (Nicholls 116-117)

The nervous conditions of Dangarembga’s characters are also depicted as symptoms of the colonial situation and the cultural conflicts at that time.

Fanon describes the colonial world as a Manichean world, “as in dualistic religions pitting darkness against light” (Döring 52). A Manichean structure comprises two opposed categories, polarities of good and evil (McLeod 155). The colonial Manichean world is cut and divided into two compartments. The zone where the natives live and the zone where the settlers live are opposed and irreconcilable (Fanon 30). Colonial culture in general has created a polarized world, where the indigenous and his life are described as evil and savage in contrast to the good and civilized Westerners (Treiber 85). Dangarembga creates a Manichean world in her novel which she slowly breaks up to expose the constructedness of the two zones. Tambu views her Shona culture as backward and English culture as progressive. Describing the dirt and simplicity of the homestead in contrast to the desired clean and luxurious house of her uncle, Tambu evokes a dualistic world (Treiber 86). Her uncle’s house is perceived as Western space, superior, white and desirable. However, the adult narrator reflects that her early perception was an illusion.

[A]s the novelty wore off, you began to see that the antiseptic sterility that my aunt and uncle strove for could not be attained beyond an illusory level because the buses [...] rolled a storm of fine red dust which perversely settled in corners and on surfaces[...]. (Dangarembga 71)

As the fine red dust contaminates the heaven-like mansion, it destroys the separation of the perfectly hygienic Western world from the dirty Shona world. Eventually Tambu

¹⁰ These topics are further analyzed in section 3.5. and 3.6..

notices the dust and her naïve assumption of Western culture as the ultimate redemption. She comes to realize that her westernized aunt is less emancipated than she could be, and her westernized uncle is less powerful than he wants to be. Dangarembga elicits the colonial Manichean picture of the superior/clean/desired Western world opposed to the inferior/dirty/backward indigenous world in order to unmask it as illusion and manipulation by the colonizer.

Sugnet points out that there is a relationship between women's politics and nationalist politics in that both discourses entail the "symptomatic resistance to two different but related forms of domination" (47). Dangarembga came across Fanon's work only after she had drafted her manuscript. Nevertheless, *Nervous Conditions* can be read as an "exemplification of and also as corrective to Frantz Fanon's [...] treatise on pan-African nationalism" (Zwicker 10). *Nervous Conditions* "goes beyond Fanon, whose male-oriented analysis of the colonial condition does not explore gender issues in any substantive way" (Booker 191). Dangarembga's response to the neglect of the gender aspect will be elaborated in the following section.

3.4. No Voice for National Struggle?

The story told by Tambu covers a range of years reaching from 1960 to the early 1970s. These years were highly important for the future of Rhodesia as a nation. The time narrated comprises colonial rule as well as white minority rule during a Unilateral Independence and warfare training of guerilla fighters for an upcoming liberation war. However, for a reader unfamiliar with Zimbabwe's history, the political significance of these years is not apparent in the novel. Dangarembga does not mention the political changes her country underwent during the narrated time. There are only three short remarks that allude to the national events. In contrast to *Bones* (1988) by Hove and *Harvest of Thorns* (1989) by Chinodya, the two best-known and most celebrated Zimbabwean novels in English published at about the same time, Dangarembga's text does not engage in the Zimbabwean independence struggle (Andrade 25). The reason for this authorial omission of Rhodesian national politics lies in the omission of gender

issues in nationalism. “Because the African problematic continues to be defined in terms of political empowerment and nation formation, there is often the temptation to conflate political and feminine themes in a single discourse” (Wilson-Tagoe 181).

In the 1960s African national struggles succeeded throughout Africa, eliciting the fear in the white settlers of losing their political and economic power. The Rhodesian government demanded independence. Britain would only grant it if the country would work towards majority rule, but the white Rhodesians were not willing to give up the power (Int. Jurists 6). After they failed to gain independence from Britain legally, the Prime Minister, Ian Smith, issued a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1965 (Palmer and Birch 9). The already meager political rights that Africans held were diminished further with amendment acts (Int. Jurists 6). Rhodesia’s UDI was never officially recognized by any country (Bös 72). It was declared illegal by the British government and economic sanctions were gradually imposed (Int. Jurists 8-9). After these counteractions the Rhodesian economy only abated slightly. Smith’s racist regime was going to rule for 15 years. Tambu never tells the reader that UDI was declared. However, her family seems affected by it. Babamukuru and his family move back from England in 1965. Though this might be a coincidence, it is more likely Babamukuru and his family are legally obliged to return to Rhodesia as a result of the UDI. The only instance where UDI is mentioned in the novel is when Nyasha asks about its meaning and cause. Dangarembga uses only the abbreviation, UDI, and does not give the reader an answer or further information. Not too much attention should be drawn to it. However, readers familiar with the history of Rhodesia are reminded of this major political event.

Racial discrimination, first legalized by the constitution of the British Parliament in 1961, was preserved by the constitution of the illegal Smith government in 1969. Both constitutions claimed they were in support of equal human rights, while at the same time they maintained privileges for the white minority (Int. Jurists 10).

The essential areas of discrimination relate[d] to the ownership and occupation of land, so as to ensure physical separation of the races as far as possible, and the fields of education, labour and political activity, so as to restrict the development of the Africans in such a way as not to threaten the interests of the Whites. (Int. Jurists 10)

The illegal regime maintained and even amplified the racist politics of allocation of land, the white executive and political powers as well as the white monopoly of skills and education (Int. Jurists 10-11). Africans as well as Europeans that violated those newly enforced laws were persecuted. One of those laws required Africans “to be in possession of a pass book in the form of a registration book, registration certificate or identity card” (Int. Jurists 16). Highly degrading segregationist customs started appearing in the cities. Many places such as hotels and restaurants did not allow entrance to Blacks. As a result of the enduring discriminatory laws and policies against the African population, a voice of nationalism formed in Rhodesia in the 1950s and 1960s. After UDI was proclaimed, many Africans decided that violence was their only option and joined the armed struggle of national liberation. The second liberation war officially began in 1966 “with the battle of Chinhoyi between [Zimbabwean combatants] and Rhodesian Forces” (Bös 78). The early military attacks of the guerilla movements were quite unsuccessful. Therefore, they came to a halt, and physical and strategic trainings with foreign allegiances were conducted (Bös 78). Many Zimbabwean freedom fighters left the country and trained in guerilla warfare in Mozambique, Zambia or Tanzania. This secret emigration took place around the year 1970 (Palmer and Birch 9-10). “The rhetoric of freedom fighters [sic] called for the transformation of society[:] majority rule once and for all” (Palmer and Birch 10). Their lamentations described the stolen land, what they perceived as the most painful injustice. The guerilla fighters were referred to as ‘terrorists’ by the government (Int. Jurists 54). The narrator refers to this issue briefly in the story when she enumerates attitudes and interests that Nyasha exhibits. One of Nyasha’s questions concerns the fact that freedom fighters are referred to as terrorists. This is the most explicit reference to the Chimurenga war. Just as she did with the UDI, Dangarembga only touches on this national development without providing more information for the reader. The third allusion to national politics is made by Tambu, probably as a result of Nyasha’s influence. When Maiguru tells Tambu that she does not receive her salary, Tambu asks if the government took it, “[f]or [she] was beginning to understand that [their] Government was not a good one” (Dangarembga 103). Dangarembga merely hints at the rise of nationalist consciousness and the black Rhodesians’ physical resistance to the inhumane and oppressive minority government.

With Rhodesia undergoing such significant political changes, one must question why Dangarembga chose to omit these events almost entirely. The answer lies in a male-oriented nationalism. The years after independence of colonial rule were marked in most African countries by an intense nationalism and a search for a national identity. This process involved valuation and revaluation of the pre-colonial culture and customs. Nationalism included the acceptance of patriarchal structures and the silencing of gender inequalities (Bolzt 36). “[N]ationalism [was] constituted from the very beginning as a gendered discourse” (Bolzt 21). National allegories, produced by men, comprised gender codes that supported women’s exclusion from public life (Stratton 10). Men and women were assigned different roles in the cultural nationalist movement. Men were the link to the modern world, actively shaping the future of the country. Women were objectified and identified with tradition and nature. Women were fixated in their passive role with the help of romanticized national icons, such as the woman as embodiment of Africa (Stratton 172). The national liberators that fought colonial oppression were also traditional patriarchs, continuing oppression of women (Döring 176). “In the early male-authored novels of the 1960s and 1970s the [gender] condition was frequently subsumed within dominant public and political themes” (Wilson-Tagoe 178). Male African writers valorized traditional culture in order to oppose colonial misrepresentation (Stratton 173). Female African writers such as Dangarembga were critical of revaluations of traditional customs from which women’s rights suffered. Nationalist’s goal was to free the Zimbabwean people of the colonizer’s despotism, but not to free women from men’s despotism. Women that had helped guerilla fighters, or fought themselves, did not receive the same respect or compensation as their male companions (Wells 113). The exclusion of women’s rights has lead to heavy criticism of national African movements. Dangarembga’s text criticizes nationalism by omitting its voice. Her response to the silencing of women’s voices during nationalism is the silencing of national voices during women’s rebellions. The effect of Dangarembga’s authorial choice is a focus on patriarchy and women’s lives (Bravman and Montgomery 89). In this way, “*Nervous Conditions* function[ed] as a counter-narrative to the nascent nationalist discourse [...] in Zimbabwe” (Stone 113).

The omission of the national struggle in *Nervous Conditions* also functions as a critical response to Fanon's anti-colonial resistance literature. When Fanon discusses national identity and national culture, he talks of a gender-neutral mass of people. His colonial world is androcentric and rarely includes a woman, and if a woman appears in his text she is simply a body to be possessed or appropriated by the settler or the native (Plasa 123). The body of the male colonized lies at the focus of Fanon's exploration of the subaltern condition. The exclusion of the female colonized is overridden in *Nervous Conditions*. The female body becomes the prevalent site of resistance. Andrade explores how Dangarembga's text works as a critical response to Fanon's work:

[...] Dangarembga's forthright feminism combined with her elision from the story of the guerrilla struggle that Fanon so values might be read as riposte to Fanon's own elision of gendered politics from his analysis.[...] [I]t also implicitly indicts Fanon for writing the anxiety of colonialism as a lack of masculine agency, since he occasionally betrays the belief that the colonial subject is a masculine one [...]. Dangarembga tellingly recasts the Fanonian protagonist's masculine-coded desire for aggression and agency as a teenaged girl's suffering of an eating disorder, and [...] thereby exposing the Fanonian protagonist as (universally) male. (52)

Plasa describes Dangarembga's exclusion of the national struggle and the focus on the female subaltern as a "decentring" (128). However, Fanon's nationalism calls for a political education of the masses to open their minds and awaken their intelligence by "try[ing], relentlessly and passionately, to teach the masses that everything depends on them" (Fanon 159). He explains that "[i]ndividual experience [...] ceases to be individual, limited and shrunken and is enabled to open out into the truth of the nation" (Fanon 161). *Nervous Conditions* can be viewed as a work of national literature by the terms Fanon defines (Zwicker 12). The African novel has been shaped by men's view of what is political and what is relevant for the national struggle (Wilson-Tagoe 183). Feminists and Womanists have redefined what is considered political. In *Nervous Conditions* the concept of politics is redefined as everyday power relations experienced by women.

3.5. Colonizing the Mind

Colonialism is perpetuated in part by justifying to those in the colonising nation the idea that it is right and proper to rule over other peoples, and by getting

colonised people to accept their lower ranking in the colonial order of things – a process we can call ‘colonising the mind’. It operates by persuading people to internalise its logic and speak its language; to perpetuate the values and assumptions of the colonisers as regards the ways they perceive and represent the world. (McLeod 18)

Like patriarchy, colonialism “asserts certain representational systems which create an order of the world presented to individuals as ‘normal’ or ‘true’” (McLeod 174). Colonial politics used education as a technique to exercise power over the African population. Desired dearly by Africans, colonial education set a mental trap. It was highly manipulative and racist, forcing Western ideologies, histories and moralities onto Africans - depriving the indigenous of his dignity by demeaning his culture and language. The colonized were persuaded to renounce their cultural affiliations and to embrace the superior European culture. The internalization of another culture is referred to as the process of acculturation (Veit-Wild 187). In more detail, acculturation describes an adoption of beliefs and behaviors of the dominant group, an identification with the culture of the dominant group and the desire to achieve goals valued in the dominant society (Graves qtd. in Veit-Wild 187). As a result of acculturation, African students develop more individual thinking and feel less bound by tradition (Veit-Wild 188). The African students are “washed white” by their teachers who make sure their pupils are thoroughly acculturated (Veit-Wild 50). The longer students go to school, the more they are forced to forget about their background. They become alienated from their parents and their traditional culture. The concept of alienation has been much discussed in regard to African literature. It describes the result of the change from an African cultural system toward a Western system, usually mediated by modern education. Western education leads to severe alienation from one’s own language, culture, and context (Katrak 89). Alienated colonial subjects tend to be caught between Western culture and their own. *Nervous Conditions* conveys a Fanonian criticism of the colonial oppressive and unnatural environment that leads to radical alienation in the colonial subject (Booker 190). The most extremely alienated character in *Nervous Conditions* is Nyasha. Alienated from English and Shona culture, she is a hybrid torn between two sets of values¹¹. The estrangement often leads to emotions such as anger, disgust or embarrassment towards their traditional culture and families (Veit-Wild 188). *Nervous*

¹¹ Nyasha’s alienation is discussed in detail in section 4.3..

Conditions depicts this process of acculturation and alienation in the characters Nhamo and Tambu. Once Nhamo perceives a Western education and experiences Western conveniences “the poverty beg[ins] to offend him, or at the very least to embarrass him” (Dangarembga 7). His appearance changes dramatically. He grows healthily in size and weight, “[v]itamins had nourished his skin to a shiny smoothness” and his hair was “shiny with oil and smoothly combed” (Dangarembga 52). Tambu approves of these physical changes in contrast to the cultural changes such as the loss of the command of his mother tongue. “He had forgotten how to speak Shona. A few words escaped haltingly, ungrammatically and strangely accented”, Tambu recalls about his visits (Dangarembga 53). This reduces the communication between him and his family to few and insignificant interactions. However, in emotional situations and arguments Nhamo’s Shona skills magically reappear. Nhamo has been successfully westernized in the way that he identifies with the English language and intentionally rejects his native tongue, alienating himself further. His aphasia is “a ploy to consolidate an elitism based on his proximity to whiteness/Britishness” (Young 155). As part of Nhamo’s devaluation of his mother’s culture, he starts to disdain the corporeal work of a farmer and refuses to help his family during his visits. He begins to regard himself too good for the simple living conditions of his family, and uses excuses to avoid visiting their homestead. Nhamo’s sudden death is viewed by his mother as the “material confirmation of his cultural death” (Chennells 61). Tambu also has her own interpretation of her brother’s death. She thinks his presumptuousness and the overwhelming experiences of Westernized living and education lead up to his death. Therefore, Tambu perceives Nhamo’s death as a warning not to embrace the British culture imprudently. Although she promises herself not to be seduced by the comfort and not to become as arrogant and ignorant as her brother, Tambu comes dangerously close to be alienated from her family. Soon the nutritious and plentiful food at her uncle’s house show on Tambu’s body, and her experiences of a comfortable Western living show in her attitude. During Tambu’s first visit at the homestead after her stay at the mission, she is disgusted and embarrassed by the dirt and feels estranged from her mother. Realizing the change that Tambu undergoes, Mainini claims that Tambu has become ashamed of her.¹²

¹² Tambu’s alienation is discussed in detail in section 4.1..

On the ladder of mental invasion by the colonizer, the process of degradation is a step further from acculturation. This process describes the destruction of the native's dignity, identity and culture while contrasting it to the supremacy of the colonial culture. Spivak refers to an "epistemic violence" that "devalue[ed] their language, history and ways of seeing and expressing the world" (qtd. in Wisker 40). Africans were taught "to deny [...] their [own] dignity, their culture, even their history" (Palmer and Birch 7). Mainini warns her children that the 'Englishness' will kill them, and one can figuratively agree when considering the Western culture and ideology kills the native culture. "The effort by colonial powers to subvert indigenous culture can be seen as a more or less successful attempt at ethnocide" (Geller 147). Dangarembga depicts the seriousness of the death of one's cultural identity as a member of the community for oneself and for the community (Geller 138). Western education has been referred to as a more evil colonial weaponry than their military forces.

Colonialist educational policies were both racialized in terms of asserting the superiority of English language and culture, and gendered in terms of instituting different curricula for male and female students. [...] Colonialist curricula and the imbibing of English history and geography often went along with denying and denigrating indigenous cultures. (Katrak 93)

Fanon recalls the colonial theories on the Algerian native. At university, they were taught that the native was a born criminal, slacker and liar. Algerian students, receiving colonial education, came to accommodate themselves to the inherent stigma of their people (Fanon 239). Colonialism, with its "systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity", effects the mental condition of the colonized profoundly (Fanon 200). The infiltration with the English language, Western literature and ideologies results in a mental state of Africans where they accept their colonization (Katrak 92). Sartre refers to this sort of capitulation and acceptance of inferiority when he states that the native gives his consent (17). However, there comes a point when the colonized cannot take any more harm and humiliation, and a mental disorder evolves. "There is thus during this calm period of successful colonization a regular and important mental pathology which is the direct product of oppression" (Fanon 201). Hand in hand with the degradation of the native, the supremacy of the white race was deeply implanted in the minds of the colonized (Fanon 36).

When we consider the efforts made to carry out the cultural estrangement so characteristic of the colonial epoch, we realize that nothing has been left to chance and that the total result looked for by colonial domination was indeed to convince the natives that colonialism came to lighten their darkness. The effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the natives' heads the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation and bestiality. (Fanon 169)

"To lighten their darkness" is a typical phrase that was used by colonial missionaries. Christian beliefs formed a significant part of colonial ideology. While missionaries saw themselves as superior to other whites, having a higher goal than just gaining wealth, they iterated the colonial degradation of the natives and their culture. Fanon describes missions as institutions that implanted "foreign influences in the core of the colonized people" (32). He continues that "the Church in the colonies [was] the white people's Church" that called the native not to God's way but to the ways of the white man, the master, the oppressor (32). Dangarembga depicts how Tambu adopts the views of social hierarchy by Christian missionaries:

[The missionaries] were about God's business here in darkest Africa. They had given up the comforts and security of their own homes to come and lighten our darkness. It was a big sacrifice [...] [Their] self-denial and brotherly love did not go unrewarded. We treated them like minor deities. [...] Today [...] [t]hey are called expatriates [...] [b]ut they are deified in the same way as the missionaries were because they are white so that their coming is still an honour. [...] I used to feel guilty and unnatural for not being able to love the Whites as I ought. [I]t did not take long for me to learn that they were in fact more beautiful and then I was able to love them. (Dangarembga 105-106)

The Christian's indignity towards the black race is visible. Africans are associated with evil darkness and have to be saved (their darkness lightened) by the missionaries. In return for their salvation, Africans are expected to regard Whites as admirable and superior beings. Babamukuru is a member of the Christian missionary church and has adopted the Christian and Western norms (Veit-Wild 334). To prevent traditional Shona polygamy in his family, Babamukuru forces his brother to have a Christian wedding. Superimposing Christian morality onto Shona culture, Babamukuru echoes the colonial attack on indigenous life (Young 144). Tambu is also taught in Sunday school. The Christian notions of guilt and sin have become powerful concepts in Tambu's thinking. She elaborates on the intimidating effects that they hold on her:

I had grown to understand, very categorically, that sin was something to be avoided [...] because it was deadly. I could see it. it was definitely black, we were taught. it had well-defined edges, and it was square rather than round so that you knew where it ended. I worked like a predatory vacuum, drawing the incautious into itself and never letting them out. (Dangarembga 152)

Tambu, at first, supports Babamukuru's decision of a Christian wedding for her parents, while Nyasha, having a wider understanding of things, immediately warns her not to "assum[e] that Christian ways were progressive ways" (Dangarembga 150).

When Tambu is offered a scholarship at the nuns convent, Nyasha points out how the colonizers will brainwash her. She remarks that "it would be a marvelous opportunity [...] [t]o forget who you were, what you were and why you were that" (Dangarembga 182). Nyasha goes on debunking the colonial manipulation. She explains to Tambu that cognitively higher developed African children have to be assimilated to colonial beliefs early on in order to prevent rebellion in the future. Therefore, white Rhodesians make "a little space into which you were assimilated [...] [where] they could make sure that you behaved yourself" (Dangarembga 182). But she insists that this space must not be occupied. The African should not fall for the tricks and manipulations of the colonizer. Tambu counters that this opportunity will help her whole family out of poverty but Nyasha's mature mind sees the larger picture. Tambu improving her own status and helping her own family does not change the reality of over 4 million people being oppressed on the basis of their race. Anticipating that the white school will swallow up Tambu's African identity, her mother, niece and friends remind Tambu not to forget about her own people and culture. Tambu does not quite understand the anxiety and fuss about forgetting. She concludes that she would have to forget herself in order to forget all of them, which is not possible in her eyes. During a mental breakdown, in a very fragmented way, Nyasha condemns the entire colonial system and its manipulation:

'[My parents] have done it to me. [...] It's not their fault. They did it to them too. You know they did[.] [...] To both of them, but especially to him. They put him through it all. But it's not his fault, he's good'. [...] 'Why do they do it, Tambu,' she hissed bitterly, her face contorting with rage, 'to me and to you and to him? [...] They've taken us away. [...] All of us. They've deprived you of you, him of him, ourselves of each other. They've trapped us. But I won't be trapped, I'm not a good girl. I won't be trapped. (Dangarembga 204-205)

The “it” to which Nyasha refers comprises the colonizer’s imposition of their ideologies and Western beliefs onto the African mind. The passage above indicates how the colonizer created a self-image of Africans that infiltrated their minds and deprived them of their own selves. Nyasha also highlights the social hierarchy that colonialism implanted. The white settler, at the top of the social pyramid, rules over the African élite who rules over the poor African mass. As an object of colonial hegemony and colonial power over the African mind, she takes her history book and tears it apart. Colonial history was full of myths that denied the indigenous people their part in history, hence Nyasha’s accusation of their history being lies is justified (Palmer and Birch 7). In another passage, Nyasha reflects on Chido’s scholarship and highlights the dynamics of guilt and appeasement by the colonizer. The white missionary, Mr. Baker, insists on helping Chido to be accepted at the same school to which he sends his own sons. Babamukuru cannot afford this private school and would rather Chido attends secondary school at the mission amongst African Rhodesians. Tambu recollects Nyasha’s comments on these events;

Not surprisingly, since Whites were indulgent towards promising young black boys in those days, provided that the promise was a peaceful promise, a grateful promise to accept whatever was handed out to them and not to expect more, Chido was offered a place at the school and a scholarship to go with it. Nyasha was sure that Mr Baker had had a hand in that scholarship. To ease his conscience, she said. [...] Mr Baker feels better about sending his sons there in the first place. Really! The things they get up to to pull the wool over our eyes. [...] Without the scholarship [...] Mr Baker would have had his sons’ superior education nibbling away at his conscience. (Dangarembga 108)

Nyasha reveals the subtle manipulation of ‘gifted’ Africans by white Rhodesians that can underlie something like a scholarship. The guilt of the colonizer for the historical injustice and economic deprivation of Africans should be forgiven due to beneficial acts at the present. Africans are put in the position of the grateful beneficiary in order to make them content and peaceful.

3.6. The Colonized

Dangarembga does not simply create flat male characters or evil patriarchs. The men in *Nervous Conditions* are also victims of colonial oppression. The reader gets the most insight into psychological effects of colonial politics via Nyasha. She warns Tambu about colonial education and Western schools, and she critically analyzes her own predicament as well as her father's. He represents a class of educated Africans that were inculcated with Western culture in order to spread Western ideologies and govern the African masses. With reference to postcolonial theories of Frantz Fanon and Homi Bhabha, Babamukuru's nervous condition will be analyzed.

In the system of patriarchy men are superior to women and, therefore, hold authority and power. However, Dangarembga shows that, although sexism is a universal power structure, the colonial rule added racism and its discriminating economics and hierarchy. Third world women are at the bottom of the hierarchy, bound by gender and race. Dangarembga does not excuse the patriarchal behavior of her male characters but she depicts their complex position in colonialism. Certain instances in the novel hint at the racist power relation that supersedes the gender constructed hierarchy. For instance, the schoolteacher, Mr. Matimba, stands for authority and control. As the mediator for Tambu, when she sells her maize in Umtali, he speaks to a white lady "most sorrowfully and most beseechingly" (Dangarembga 29). His manners become subservient – the power structure of colonizer and colonized is prevalent. We also experience Babamukuru going from the powerful patriarch to the powerless African. At the predominantly white Sacred Heart convent, Babamukuru seems tense and helpless, confronted with the racial segregation of rooms. "[H]is nerves [are] sharply on the edge" facing the luxurious ground and estates as well as the expensive cars of the arriving white parties (Dangarembga 197). All of this reminds of the dividing gap between the wealth of the white and the poverty of the black Rhodesian population. The economic deprivation of the native is the result of the highly racist laws and regulations by the colonizer. Hence, the wealth of the whites as the result of the colonizers violent invasion and economic oppression of the indigenous people functions as a reminder.

During Nyasha's mental breakdown, she refers to the manipulation of the native's identity by the colonizer. Nyasha alludes to the colonial assimilation of gifted Africans, such as Babamukuru, and the construction of a small group of an African élite to carry out colonial views and beliefs. Their minds have been shaped into a copy of the Western mind. "He's a good boy, a good munt. A bloody good kaffir,' she informed in sneering sarcastic tones" and in a fake Rhodesian accent (Dangarembga 204). Nyasha uses *kaffir* and *munt*, derogatory and disparaging terms for blacks, to mock the white settler's racism. She realizes that the colonial system produces and manipulates intellectuals such as Babamukuru. They provide them with a comfortable position and trap them there. She pities her father and she does not blame him, but instead blames the colonizer who has molded his identity. Babamukuru's bad nerves are symptoms of his own nervous condition, which results from the effects of colonization. His contradictory statements and his tense moods mirror a 'divided' consciousness which he has been developing since his childhood (Veit-Wild 52). He suffers from his constructed status as native intellectual. In his preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Sartre describes the native élite:

The European élite undertook to manufacture a native élite. They picked out promising adolescents; they branded them, as with a red-hot iron, with the principles of Western culture; they stuffed their mouths full with high-sounding phrases, grand glutinous words that stuck to the teeth. After a short stay in the mother country they were sent home, white-washed. These walking lies had nothing left to say to their brothers; they only echoed. (7)

Babamukuru represents a member of this native élite. Recalling her grandmother's stories, Tambu echoes the colonizer's attitude towards the young and promising African Babamukuru. "[The colonizers] thought he was a good boy, cultivatable, in the way that land is, to yield harvests that sustain the cultivator" (Dangarembga 19). He was educated by missionaries and studied in England. Babamukuru is headmaster of a mission school and is one of the first members of the African Christian élite (Torti, Kilb and Stein 249). Babamukuru is a member of the "colonial bourgeois élite that Fanon sees as mere imitators of their European masters" (Booker 192). His status is authorized by Western educational achievements (Booker 193). Babamukuru accepts the superiority of the Western culture and shows no signs of physical resistance. Babamukuru has been appropriated successfully by the colonizer;

The native intellectual has clothed his aggressiveness in his barely veiled desire to assimilate himself to the colonial world. He has used his aggressiveness to serve his own individual interests. (Fanon 47)

“[The native intellectual] is the living haunt of contradictions which run the risk of becoming insurmountable” (Fanon 175). The awareness of his imitative function “quietly allows his body’s implosion” (Holland 134).

Sartre describes how the native élite stopped just echoing the European’s voices and started to speak for themselves: “[V]oices still spoke of [European] humanism but only to reproach [us] with [our] inhumanity” (7). This generation of natives “could neither reject [European values] completely nor yet assimilate them” (Fanon 8). With the character of Nyasha, Dangarembga gives this generation a voice. This voice tells us, Europeans, that “[we] are making [them] into monstrosities; [our] humanism claims [they] are at one with the rest of humanity but [our] racist methods set [them] apart” (Fanon 8). Fanon describes this period in colonialism the decolonization; “the colonized masses mock at [European] values, insult them and vomit them up” (34). The metaphor of vomiting the colonizers hypocrisy also applies to Nyasha’s vomiting Western food/ideologies.

In his essay *Of Mimicry and Man*, Bhabha appropriates Fanon’s concept of the native intellectual. He highlights the hypocritical humanism of colonial endeavors. He quotes texts of early observations on indigenous societies where colonial authorities plan religious reforms and moral projects for the colonized (Bhabha 87). However, these texts state clearly that only “partial reforms” will secure that the colonial subjects stay subservient and in need of the colonizer’s protection (Bhabha 87). Lord Macaulay, a colonial administrator, explains that in his opinion “a class of interpreters between [them] and the millions whom [they] govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” has to be created (qtd. in Bhabha 87). These “project[s] simply instal[] power structures to confirm, once more, the general assumption of European superiority by subjecting [natives] to foreign cultural norms” (Döring 56). Bhabha refers to this type of people – colonized minds, raised and molded by colonial schools and missionaries – as mimics. He states that the mechanism of mimicry is “one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and

knowledge” (Bhabha 85). The strategy of mimicry is a strategy of exclusion of the majority of ‘bad’ natives via the inclusion of the fewer mimicking ‘good’ natives (Childs 79). Bhabha explains that colonial mimicry aimed at the creation of “a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (86). The colonizer desired to create an Other that resembles him without ever becoming him (Bhabha 86). Hence, to be anglicized like Babamukuru and Nyasha is “emphatically not to be English” (Bhabha 87). As mimic, Babamukuru has ingested and enforces colonial rule (Holland 124). He resembles the colonizer but is denied his authenticity. He is little interested in the preservation of traditional African practices (Holland 130). Babamukuru is the example of the mimic that desires and accepts the “partial representation in hopes of becoming ‘authentic’, of gaining comparable status to the colonizer” (Holland 124). However, just like the red dust from the passing busses ruins the hygienic atmosphere in his white mansion, Babamukuru’s inauthentic state nags at his consciousness (Holland 129). His bad nerves reflect his nervous condition of being just a partial representation (Bhabha 88).

However, Bhabha argues that mimicry also entails possibilities of resistance for the colonized. The ambivalence of colonial mimicry being alike but different “produces a disturbing effect on the authority of the colonizer (Bhabha 86)”.

[M]imicry results in fantasies of menace; but this is a menace produced by (or forced upon) the colonized. With mimicry the authoritative discourse becomes displaced as the colonizer sees traces of *himself* in the colonized: as sameness slides into otherness. [...] [M]imicry stems from the colonized subject’s peculiar awareness of cultural, political and social inauthenticity, of being ideologically constructed and fixed in representation [...]. A sudden awareness of inauthenticity, of authority’s constructed and assumed guise, is the menace of mimicry. (Childs 79)

Just by acting his part in the colonial system Babamukuru disturbs the difference on which the colonizer bases his power and authority. As the mimicking headmaster, Babamukuru repeats and authorizes colonial authority even though he is “not quite/not white” (Bhabha 92). His presence points at “unsettling similarities [and] [t]he lines between the colonizer and colonized are thus blurred; the rules and means of colonial subjection are challenged” (Holland 124). Nyasha is conscious of her father’s “inauthenticity” and “guise”. She is aware that the imitation of the colonizer differs in

“liberty, status, and rights” (Childs 80). Nyasha, therefore, refers to her father as a “historical artefact” (Dangarembga 162). Whereas he represents the authorized, “appropriate objec[t] of a colonialist chain of command”, Nyasha represents the menace (Bhabha 88). She threatens the colonizer with “the displacing gaze [as the] disciplinary double” (Bhabha 86). Nyasha uncovers colonialism’s hypocrisy and lies. She refuses to play the female African role that the white settler has ascribed to her, and which her own father enforces on her. She refuses to be appropriated as the decent daughter of the good kaffir.

Instead of being appropriated, Nyasha adopts an interstitial identity as hybrid. In postcolonial theory, hybridity refers to transcultural forms produced by colonization and people’s migration (Wisker 189). It is used to describe phenomena that differ from conventional oppositions or transgress boundaries such as colonizer/colonized. Cultural hybridity exposes the notion of purity as an illusion and highlights the heterogeneity of all culture (Döring 35-36). It breaks down the symmetry and duality of self/other, inside/outside (Bhabha qtd. in Childs 83). Similar to mimicry, hybridity unsettles the Manichean world of the colonizer and questions assumptions of authenticity (Edwards 141). Nyasha finds herself torn between incompatible cultures. Her existence in a hybrid, transitory, in-between space challenges binary oppositions and disturbs conventional patterns of thought (McLeod 217). As a result of hybridity, Nyasha experiences a sense of dislocation, lack of belonging and identity crisis (Edwards 140). In the depiction of Nyasha, Dangarembga holds a postcolonial view of identity as discursive and not stable or pure. Nyasha’s identity is composed from different locations, England and Rhodesia, and from different sources, Western and Shona. From the in-between position, the hybrid has the power to actively influence the transfer of cultural inheritance, and not passively accept customs and ideas. Dangarembga has successfully made Nyasha a postcolonial agent of change (McLeod 219). Nyasha questions, challenges and transforms received ideas and traditional knowledge. “Hybrid identities are never total and complete in themselves [...]. Instead, they remain perpetually in motion, pursuing errant and unpredictable routes, open to change and reinscription” (McLeod 219). Many

descriptions of Nyasha elicit a sort of constant agitation of her mind. Nyasha's consistent challenge of the status-quo turns out to be too overwhelming for her¹³.

Less overt than the feminist statement but powerful nevertheless, *Nervous Conditions* comprises a black nationalist agenda (Matzke 44, Andrade 47). Dangarembga denounces the colonial system with all its manipulative mechanisms. Nyasha exclaims that "[it]'s bad enough [...] when a country gets colonized, but when the people do as well!" (Dangarembga 150). She condemns the colonizers for the intellectual violence exercised over the African. This is a highly significant political standing of Dangarembga which is echoed throughout the novel, mainly via the character Nyasha, and to a lesser and simplified extent by Mainini. Like Fanon, Dangarembga stresses the unhealthy and nervous conditions from which the colonized suffer. In reference to his description of a political education for the masses, Dangarembga's text awakens people's resistance and awareness for the mental repercussions of colonization, and teaches the colonized that it depends on them (Fanon 158). Although feministic in attitude, *Nervous Conditions* makes the reader aware that men are also victims (Veit-Wild 334). They are victims of colonial oppression and the colonial discourse into which they are born. However, the women in the novel are the ones that develop critical awareness, determination and strength in order to rebel and voice their resistance (Veit-Wild 334). This will be discussed in the next chapter.

4. Women in *Nervous Conditions*

Dangarembga addresses the complex ways in which women are colonized and how they challenge patriarchy and colonialism. Her female characters exemplify how "precolonial values, postcolonial developments, and the psychological impact of colonialism are negotiated" (Berndt 8). The patriarchal decolonization comprises the disengagement of the identities that colonial education and local tradition have created for women, which "perpetuate women's subordinate status while ensuring male

¹³ Nyasha's character is analyzed in detail in section 4.3..

privilege” (Katrak 8). Through their resistance of patriarchal roles, male domination, etc, Dangarembga’s female characters transgress traditional literary images. But they also play their subaltern roles:

Their engagement with masculinity ranges from passive acceptance, through admiration, aspiration, and emulation, to active and confrontational challenge. Significantly, most of these responses are toward Babamukuru, the identified icon of masculinity. (Mugambi 210)

In one way or another, all the women in the novel find themselves in Fanon’s nervous condition. The novel focuses on the revolts of five female characters. These revolts are made explicit by the narrator on the first page telling us: “my story is [...] about my escape and Lucia’s; about my mother’s and Maiguru’s entrapment; and about Nyasha’s rebellion” (Dangarembga 1). We get an immediate estimation on the statuses of their independence – escaped, entrapped, ongoing rebellion. Their different personalities and specific conditions result in different forms of resistance. The rebellions vary in their aggressiveness. The older women, Maiguru and Mainini, represent the passive acceptance of masculinity and the traditional African femininity (Mugambi 210). Although both women voice the inequalities and prejudices against them, they “appear to consciously accept them” (Mugambi 210). The resistance of Maiguru and Mainini starts too late and is too weak. Alternatively, Lucia and Nyasha are very aggressive and confrontational. Their approaches differ greatly when it comes to idealism. Nyasha is radical and idealistic, Lucia is pragmatic and resourceful. Tambu’s rebellion, similar to Lucia’s approach, is less aggressive but more inconsistent. Her political consciousness starts to develop towards the end of the novel. Tambu’s ultimate success lies outside the story and is embodied in her accomplishment as narrator. The tactics and strategies to rebel against oppression are “part of women’s ways of knowing and acting” (Katrak 8). In addition, their resources are limited, hence, the women use their bodies and food as sites of resistance. The theme of alienation also plays a central role in the lives of all the characters, especially in the development of Tambu and Nyasha. The present chapter analyzes the different rebellions of Tambu, Nyasha, Maiguru, Mainini and Lucia, and concludes with a brief outline of a sociological study that shows Zimbabwean women’s active sabotage of patriarchy.

4.1. Tambu

Tambu is the protagonist of the novel, therefore the most prominent and most accessible character to the reader, closely followed by Nyasha (Gorle 13). Through the eyes of a more mature Tambu, the reader experiences young Tambu's struggle with patriarchy and colonialism. In her early childhood, Tambu shows resilience and resourcefulness.

While [her brother] takes it for granted that he will be educated and will enter the wider world of knowledge, opportunity, and development, Tambu knows that the odds of prejudice and tradition are heavily stacked against her and that she has to put up a determined struggle. (Palmer 179)

Tambu's path becomes clear; "she is determined to free herself from the double-bind which her mother fatalistically calls 'the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other'" (Gorle 13) – the multiple jeopardy of third world women. Tambu rebels against her mother's fatalism and her father's sexism. Due to her brother's death, Tambu gets the chance to move into her uncle's house and enter the mission school. Once content with the possibility to acquire an education she loses her rebellious nature. In her urge to flee patriarchy, Tambu faces the danger of alienation from her Shona culture and the infiltration of the colonizer's racist ideologies. Freeing herself from poverty and sexism at the homestead, she risks being assimilated into the role of the mimicking colonized who takes up the inferior role with her consent. The relationship with her cousin stimulates Tambu's mental development. Nyasha, eloquent and far-minded, points out colonial and patriarchal oppression. Towards the end of the novel we experience the beginning of Tambu's mind sharpening. Her ultimate escape, however, is demonstrated by her status as narrator which is discussed separately in the next section.

At a very young age, she realizes she is being discriminated on the basis of being a girl. Her father and brother have her know that she is not to be educated but to learn how to cook and clean for a husband. Little Tambu, unable to accept such explanations, rebels against her family's suppression. She grows her own mealies to raise money for her school fees. Tambu's successful cultivation is almost spoiled by her chauvinistic older brother. However, with the help of her schoolteacher, Tambu is able to come up with the

money. Her brother's sexist comments raise Tambu's temper throughout their early childhood. The moment she leaves the homestead to live with her uncle at the mission, Tambu describes her move as an emancipating step for herself. She also sees it as a lesson for the women she leaves behind that "circumstances were not immutable" (Dangarembga 58). However, after Tambu's early rebellious behavior at the homestead, she turns into the subservient niece, now that she has already acquired her emancipated wish to be educated. "[S]he loses her earlier determination and independence of mind in the shadow of her uncle's benevolence and power" (Uwakweh 81). As the poor relative brought into the family, "almost as an object of charity, Tambu accepts the need to conform to Babamukuru's wishes and prescriptions" (Palmer 191). Her uncle's example of success is the model which Tambu craves. The story of his childhood, as told by her grandmother, imprints two messages in Tambu's mind: endure and obey (Androne 273). If Tambu wants to follow the road of her uncle, she must "suspend her reason, her moral judgment and her sense of political justice" (Androne 273). This would lead to another mimic – assimilated and complicitous with the colonial power structure. After the physical fight between her uncle and cousin, the narrator reflects on her thought processes of the time:

If I had been more independent in my thinking then, I would have thought the matter through to a conclusion. But in those days it was easy for me to leave tangled thoughts knotted, their loose ends hanging. I didn't want to explore the treacherous mazes that such thoughts led into [...] because there, I knew, I would find myself and I was afraid I would not recognise myself [...] [having] taken a wrong turning. So [...] I took refuge in the image of the grateful poor female relative. (Dangarembga 118)

Tambu utilizes "a strategy to impede the momentum of a movement which threatens to erupt into action" (Basu 262). Ambiguities and sexist discrimination are blocked off by a kind of radar. She complies with the system of power prevailing in order to improve her status. Like Lucia, Tambu's rebellion and promotion works within the patriarchal system (Härting 241). Fortunately, her insightful and sophisticated cousin keeps reminding Tambu of the importance to voice social injustices. Tambu knows that she is sacrificing a part of herself at that time, and is "embarrassed with [her] acquired insipidity" (Dangarembga 118). Her approach to choose her battles and to preserve her energy, unlike Nyasha "who [is] burning herself out" (Dangarembga 119), seems to be the more successful strategy in the long run.

After adhering to the role of the grateful and subservient niece for a long time, Tambu's inner struggle finally breaks out on the day of her parent's wedding. This wedding is Babamukuru's solution to the threat of Jeremiah considering Lucia as a second wife. Traditionally, if a wife has become too worn and tired to do the chores and work on the field by herself, a second wife was brought into the family. Raised strictly Christian by the missionaries, this solution is unacceptable for Babamukuru. Therefore, great and costly efforts are put forward to create a grandiose wedding. Tambu, however, does not approve because she disagrees that her parents, who have lived together for nineteen years and have four children together, should suddenly have to adhere to Christian standards. Babamukuru, the assimilated colonized, superimposes Western culture onto Shona culture, devaluing the latter just like the colonizer did. The previous existence of her family is degraded and condemned to a sin. Tambu refers to the wedding as "ridiculous", "a comic show" and "a mockery of the people [she] belonged to" (Dangarembga 165). "Tambu's realization, however, is tempered by her continuing admiration for Babamukuru and his language of rightness and sin [...]" (Willey 76). She still recognizes him as "nearly divine as any human being could hope to be" (Dangarembga 166-167). The reverence for her uncle's achievements and authority stunts her growth of criticism and saps the energy that she had shown in her childhood. Sin is a concept that missionary schooling has burned into Tambu's consciousness. The realization that Babamukuru indirectly claims that her being comes out of sin and her existence is illegitimate confuses her profoundly, since he is also the one that describes her as the well developed and perfect daughter (Willey 77). These contradictions in her uncle's statements make her mind run in circles and eventually split in half.

[H]ow I had suffered over the question of that wedding. [...] [H]ow my mind had raced and spun and ended up splitting into two disconnected entities that had long, frightening arguments with each other, very vocally, there in my head, about what ought to be done, the one half maniacally insisting ongoing, the other half equally maniacally refusing to consider it. (Dangarembga 169)

Tambu suffers from the tension between opposing worldviews, and her inability to reconcile them (Young 145). "The reconciliation proves especially difficult for her as the Western progressive lens she has put her faith in attempts to relegate her family's beliefs, customs, and existence to specters of primitivism" (Young 145). She briefly

considers telling Babamukuru how she feels but immediately dismisses the idea as untenable (Stone 119). Tambu's mind is split in half between the obedient cousin and the resistant Shona girl. "In order to acknowledge her true feelings on the matter, Tambu must re-examine her opinion of Babamukuru" (Stone 119). This leads to the destruction of the image of his infallibility and the severance of "her development from Babamukuru's desires" (Stone 119). "The loyalty to her mother therefore provokes Tambu[s] first critical judgment of Babamukuru" (Berndt 98). Tambu, although grateful for all the opportunities her uncle provided, feels that "the price he was exacting from her was too high to pay" (Stone 120). The morning of the wedding, Tambu, still unable to articulate her objection to Babamukuru, "uses her body as a sign of resistance" (Young 145). When she wants to get up, her muscles refuse to "obey [her] half-hearted commands" (Dangarembga 168). In a way she is paralyzed by the part of herself that does not want to go to the wedding, the part that reveals Babamukuru as a fraud (Treiber 94). In contrast to Nyasha's and Lucia's aggressive approaches, Tambu's body, immobile on the bed, enacts resistance passively (Young 145). Tambu's mind starts slipping out of her body and watches the scene from a place "where [Babamukuru] could not reach [her]" (Dangarembga 168). Finally, she has the courage to tell her uncle that she is not going to the wedding. In his usual categorical way, Babamukuru rants about her being a bad girl and spoiled. He accuses Tambu to be ungrateful and disrespectful. After these accusations, Babamukuru threatens Tambu with all kinds of punishments, from stopping to buy clothes to sending her back to the homestead (Dangarembga 169). Tambu's refusal to go to the wedding, represents her biggest act of rebellion which has maturing repercussions for her emancipation (Treiber 94). She realizes how making her own decision against her uncle's will was significant in developing her identity. The spiritual growth succeeding Tambu's mental upheaval is characteristic for womanist stories (Ogunyemi 74). Beforehand, decisions about Tambu's life were made mainly by others. Nevertheless, one part of her still feels she did wrong by disobeying Babamukuru. This part, masochistically, embraces the punishments given by her uncle (Dangarembga 171).

Tambu's move from her squalid life at the homestead to a Western middle class life at the mission threatens to lead to a psychological colonization (Booker 191). This complex

process comprises the alienation from Shona culture, the assimilation into Western culture and the colonizer's belief systems which entail a degradation of the Shona culture and racism. Arriving at Babamukuru's house, Tambu is overwhelmed by the Western commodities and comforts. Her uncle is much wealthier than she has ever imagined. For the young Tambu, his house resembles a palace, mansion or castle. Remembering her brother bragging, she starts to understand that he was not exaggerating. She comes to see how this luxurious living seduced her brother. In her eyes, Babamukuru is God and his house heaven. Therefore, she immediately tries to suppress the feelings of joy and comfort, guarding herself against the "enticing plenty" her uncle's house offers (Matzke 43). She tries to "remain as aloof and unimpressed as possible" (Dangarembga 70). Instead she reminds herself of her mother, sisters and their poor living conditions, and the purpose of her studies: "to play the leading role in redeeming the fortunes of her father's house [and] to demonstrate that a woman can be a successful standard bearer" (Palmer 183). At the beginning of her stay at the mission, Tambu is very confident that she will not change her identity but only extend and improve it. However, living in a comfortable middle class Western environment and gaining a Western education starts to alienate Tambu from her family and the Shona culture. In her eagerness to rid herself of the restrictions of her patriarchal family and to gain the best education possible, Tambu drifts further and further away from the homestead. "The farther Tambu travels from home, the more 'dirty' and distasteful [her home] becomes to her [and] like her brother, Tambu risks internalizing colonial perspectives that render everything 'native' unworthy" (Aegerter 236). During her stay at the mission she is offered a scholarship for a white girls' convent. As only one of six black Rhodesian girls in the entire school, Tambu joins the convent, Sacred Heart. Fleeing from her family's patriarchy, Tambu "comes dangerously close to incarceration in racist assimilationist structures" (Aegerter 235-236). Tambu's acculturation threatens to disconnect her from her Shona identity and to render her alienated such as Nyasha. Dangarembga shows that there is a valid danger of forgetting oneself and one's identity in circumstances of such a radical change of lifestyle and culture as well as the impact of colonial education (Young 155). Sugnet asks the crucial question in his article 'Dangarembga's Feminist Reinvention of Fanon':

[H]ow [can Tambu] pursue her dream of education and upward mobility without becoming an agent of colonial hegemony and suffering losses similar to those suffered by Nhamo and Babamukuru [?]. (42)

Numerous reasons play a role in Tambu's ability to negotiate between her Shona ancestry and new Western influences. First, her connection with the Shona culture is deeply rooted with all her childhood experiences and memories. In contrast to Nyasha, Tambu has a "bodily belonging and anchoring" to her childhood places such as the river Nyamarira (Katrak 137). She possesses this "genuine layer [...] to which [she] can always cling" (Minh-Ha 94). The reader experiences Tambu's love and longing for Nyamarira. She describes the river as her "flowing, tumbling, musical playground" and as the only thing she was sad to leave behind on her way to freedom (Dangarembga 59, 186). The river is a meeting place for women. It functions as a symbol for the Shona community. Second, Tambu's dead brother serves her as a warning. His detestable presumptuousness and arrogance remind her to stay grateful and remember the hard life of the homestead. Third, Tambu is reminded several times by friends and family about the danger of alienation. After Tambu receives pleas not to forget her friends and family, she wonders why everybody urges her to remember – she does not realize the danger of assimilation yet. Mainini warns Tambu several times, and points out that too much "Englishness" can be lethal (Dangarembga 207). Fourth, Nyasha's insights as well as her deteriorating mental state warn Tambu about the process of alienation and mental colonization. In their private talks, Nyasha directly raises Tambu's awareness regarding colonial manipulation. Tambu comes to realize, as Nyasha has warned her, that "escape from her father's sexism into colonial racism is no escape at all" (Aegerter 234). In order not to succumb to a kind of aphasia that Nhamo showed, Tambu makes a compromise (Willey 78). While exploring the Western culture, she "remains connected to her family and landscape in physical and emotional ways" (Willey 78). At the end of the novel, Tambu has come to acknowledge and appreciate her mother's traditional knowledge and wisdom. She also comments on the critical thoughts that she starts to develop towards an unlimited embrace of Western culture:

Was I being careful enough? I wondered. For I was beginning to have a suspicion, no more than the seed of a suspicion, that I had been too eager to leave the homestead and embrace the 'Englishness' of the mission; and after that the more concentrated 'Englishness' of Sacred Heart[, the convent]. (Dangarembga 207-208)

When Tambu arrives at the mission, she lacks Nyasha's perceptivity and insights (Torti, Kilb and Stein 252). She is more pragmatic than her ideological cousin. Thoughts on ambiguities and complex situations are suppressed by Tambu. In this way Tambu protects herself from issues she cannot handle at the time, unlike Nyasha who tackles everything (Torti, Kilb and Stein 252). However, Nyasha teaches her to question things that appear "fixed, 'natural', or predetermined" (Berndt 111). Through Nyasha, Tambu increasingly gets an insight into the contradictions that surround their lives and the "interconnection of patriarchal and colonial oppression" (Berndt 84). Experiencing Nyasha's struggle and suffering helps Tambu understand her own situation as well as the issues of the women around her (Matzke 46). Nyasha also benefits from these talks and discussions between cousins, in the form of female companionship she was not getting from the girls at her school. Thus, the close friendship between the cousins promotes the importance of female community. Aegerter states that Tambu and Nyasha "engage in a dialectic of autonomy and community as a way to retrieve and to conceive individual (women's) and cultural (African) 'wholeness'" (235). The aim towards a "wholeness" of one's identity resembles the novel's womanist agenda.

Although Tambudzai and Nyasha are "whole" as individuals, it is only in their friendship that their greatest fullness and integrity of identity are experienced; it is, in other words, within community rather than individuality that African's women's autonomy is fully realized. (Aegerter 2324)

Nyasha and Tambu complement each other. Apart they represent split subjects, "alienated from themselves and from their traditional culture by oppression of their own culture as it intersects and collides with colonial patriarchy" (Aegerter 235). Nyasha's self-destructive way of rebellion is a "vivid symbol of protest" that functions as crucial warning for Tambu (Holland 134). With the help of her cousin's rebellion, Tambu acquires the "sort of revolutionary consciousness that Fanon calls for throughout *The Wretched of the Earth*" (Zwicker 18).

In retrospect, Tambu's success is viewed critically by herself (Torti, Kilb and Stein 253). She breaches ties with female companions. Her pragmatism is useful at times, but it is also selfish. "By pursuing her dreams of autonomy, Tambu begins to disregard the needs of the community of women" (Aegerter 236). Tambu knows that her mother

refuses to eat and live because of her entering the white girls convent. Nevertheless, she is not willing to give up her goal to gain the best education possible. Similarly, Tambu acknowledges Nyasha's bad mental condition and recognizes that their close relationship helps to calm her cousin's mind. These circumstances do not affect her decision to leave her cousin to follow her own goal. At the convent, Tambu does not take the time to respond to the cousin's letters. She does not even respond to Nyasha's dearest letter in which she admits how badly she misses Tambu and their talks, and how lonely she is without her. These memories carry the feeling of guilt. The reader recognizes that Tambu's success includes sacrifices. Tambu sacrifices the closeness to her mother in order to escape poverty and the closeness to her cousin in order to gain a more sophisticated education (Sizemore 72). Unlike Lucia who succeeds in her undertakings and shows strong female companionship, Tambu neglects her mother's and cousin's calls for help.

Tambu's aspirations and success at school challenge the traditional role of women and its subalternity (Chennells 74). She revolts against "her brother's obnoxious display of authority and power", her father's sexism and her mother's fatalistic acceptance (Uwakweh 80). In two of her most important moments of female resistance Tambu uses her body and food. At the homestead, in order to afford primary education she cultivates a maize field all by herself despite her father's reluctance. Several years later, she disobeys her uncle's orders. Her mind being split by opposing forces, it is her body that takes initiative and renders her temporarily paralyzed. Similar to Lucia, Tambu's rebellion evolves from within the system. With the support of her uncle, Tambu is provided with better schooling and living conditions that promote her studying. However, "Tambu's growing awareness involves the shedding of important childhood myths such as the divinity of her beloved Babamukuru" or the belief that the acquisition of an education presents the solution to female oppression (Gorle 184). Nyasha plays an important role in Tambu's evolving awareness. She "raises [Tambu's] consciousness about the politics of language, culture, gender, and colonialism in its various forms" (Gorle 185). Tambu is able to keep esteem for certain aspects of the traditional Shona culture and respect for her mother's knowledge. On the last page, the reader discovers that Tambu will not embrace the English culture imprudently (Dangarembga 208). A

suggestion that Dangarembga provides for a post-colonial identity formation are “to retain both pride of origin and a critical stance on the process of [Western] education” (Geller 150). However, Tambu’s ultimate success lies outside the story.

4.2. Developing a Voice

Nervous Conditions is a homodiegetic retrospective narrative of Tambu’s “coming-to-consciousness” (Murray 189). Irele stresses that the “transformation of [the] mental landscape” plays a significant role in modern African literature (34). The prevalence of Tambu’s mental development in Dangarembga’s text illustrates this. Tambu’s escape does not take place within her story but outside of it, where she develops a critical awareness of the ramifications of domination (Uwakweh 82). Dangarembga starts and ends her novel with a comment on the protagonist’s development towards her authorship. Dangarembga emphasizes the significance of the success of a young black Rhodesian woman to achieve agency and voice. Stone-Mediatore calls for this when she writes “[n]arration that serves a feminist and democratic politics must also redescribe ‘agency’” (150). “Tambu achieves voice through narration, an act that gives her liberation from patriarchal-imposed silence and offers hope in the resilience and success of female challenge” (Uwakweh 78).

Tambu tells her coming of age story in retrospect. Dangarembga makes it explicit throughout the novel that the narrator Tambu views her childhood from an adult’s perspective (Veit-Wild 336). Therefore, there is a clear difference between narrated and narrative time. The narrative voice switches between adult Tambu, who comments critically, and child Tambu, who describes her experience from a more naïve perspective (Berndt 81). However, the adult narrator remains a mystery to the reader. We do not know “her physical location or how much time has elapsed between the recorded events and the moment of scripture” (Treiber 97). But we do know that she has become the author of this story, and we can infer her state of awareness from the numerous comments and opinions that she gives on the events and people. The descriptions of adult Tambu display a “wicked sense of humor. [...] She has an especially delicate touch

when caricaturing her father, Jeremiah” (Gorle 185). “Words like ‘always’ and ‘never’ were meaningful to my father, who thought in absolutes and whose mind consequently made great leaps in antagonistic directions when it leapt at all” (Dangarembga 25). Emphasizing the maturation Tambu undergoes, the novel contrasts the narration of the child Tambu with the opinion of adult Tambu (Berndt 81). Whereas young Tambu accepts the losses as well as gains on her way to the best education, adult Tambu “creates a critical distance between herself and the world of modernity through ironic statements on the nature of progress, the hypocrisy of the colonial system of education, and other indices of development” (Willey 69). “The retrospective narrative voice, acting in dialogic tandem and tension with the naïve Tambu, creates a narrative friction” (Aegerter 236). The younger Tambu intends to follow her uncle’s example of advancement– “that of the triumphing, assimilated, unified self complicitous with the colonial power structure” (Androne 273). However, refusing to “suspend her reason, her moral judgment and her sense of political justice” Tambu develops into a politically conscious adult that critically comments on her childhood experiences (Androne 273). Tambu’s narration of her childhood resembles the notion of reflective practice in Teresa de Lauretis’ conception of subjectivity (Alcoff 425). Tambu acquires agency through the process of consciousness described by Lauretis as politically analyzing and interpreting one’s history with the knowledge and meaning available at the time (Alcoff 425).

In the conclusion of the novel, the narrator describes the beginning of her mental development which leads to the moment when she is able to set down the story:

Quietly, unobtrusively and extremely fitfully, something in my mind began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed, bringing me to this time when I can set down this story. It was a long and painful process for me, that process of expansion. It was a process whose events stretched over many years [...]. (Dangarembga 208)

Tambu arrives at a sense of her own agency which she realizes through writing the story (Zwicker 19). She finally succeeds in her struggle against oppression through her status of authorship. Outside the text, Tambu gains sheer liberation of voice and self-conscious awareness, which is reflected in the text in her critical statements (Aegerter 78). The writing of her own story is an important step towards an authentic self (Katrak 138). “Freeing herself from patriarchal control and the danger of cultural alienation, Tambudzai

achieves the superior status of the interpreter” (Aegerter 78). Producing the narrative is also a way of self-healing as anchored in womanist theory. By critically reflecting on and coming to terms with the past she becomes more aware of her oppressions and more consciously resistant to them (Sugnet 45). The opposing views of naïve Tambu and critical Tambu evoke the readers’ appreciation of her new awareness and her insights on the life of women in a patriarchal and colonial society (Uwakweh 76).

The crucial move [Tambu] has made is to use the tools given by colonial education to make her own account of herself. By becoming narrator, teller, writer, finding the language to nudge her symptoms toward articulate consciousness and resistance, she breaks out of those discourses where she would remain perpetually as goddess/victim, and reclaims agency for herself. (Sugnet 47)

Uwakweh states that in order to underscore the attainment of voice in the Zimbabwean male-dominated literary arena, Dangarembga chose an autobiographical mode with its self-referential nature. Uwakweh further describes voicing as a “self-defining, liberational, and cathartic” act that gives proof of the independent and conscious thinking of the individual” (75-76). Dangarembga presents Tambu in this light as the narrator of *Nervous Conditions*. Dangarembga gives the Rhodesian woman a voice and what she is saying is not just a private matter.

How much of Tambu’s voice is Dangarembga’s voice? The autobiographical presence in *Nervous Conditions* is elusive:

[T]he triangle comprising the writer, the adolescent Tambu, and the older, narrating Tambu is a continually fluid relationship which defies pinning-down [...]. Tambu’s adult narration of childhood experience contains detachment, wry amusement, and pointed self-irony, and one cannot help wondering where Dangarembga herself is in relation to this older, more worldly-wise voice. (Gorle 182)

Several events in the novel reflect events from Dangarembga’s own childhood. Tsitsi Dangarembga was born in 1959 in a small town in Rhodesia. Her parents obtained Bachelor degrees in South Africa and later Master’s degrees in England (Veit-Wild 331). Dangarembga spent her childhood years from two to six in England while her parents studied before they returned to Rhodesia in 1965. She was schooled first at a mission school in Mutare and then went to a predominantly white American convent school in Salisbury (George and Scott 309, Veit-Wild 331). After twelve years in Rhodesia,

Dangarembga left again for England to study medicine. Unhappy with the implicit and explicit racism she faced at Cambridge and concerned about her family and country during the liberation war, Dangarembga returned to Zimbabwe in 1980, a few months before independence was established (George and Scott 309, Willey and Treiber xi). In Harare, Dangarembga studied psychology. At the age of twenty-five Dangarembga wrote Tambu's story.

Dangarembga's first-person-narrator is not identical with herself as the author (Veit-Wild 337). Her own experiences are distributed between Tambu and Nyasha; "the two cousins through their different characters provide contrasts and complementary views on the process of growing up" (Veit-Wild 337). With the difference of a couple of years – Tambu and Nyasha are five in 1960 – Dangarembga's time of childhood coincides with the years she describes in the novel (1960-ca.1972). Just like Dangarembga, Nyasha's parents belong to the first generation of highly educated Africans in Zimbabwe who move with their children to England for their Master's degrees (Veit-Wild 331). Nyasha, like Dangarembga, spends her formative years in England and then returns to Rhodesia. Dangarembga's path of schooling is reproduced in Tambu's education – first a mission school and then a Western convent. Nevertheless, Nyasha resembles Dangarembga autobiographically more than the protagonist (Veit-Wild 337). Nyasha is introduced only gradually and through Tambu's perspective. "Thus Dangarembga has disrupted the usual identity of author/narrator and has incorporated autobiography in a fractured, slightly alienated way" (Veit-Wild 337). Aegerter argues that Nyasha as "the putative primary character is thus denied primacy just as Africans and their cultural contexts are denied legitimacy under colonial rule" (234). Through the usage of double protagonists Dangarembga demonstrates the communal ethic at the core of the novel.

She displaces the Western focus on the single protagonist and narrator [...] –and thus subverts the individualist impetus–the neatly unified and univocal self–of Western tradition's patriarchal autobiography. (Aegerter 234).

Although it is not an autobiography, *Nervous Conditions* still "comes from the very heart of African experience, from the central consciousness" and teaches political and social lessons (Olney 7-8).

The writer [...] casts a net of present awareness back over the past in an attempt to find a significance there that exists, in fact, not in the past itself but in this very

effort of present consciousness to order and to organize according to the pattern that has evolved as the artist's own personality, his vision, his moral awareness. (Olney 22)

We experience Rhodesia and the lives of the women through Dangarembga's awareness. In an interview in 1989, Dangarembga states that she identifies with Tambu as well as Nyasha, and explains one reason why she split her experiences and attitudes between these characters (qtd in Veit-Wild 337).

From a psychological point of view, a person is very complex, guided by various motives. In writing, however, you try to evolve the dominant feature of a character, the main thrust of a character: if one tries to incorporate all the diversity in a single character, you end up in a mess. Writing is a distillation process. (qtd in Veit-Wild 337-338).

Nevertheless, Dangarembga does not see the relevance in discussing the details of the autobiographical aspects and prefers not to answer the question of how autobiographical *Nervous Conditions* is (George and Scott 318). This underscores the notion that *Nervous Conditions* is not a private story about Dangarembga's life first and foremost but a socio-political voicing about the (post-)colonial situation of (Rhodesian) third world women.

4.3. Nyasha

Nyasha, Tambu's cousin, is one of the most complex and, definitely, the most rebellious female character in *Nervous Conditions*. This character is a revolution in the portrayal of a Zimbabwean young woman. However, alienated from Western and Shona culture, Nyasha is also the loneliest character in the novel. Her Western education as well as her intense reading and inquisitive disposition culminate in her "feverishly sharp and analytical intelligence" (Mugambi 214). Tambu describes her as "far-minded" (1), "experimental", insisting on "alternatives" (181) and "thriv[ing] on inconsistencies" (Dangarembga 118). Nyasha is "at times stormy and turbulent, at times confidently serene, but always reaching [...] a little further than [Tambu] had even thought of reaching" (Dangarembga 154). We are told that Nyasha "had an egalitarian nature and had taken seriously the lessons about oppression and discrimination that she had learnt first-hand in England" (Dangarembga 64). Her sharp and attentive mind, and her political

sophistication make her question the categories that colonialism and patriarchy inflict on people. During dialogues with Tambu she often refers to the injustices that these systems promote. Nyasha is well aware of the different values by which her position is determined, and this psychological insight alienates her from others (Torti, Kilb and Stein 251). With her father, Nyasha has intense arguments in which she rebels against his authority and patriarchal opinions. These struggles are often taken out over the dinner table, and eventually food and her body become Nyasha's sites of resistance. Building up suspense, Dangarembga foreshadows Nyasha's "ill-fated rebellion [which] is perhaps the most ominous" (Androne 277). We are told immediately that "[her] rebellion may not in the end have been successful" (Dangarembga 1). Although her rebellion is destructive, it consists of important messages to Tambu.

At a very young age Nyasha is taken to England due to her parents accepting scholarships for their Master's degree. After having spent her formative years in England, she returns to Rhodesia with her family. As a result, she is anglicized internally and externally. When she finds herself in colonial Rhodesia, again, she experiences a cultural clash (Uwakweh 28). On the one hand she finds herself estranged from her extended family and their Shona culture. She has forgotten about their cultural customs such as traditional greetings. More significantly, she has forgotten how to speak Shona. Having lost her Shona identity she takes up the role of an outsider. Nyasha tries to come in touch with her native culture and to "re-memb[er] blackness" (Young 156). She wants to re-learn the customs and practices of her ancestors, trying to identify with the Shona culture, but she cannot really change who she has grown into, having been to England. Her attempts at re-assimilation are simply too artificial. For instance, she makes clay water-pots, a habit which has been abandoned by Shona adults in favor of tin drums (Young 156). Tambu refers to these interests as Nyasha's latest "craze" or "hobby" (Dangarembga 152). In Fanon's words, it denotes the "banal search for exoticism" in the native intellectual (178). On the other hand, Nyasha acquired Western ways of dressing and speaks English in an outspoken way without any accent. The other children interpret her behavior as snobbish and arrogant. Of Shona decent but raised mainly in a Western culture, Nyasha refers to herself as "hybrid" (Dangarembga 79). She no longer belongs to either culture and exists in a kind of "internal exile" (Gorle 186).

Nyasha is alienated from both Western and Shona culture, not only because she has been deprived of a legitimate place in both of them, but also because she rejects ideologies of both cultures. She lives a Western middle-class lifestyle with all its conveniences but at the same time rejects Western colonialism and its manipulative tactics. It degrades indigenous people, therefore Nyasha knows that, on the basis of race, she is not accepted as an equal member in their society. In addition, she detests the patriarchy that rules the structures of her extended Shona family.

[Nyasha] is exiled not only because her years abroad have taught her to think within English frameworks but because she was born female. She has ostensibly come home, but she can never be at home as long as her society continues its ancient tradition of assuming male superiority and female submissiveness. (Gorle 188)

The patriarchal customs are personified by her father. Similarly, Nyasha, caught in her Western-ness, not only disapproves of the indignity towards indigenous people but also the restrictions for women that male colonial hegemony dictates.

Nyasha recognizes that male privilege is a social construction rather than some indelible natural law. Its artificiality is arbitrary, and her indignation and rage are at the refusal of those who benefit from the gender-based hierarchy to see how their participation in the sexist system means their complicity in, and the perpetuation of, the paternalistic racial patriarchy of colonial Rhodesia. She recognizes equally, however, the way in which the power of African men is undermined by the racist rubric that overshadows and undermines their every move. (Aegerter 236-237).

As a Shona girl or woman, she is seen as inferior to Western people on the basis of her skin color as well as her sex - a double jeopardy. Nyasha is not only "a victim of cultural alienation" but also "a victim caught between two worlds in which she strives to find the best model of existence for the female" (Uwakweh 82).

Nyasha is an extremist and idealist, and the "most explicit and most intelligent opponent of masculine chauvinism in the novel" (Mugambi 214). Some scholars even describe Nyasha as the "most powerful masculine figure in the novel" (Holland 133). Her rebellion against male supremacy includes an appropriation of masculine behavior. She refuses to conform to feminine ascriptions and tends to reason, challenge and assert - dispositions traditionally considered masculine (Mugambi 205). She speaks her mind and argues vehemently with her father. Unfortunately, she assimilates all the negative

aspects that her father's masculinity entails, such as "absolutism, arrogance, and aggressiveness" (Mugambi 214). Tambu and Nhamo reflect that Nyasha's behavior is too aggressive, disrespectful and stubborn with the result that she is "burning herself out" (Dangarembga 119). Katrak observes that "[her] precocious courage makes her overtly confrontational" (132). However, Nyasha's "resistant diatribes fail[ing], she uses her body to rebel" (Aegerter 237). She refuses to eat the food her father provides for her and eventually forces herself to vomit. A reason why Nyasha's resistance is embodied in a struggle with food is her Westernized ideal of the female body. Having adopted the Western ideal of skinny women as beautiful, Nyasha carefully administers her food intake. Therefore, Nyasha already has an unsettling relationship to food. However, food plays a more significant and symbolic role in the relationship with her father. For Babamukuru, the provision of food signifies his success as breadwinner in the family for which he expects gratitude. As the male head of the family, he expects unrestricted obedience by his daughter which he demands in a very authoritative way. Nyasha and her father often get into fights at the dinner table, which results in her disobeying at the table by not eating her food. Rejecting his food hurts his pride as provider and threatens his authority as patriarch. Babamukuru exercises control over her by controlling her food intake (Wixson 228). He forces her to eat. Tambu describes the dinner scenarios as "horribly weird and sinister" (Dangarembga 202). The atmosphere is tense when Nyasha shovels down the big plateful of food her father served her, before she excuses herself immediately to secretly throw up the food in the bathroom.

Nyasha vomiting her father's food is her self-destructive form of rebellion to her father's will (Zwicker 14). By throwing up the food, she annuls her father's order which proves her autonomy over her his authority.

In addition, her growing thinness contests her parents' claims of prosperity in a society where scarcity of food and its accompanying weight loss speak of the encroachment of poverty, a suggestion that Nyasha knows Babamukuru finds humiliating. (Young 163)

However, her ongoing self-starvation can be interpreted as a much larger rebellion. She is tearing away the layers of identities that were forced upon her by colonialism and patriarchy (Aegerter 238). Her vomiting of Babamukuru's Western food symbolizes her refusal to imbibe his sexism and patriarchal ideology. His lectures on the role and

behavior of a proper girl drive Nyasha rebellious. She does not want her life to be dictated by men. Reflecting on her own eating disorder she tells Tambu the following:

Imagine all that fuss over a plateful of food. But it's more than that really, more than just food. That's how it comes out, but really it's all the things about boys and men and being decent and indecent and good and bad. He goes on and on with the accusations and the threats, and I'm just not coping very well. (Dangarembga 193)

Babamukuru calling his daughter indecent and a disgrace symbolizes the patriarchal tradition of men subjecting women by forcing social roles on them and condemning women if they do not adhere to these rules. As mentioned in chapter 2, women had to follow much stricter rules of decorum and were easily prejudiced as prostitutes. Nyasha's nervous condition is often described as self-destructive by critics. Dangarembga, however, does not agree with these Western analyses that tend to blame the individual (George and Scott 314). In Zimbabwe, people perceive her condition as a result or a symptom of her alienation and rebellion (George and Scott 314). Dangarembga explains that the system destroys Nyasha because she is not willing to accept or internalize to any extent the labels that patriarchy and colonialism force upon her (George and Scott 314).

Nyasha's starvation also deprives her body of its femaleness, "stopping menstruation [and] reducing female curves" (Sugnet 43). In this way Nyasha, additionally, resists the male subjugation of the female body. Her ultimate social goal might be to "annihilate the female altogether" (Sugnet 43), since she has experienced how her body signifies her as woman and inferior. One night Nyasha comes home a couple of minutes later than her brother and cousin, having talked and danced with a neighbor's boy at the top of the drive. Being out alone as a girl at night with a white boy is an 'indecent' behavior that Babamukuru does not tolerate. Her father demands undisputed obedience and by controlling Nyasha's clothing and sexuality, he tries to control her life as is the tradition in patriarchal families (Andrade 35). Furthermore, colonial Rhodesia was marked by a strict racial segregation which forbid interracial sexual endeavors (Young 164). "As the black headmaster of a racially mixed school, [Babamukuru's] reputation rests on his ability to both prevent and assuage white fears of 'interracial' sexual interactions" (Young 164). Therefore, the situation is loaded with a great amount of fear and anger, and their most

hostile fight follows. The manifestation of female oppression tied to sexuality and the female body becomes visible. Her father claims that she is promiscuous and calls her a whore, “making her a victim of her femaleness” (Dangarembga 118). Nyasha responds boldly.

‘Now why [...] should I worry about what people say when my own father calls me a whore?’ [...] [G]athering himself so that his whole weight was behind the blow he dealt Nyasha’s face. ‘Never,’ he hissed, ‘never,’ he repeated, striking her other cheek with the back of his hand, ‘speak to me like that’. (Dangarembga 116)

After her father’s first slaps, Nyasha backs away and begs him not to hit her anymore. When he strikes her again, she defends herself, punching him in the eye (Dangarembga 117). This disrespectful and unfeminine behavior pushes Babamukuru over the edge. “Babamukuru [was] alternately punching Nyasha’s head and banging it against the floor, screaming or trying to scream but only squeaking, because his throat had seized up with fury [...]” (Dangarembga 117). Babamukuru uses his physical advantage of being larger and stronger to make Nyasha conform. The week after, Nyasha is also disciplined with fourteen lashes because of her age of fourteen years. Historically, physical violence has been men’s oldest form of subjugating women. Dangarembga marks this violent incident as the inward onset of Nyasha’s mental and physical decline, giving it special gravity (Andrade 34). After the incident, Nyasha grows “vague[,] detach[es] herself [and] retreat[s] into some private world” (Dangarembga 120).

Throughout the novel Nyasha reveals that her nervous condition is also caused by the inequities in the colonial society which make her “unable to enjoy the privileges” which her parents household provides (Booker 196). Nyasha’s rebellion is “as much a statement about patriarchal oppression of women as about the colonial oppression of Africans” (Booker 196). The Western food is symbolic for the Western culture that has been forced down the colonizers throat. Nyasha can “no longer accept English culture as something to identify with and be proud of” (Veit-Wild 192). One day, at three in the morning, “she [sits] on her bed and look[s] at [Tambu] out of her sunken eyes, her bony knees pressed together so that her nightdress [falls] through the space where her thighs ha[d] been, agitated and nervous and picking her skin” (Dangarembga 204). Suddenly, all the stored up injustices disrupt Nyasha’s mind and although she tries to hold back, “it’s coming, [she] feels it coming” (Dangarembga 204). Nyasha experiences a mental

breakdown during which she condemns the colonizers for depriving the native of their dignity, identity and culture (“They’ve taken us away. [...] They’ve deprived you of you” [Dangarembga 204-205]). She disdains the colonizers for manipulating the minds and social structure of the Africans. Throughout her tirade she announces that she will not adhere to the colonizer’s role of a good African girl and will not “grovel” to them, will not be “trapped” and will not “die” (Dangarembga 205). “Die” in the sense of her real identity, she will not give up who she really is. Ironically, the struggle not to yield to colonial prescriptions, not to be trapped with a circumscribed voice and the survival of her authentic mind endangers her body to the point of possible death. Once her parents have arrived at the scene, Nyasha furiously “shred[s] her history book between her teeth” and calls them “[f]ucking liars” (Dangarembga 205). She refers to the colonizer’s distorted and Eurocentric version of their history (Booker 194). Just like she throws up their ideologies, she tears their history apart with her teeth, rejecting to swallow what colonial education wants to force down her throat (Chennells 69). Her mental breakdown ends in her confirmation that she does not belong anywhere.

Concerning the type of Nyasha’s eating disorder, there has been a lot of controversy within literary critics. Some scholars criticize that labeling Nyasha’s condition as Anorexia Nervosa or Bulimia Nervosa is Eurocentric since Dangarembga never uses these terms in the novel (Nicholls 120-123). Nyasha’s symptoms, however, are very similar to manifestations of Anorexia and Bulimia which often appear in combination and involve excessive dieting and self-inflicted purging. Traditionally, these disorders have been only diagnosed in Western cultures (Treiber 85). However, certain familial constellations and psychological dispositions have been found to raise the possibility of Anorexia and/or Bulimia. One factor which is considered a Western cultural impact in the formation of the disorders is the image of skinny female bodies in the media. First, this is only one factor in a number of factors that can lead up to Anorexia or Bulimia. Second, in our globalizing world these images have exceeded the boundaries of Western society. In addition, Nyasha spends her formative years in England and therefore has imbibed the prototypes of svelte women. Nevertheless, the fact that Anorexia and Bulimia have barely been diagnosed in other cultures does not exclude the possibility of them existing there. Zwicker points out that the traditional view of Anorexia and Bulimia as middle

class white women disorders is outdated and should be abandoned (15). In the last decades the appearances of these eating disorders have risen among non-Westerners due to socio-cultural factors which can be traced back to social injustices and colonialism (Zwicker 15). I have purposefully used the more neutral term eating disorder in this paper to coincide with the author. Nevertheless, I disagree with the critics that recognize the diagnosis of Anorexia and Bulimia as Eurocentric. In contrast, the disorders themselves should not be restricted to certain cultures. However, Dangarembga makes some important points about Eurocentric medicine and cultural essentialism (Treiber 85). A white psychiatrist, who examines Nyasha, claims that “Africans did not suffer in the way [they] had described” (Dangarembga 206). He goes on that “[s]he was making a scene [...] [and they] should take her home and be firm with her” (Dangarembga 206). On the basis of race, the doctor negates Nyasha’s suffering and denies her treatment. Dangarembga avoids labeling the disorder despite the fact that she had training in psychology and medicine (Nicholls 104). This could imply that her criticism of Eurocentric medicine includes the avoidance of Western defined denotations. Nyasha finally sees a more “human” doctor, who recommends rest at a clinic. There she receives an anti-psychotic medicine which is used to treat Anorexia. Booker argues that Nyasha’s mental condition cannot be “cured merely by medicine” since its genesis includes the social circumstances arising from colonialism (195). During her stay at the clinic, she also receives visits and “practical attention” of aunts that live in the city (Dangarembga 206). This short mention is quite significant and adds to the general theme of community as a source of strength for women. Nyasha’s condition improves with the healing help of community (Young 169).

Nyasha’s position in the interstice between the cultures and her hybridity are difficult for her parents to grasp. “Her early childhood years overseas have done more than strip away her Shona fluency and accent: they have revolutionized her outlook, so that she now has trouble relating to her parents” (Gorle 187). Babamukuru’s authoritative and patriarchal ways of parenting and her rebellious and feminist responses lead to a deeply disrupted father-daughter relationship. In addition, both are caught in a wider, complex social structure of colonialism. Babamukuru expects Nyasha to behave like a traditional Shona girl. Gender roles are so strictly circumscribed in Babamukuru’s mind that he,

eventually, calls her a man. Her “analytical power [...] and inquisitiveness” are viewed as masculine traits by her father (Mugambi 214). Her disruption of the feminine role and masculine behavior threaten his authority as patriarch. He punishes her by ‘chaining’ her to her female body and dominating her physically. Nyasha fights the “Western ideals that revile the very man she is forced to revere, that make a slave of her father, her master” (Aegerter 237-238). During Nyasha’s breakdown, she refers to her father being ‘brainwashed’ by the colonizers. She adds “especially him” to explain that her father was more of interest to the colonizers than her mother and therefore, they infiltrated his mind deeper (Dangarembga 204). Another time she refers to her father as a “historical artefact” (Dangarembga 162) because he has been created as an African bourgeois – the African élite that was educated and manipulated to exercise the colonizer’s plan for the African masses (see Fanon). Despite Nyasha’s “rebellion against his patriarchal, moralistic and narrow-minded attitude, [she] sympathizes with her father because she knows about the constraints he is exposed to” (Berndt 109). Nyasha rejects what Babamukuru represents, his role in the colonial system, but at the same time she loves her father and pities him for being caught in his position (Sugnet 45). She says she does not hate him although “[t]hey want [her] to” (Dangarembga 205). We do not get to know to whom she refers here. Keeping the political events of Rhodesia in mind, a reference to nationalistic thoughts and the evolving freedom struggle that render him a traitor and accomplice is likely. The native intellectual is viewed by the peasant as a “turncoat who has betrayed everything that goes to make up the national heritage” (Fanon 89).

Nyasha’s relationship with her mother is very cold and distant. Unlike her mother Nyasha cannot or does not want to rationalize the constrictions women face. She is disrespectful to her mother and judges her harshly, disapproving of her mother’s submissiveness and obedience to Babamukuru. She explains to Tambu, “[my mother] doesn’t want to be respected” (Dangarembga 79). Despite her education, Maiguru does not function as a role model for Nyasha because she conforms to the role of a Shona wife and mother (Sizemore 74). The only time Nyasha approves of her mother and shows admiration, is the time Maiguru tells Babamukuru her mind and, after getting into a fight with him, leaves the house for several days. Nyasha fully supports her mother’s emancipative action. In contrast, Maiguru does not really support her daughter in her

feminist cause, but mainly tries to mediate between her husband and Nyasha. Buying Nyasha tampons and miniskirts, she does not discourage her daughter's feministic Westernness. However, at times it seems she also resents her daughter for the opportunities and freedom Nyasha thrives for (Young 162).

The relationship with Tambu is the most significant one for Nyasha. Their closeness in age and experience of developing a female identity leads to an intimate friendship. Aegerter analyzes the relationship between Nyasha and Tambu in her paper 'A dialectic of Autonomy and Community', and stresses how important their support and exchange is:

[...] Nyasha, severed from her African self and society by colonization, strives through her friendship with Tambudzai to reconstitute herself as African, but on feminist rather than her father's sexist terms. Tambudzai, determined to escape the sexism of her father and the poverty that is colonization's lingering legacy to rural Africans, slowly but surely learns from Nyasha's postcolonial and feminist perspectives to hold onto her African identity, even as she revises it. (Aegerter 234)

Tambu is "bridging some of the gaps in Nyasha's life" (Dangarembga 200). When Tambu leaves for the convent, the girls' bond is severed, which negatively affects Nyasha's mental condition. She becomes even more obsessed with her studies and grows "skeletal" having started to regurgitate her food (Dangarembga 202). Losing the close relationship with Tambu, gives Nyasha the last push. Her eating disorder becomes pathological.

Traditionally, in Zimbabwean literature a young girl behaving like Nyasha – smoking, talking disrespectful to her parents, even hitting her father – would be viewed as a very bad character (Palmer 193-194). However, Dangarembga breaks with these male stereotypes of women. She creates a highly complex character, a very intelligent and politically sophisticated as well as aggressive and stubborn young woman. Despite Nyasha's intelligence and insight into the complex patriarchal and colonial situation for women, she fails to save herself (Androne 277-278). She is a hybrid torn between opposing forces of history (colonial versus anti-colonial), traditions (Shona/colonial versus a developing national consciousness) and gender (Patriarchy versus feminism) (Matzke 38). Her struggle against "the obedient-daughter-self" as well as "the colonized-

grateful-kaffir” (Katrak 137), “two unacceptable alternatives” (Nicholls 103), is carried out through her body. Her resistance goes so far that she would rather lose herself and her body entirely than to lose it to the socialization of patriarchy and colonialism. Her self-exile turns into a self-annihilation (Gorle 186). Her clear insight into what is happening to herself, women, and colonized Africans drives her into this desperate state of rebellion where she wants to fight at too many fronts.

[Nyasha] is too aware and too critical of the conflicting discourses which position her as a determined daughter, a black woman, an African with a European education, a rich girl with socialist ideas. Consequently, she is without a basis from which to start modifying herself [...]. Her rebellion is not directed: rather, it is global – therefore self-destructive, not effective. (Torti, Kilb and Stein 251-252)

Nyasha’s effort to initiate a process of decolonization “which sets out to change the order of the world [...] is, obviously, a programme of complete disorder” (Fanon 27). The mere consciousness of injustices without support of other women and without a stable rootedness in a culture leaves Nyasha as a lonely “cultural orphan”, unable to fight for the cause (Veit-Wild 189). Sizemore concludes that “[v]oice alone without connection can be as dangerous as silence” (73). However, her rebellion was not in vain, but served as a serious warning for Tambu’s future and provided her with meaningful lessons on oppression and domination (Katrak 9, Wixson 229).

4.4. Maiguru

Tragically, Maiguru resembles the traditional dutiful and submissive wife that has silently accepted her inferior role, despite her individual achievements. She earned a Master’s degree from a Western university, an exceptional accomplishment for her generation (Young 149). Thus, her educational level is equal to her husband’s. Unfortunately, “education does not necessarily liberate women” (Andrade 38). Due to prejudices, gender roles and patriarchal social structures, marriage is, in essence, a trap for most women. As Palmer puts it, “no matter how much education a woman has, her main purpose in life is seen as taking care of her husband” (178). Unexpectedly, Maiguru’s patience with her authoritative and dominant husband, Babamukuru, eventually runs out

and she stages her rebellion. Although she is still trapped in her inferior status as wife, her rebellion has given her a more sensible voice.

Maiguru, like her daughter Nyasha, lives between different cultural spaces. She lived and studied in England with her family for several years where she “glimpsed for a little while the things [she] could have been” (Dangarembga 103). Once she returns to Rhodesia she reassumes the role of the “docile Black Protestant wife and mother” (Berndt 107). She leads a modern household with Western food and modern commodities, but she knows all the customs and adheres to rituals of her Shona culture. Neither the traditional nor the colonial society give her the rights to live as an equal to her husband. Despite Maiguru's comfortable middle class life, she experiences patriarchy similar to other women of lower social classes. The role as housewife transcends the traditional and modern cultural differences, and dominates the lives of the women in *Nervous Conditions* (Andrade 39). The text focuses on Maiguru's role as mother and wife and her domestic duties. We do not get any information on her profession as a teacher. In this way, the text mirrors the ignorance that the patriarchal Shona family shows towards Maiguru's academic achievements (Andrade 38). Her position is so subservient in the family that Tambu is almost shocked to find out that her aunt has the same level of degree as her uncle (Booker 198). Maiguru seems content with her existence and seems to have accepted her limited possibilities (Berndt 106). In order to “preserve [her husband's] sense of identity and value”, Maiguru effaces herself (Dangarembga 104). This self-effacement aims at bolstering her husband's masculine ego which does not tolerate any female self-assertiveness (Mugambi 211). Maiguru's chirping and fussing about Babamukuru and her baby-talk can be seen as exaggerated performances of traditional subservience and femininity (Veit-Wild 333, Wixson 226). She often has to soothe Babamukuru's anger and rage or nurse his injured pride after fights with their daughter. In their relationship, the focus is always on Babamukuru's feelings and comfort. Maiguru's thoughts and feelings are secondary and do not come to the surface.

As the woman of the respected and successful Babamukuru, headmaster of a mission school, “she has achieved the highest prestige a Black woman can hope for in colonial

Rhodesia” (Berndt 107). At times she might be content with her life and thus, since power is only ascribed to men in patriarchy, she wants to uphold her husband’s status to secure her own (Murray 210). Remaining silent throughout Lucia’s rebellion although Lucia asks her for help, Maiguru acts “complicitous with male power” (Katrak 167). She thinks that Lucia “ought to suffer the consequences of her fecund appetites” and sets herself above the uneducated, poor rural woman (Dangarembga 140). Such scenes highlight Maiguru’s lack of female solidarity. Instead of supporting Lucia and the other women in their revolt against the patriarchy, she withdraws herself from the discussion. Although resenting men’s hegemony, Maiguru appears to have accepted her oppressed female condition and conformed too long and too much to her role. She is not willing to oppose the patriarchy, thereby risking her own security, for somebody else’s sake. Maiguru does not support her daughter’s rebellion, but only tries to mediate between Nyasha and Babamukuru. It seems she prefers that her daughter follows her role and acts subservient and obedient rather than assertive and sophisticated (Uwakweh 81).

As Bravman and Montgomery state, “her constant self-abasement and subordination weigh on her” (99). During a conversation with Tambu, the normally pliable and reserved Maiguru shows her frustration with the sexist attitudes of society. Tambu remembers that everybody in her family said that Maiguru just went to England to support her husband and nobody mentioned that she studied herself. Maiguru snorts, “[w]hy should a woman go all that way and put up with all those problems if not to look after her husband” (Dangarembga 102). Venting, Maiguru points out how the family is profiting from her salary, even if they will not admit it. The family ignores Maiguru’s academic achievements and sees her as simply the inferior wife of Babamukuru and mother of his children (Palmer 178). Soon we realize that Maiguru is tired of the extended family expecting her to cook all the food and “slaving for everybody” (Dangarembga 124). As wife of the patriarch her duties are especially hard during family gatherings. The reader feels that Maiguru “is boiling with resentment” inside which eventually will “break out into open rebellion” (Palmer 189). For example, Maiguru seems to resent Babamukuru’s wedding project for his brother. Although she only had a small wedding because they did not have enough money at the time, her help is expected and her own money is taken to help produce an elaborate wedding for her husband’s relatives. A small gesture of

rebellion flares up when she is expected to purchase the materials for the wedding dress and she “conveniently forgets to make the purchases” (Palmer 189).

Maiguru’s job does not liberate her since her entire salary goes to her husband. The discriminating laws of the white minority government forced women to surrender their salaries to their husbands. This economic dependency is shown in the fact that she cannot afford a car and Babamukuru does not seem to consider it necessary for her to have one. Therefore, she is dependent on her husband’s schedule when she needs to buy groceries. Her frustration finally boils over during a visit from Lucia. The trigger for her outburst is when Lucia excludes Maiguru from the discussion with Babamukuru on Tambu’s punishment. “Maiguru’s reward for her loyalty to the system is to be confirmed in her powerless position as silent, meek, ‘good’ woman, while the defiant Lucia openly turns the system against itself” (Bosman 309). Afterwards, Maiguru addresses her husband, agreeing with Lucia that the punishment for his niece might be too hard. Her objection is shot down by Babamukuru who argues that as the older brother it is his duty to discipline his brother’s daughter. Maiguru’s patience finally snaps and she starts her own rebellion. First, she tells Babamukuru straightforward what she thinks, and then she leaves the house without further notice. She laments to him:

[W]hen it comes to taking my money so that you can feed her and her father and your whole family and waste it on ridiculous weddings, that’s when they are my relatives too. Let me tell you, Babawa Chido, 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 I am working myself sick to support. And now even that Lucia can walk in here and tell me that the things she discusses with you, here in my home, are none of my business [...]. And when I keep quiet you think I am enjoying it. So today I am telling you I am not happy. I am not happy any more in this house. (Dangarembga 174-175)

This scene is a pivotal moment for Maiguru’s struggle for emancipation. Being submissive and obedient to her husband’s will up to this point in the text, Maiguru finally speaks her mind and confronts him. Babamukuru does not show sympathy. Due to her placid and subservient nature, everybody, including her daughter, underestimated Maiguru’s capability of rebellion and the extent to which she would go (Palmer 190). Maiguru makes a courageous move and leaves the next morning. Nyasha assumes her father doubts until the last moment that his ‘perfect’ wife would be able to leave him or

offend him in this way. She suddenly admires her mother for her rebellion, for growing and saving herself. The idea of Maiguru achieving something professionally outside of Babamukuru's control, such as teaching at a University or becoming a doctor, gives the girls brief hope for their own emancipations. However, Maiguru stays with her brother for a couple of days, before Babamukuru brings her home again. The fact that Maiguru runs to a man and comes back within a week disappoints Nyasha. She believes the action represents continued dependency on men and would not be long enough for Babamukuru to appreciate Maiguru more. Nyasha hopes her mother changes her life, whereas Tambu understands that Maiguru is just trying to re-negotiate the conditions of her life. Maiguru's rebellion is a reminder to Babamukuru that his status as patriarch also depends on his wife. As a respectable headmaster and husband his status requires him to control his wife (Berndt 108). Maiguru's rebellion might have been brief and reserved but it has given her some agency and it is unlikely that she will "settle back entirely into her old habits of helpless subservience" (Gorle 190). The immediate change is visible through her more genuine happiness, decreased fussing over the children, the disappearance of almost all the baby-talk and the increase of her shared opinion on more "sensible" topics (Dangarembga 178). Her newly acquired space in her marriage grants her more voice. For instance, she refuses to "spend another Christmas catering for a family of two dozen" (Dangarembga 185). Eventually, she interferes in Tambu's educational affairs and her new voice determines Tambu's future significantly. She defends Tambu's plea to attend a convent for white girls (Gorle 189). Disagreeing with her husband's opinion, she speaks up, and subsequently changes his mind eventually leading to Tambu's further educational advancement (Dangarembga 184).

Maiguru seems to have accepted her inferior status as a woman despite her higher education. For most of her life Maiguru effaces herself in order to support her husband's endeavors, even financially (to which she is legally forced). Maiguru is aware of the hypocrisy of colonialism and the multiple jeopardy of women, and is still able to carve out a space for herself (Berndt 109). Maiguru, in her practicable way, is able to compromise between her own objectives and societies restrictions. Maiguru's job outside the home is untraditional, but her devoted wife and mother behavior adheres to traditional values (Katrak 167). In this way, she produces a type of advancement that

does not challenge society as radically as Nyasha's, and is also not destructive. Maiguru's emancipation, including her education and employment as well as her newly found voice, has been a progress to some extent. But in terms of a general equality between husband and wife in rights and status, she is still trapped in a subaltern role. Her own kind of nervous condition is slightly mitigated, but "remains fundamentally unaltered" (Young 151). Maiguru's character provides us with the notion that high academic achievements do not necessarily lead to emancipation for women (Booker 198). "Thus, Dangarembga undermines a widely held notion that modernity by necessity holds an emancipatory promise" (Treiber 90).

4.5. Mainini

Compared to Maiguru, Mainini's "passive resignation to the tyranny of the system, given her poverty and lack of choices" is easier to grasp for the reader (Mugambi 211). Mainini passively accepts the masculinity and patriarchy in her family while continuing the fulfillment of the traditional African feminine role (Mugambi 210). In her lethargy, she "has given up all hope and has come to embrace an almost deterministic conception of the women's role" (Palmer 180). "[A]fter having lost her traditionally granted spheres of influence and prestige, [Mainini] lacks any confidence in the new social order that has manifested in her worldview only as the thief of her children" (Berndt 99). Mainini's revolt is the most unsuccessful. Food and body are weapons of her resistance and threaten her own life. However, her condition is not as nervous as Nyasha's one. She finds cure in her sister's care. Mainini is the most oppressed and helpless character in the novel. She embodies the subaltern – a woman, black and poor – and thus without any rights but with all the work in colonial Rhodesia. She endures all the degrading aspects of her life (Berndt 92). Mainini does not question her duties, and "[s]he upholds the traditional family structures, even though they are rooted in a patriarchal system of gender oppression" (Childs 260). However, the prestige of Shona women has disappeared with colonialism, while the work has increased (as addressed in chapter 2). Mainini "has also recognized that the racist discourse of colonial Rhodesia further degrades her" (Berndt 93), and calls it the "poverty of blackness" (Dangarembga 16).

Having “little chance to escape her double colonization” she uses all her strength to provide for her children while her irresponsible husband spends money on beer (Berndt 93). In the beginning of the novel, Mainini believes in Western education as a means of improving her family economically. She works especially hard to afford the school fees for her oldest child, Nhamo. However, it alienates her son and turns him into a cultural stranger (Berndt 93). Over time, she grows more and more suspicious towards colonial education and distrusts European ways (Lund 170). In addition, Nhamo suddenly dies at the mission. Mainini blames the ‘Englishness’ for his death. When she hears about the decision that her daughter will go to the mission school, her subsequent rebellion is foreshadowed. The fear of losing the connection with her children makes her surprisingly stubborn. She threatens to die of anxiety if her daughter leaves her. However, her protest is ignored by the men. The week before Tambu leaves, Mainini is hardly able to eat anything and becomes so weak she can no longer work in the fields (Dangarembga 57). Nevertheless, Tambu leaves, and her mother pulls herself back together. She explains to Tambu how the ancestors cannot “stomach so much Englishness” (Dangarembga 207). Mainini “works entirely within a classic [Shona] discourse” speaking on behalf of ancestors and naming people witches (Chennells 62). She tries in vain to keep her children from the contamination of the ‘Englishness’. In Mainini’s simplified view, the English culture is the culprit that steals her children away. As Sugnet states, “her advice flows from a binary view that the novel ultimately finds inadequate”, even though Mainini is “often right in warning of dangers to her children” (42). She does not realize that it is not the English culture, per se, but the “hypocrisy of the colonial system that provokes the alienation of her children” (Berndt 93). They are affected by the debasement of their native culture and the indoctrination of English culture as superior. While Mainini’s sister Lucia realizes that the traditional Shona structures are dissolving and uses it to break out of patriarchal Shona customs, Mainini passively remains in her traditional role and views the ‘Englishness’ as a deadly disease. Mainini has been socialized so severely into the dependent wife, that she does not know how to think for herself. When her sister asks her if they would leave the homestead together, Mainini can only “display fatalism and indifference” (Berndt 94): “Since when does it matter what I want?” (Dangarembga 155).

Mainini eventually vents about Babamukuru's patriarchal domination: "He says this and we jump" (Dangarembga 187). She complains about him separating her from her children and about the wedding that he forced upon her. Having endured the wedding ceremony at the time as just another event in her life she has no control over, she finally admits her feelings of shame and anger (Young 146). When Mainini finds out about her daughter being sent to a convent for white girls, she starts her rebellion. She withdraws her body, like Maiguru, from her "established responsibilities" as housewife in order to voice her suffering (Wixson 227). Furthermore, Mainini, "depressed about not having a say in her or her children's lives, turns to refusing food as a means of defiance until she endangers her health and that of her new-born baby" (Matzke 45). This time Mainini's depression seems to be more serious. She becomes entirely passive, not only refusing food, but also refusing to get out of bed, wash herself, or change her clothes (Dangarembga 187). As a result, her baby boy Dambudzo develops diarrhea. Tambu knows that she could heal her mother's condition by not joining the girls convent but "[t]his was asking too much of [her]" (Dangarembga 188). Lucia prevents her sister from starving herself to death by evoking maternal feelings. She forces her sister to walk to the river with her and the baby. Then Lucia puts the baby on a stone in the river:

'I am putting him on this rock and leaving him there, right in the middle, in the middle of the river. If he slips into the water because you do nothing to save him then you will truly go mad, because this time you will be guilty.' [...] ' Lucia,' my mother said, ' Lucia, why are you doing this? Why? Why do you bother? Why don't you just let me die?' And removing her dress she waded out to the rock to wash herself and her son. (Dangarembga 188)

Showing Mainini the danger in which she puts her child with her own starvation, Lucia elicits protective feelings. In addition, the situation shows Mainini that she has agency, although very restricted. Her baby is dependent on her actions. This realization of somebody's dependency on oneself and, therefore, the ability to recover, is typical for the 'madwoman' in womanist novels (Ogunyemi 74). Afterwards, Lucia and Mainini are joined by other women, and they chat lively and laugh gaily. Tambu describes it as good medicine. The immediate integration into society is also considered a womanist approach of self-healing. Lucia stays for two more days and cooks nutritious food for her sister to regain strength. They also sleep together in the kitchen and talk all night. The

help and company of her sister as well as the community of women soothes Mainini's nervous condition. Mainini's rescue shows the importance of female companionship.

Unfortunately, Mainini "has long resigned to her fate" (Berndt 92) and passively accepts the blatant poverty and incompetence of her husband. The traditional esteem she would have received as the female head of the Sigauke homestead has diminished since the onset of colonialism (Berndt 92). The alienating effect of Western education on her children results in Mainini's deep resentment towards the 'Englishness' (Berndt 93). Her rebellion voices an immediate helplessness and fear. Afraid to lose her daughter, Mainini tries to prevent Tambu's entering the racially exclusive convent. Her rebellion is a voicing of her frustration that she has no say in her children's lives, as well as her powerless status in general. Unsuccessful, Mainini returns to her arduous life and subservient role. The subaltern remains silent.

4.6. Lucia

Tambu's aunt, Lucia, is poor and uneducated like Mainini. Instead of accepting her disadvantaged situation, she actively rebels against it. Without children or a husband, she "lives on the margins of [Rhodesian] society" (Androne 277). "Despite her low social status [...] she is a proud and independent woman" (Booker 197), "admirably self-sufficient, yet disreputable" (Willey 73). Her childlessness and sexual freedom are traditionally viewed as "severe limitations in the African context" (Andrade 39). However, in Dangarembga's story these circumstances enable her to live her life independently of men, to some degree, and even to improve her economic status. Lucia - the woman without a man, becoming independent - resembles a typical theme in womanist novels (Ogunyemi 73). Lucia is much more free in her choices and actions because she is not trapped in a marriage and thus in her duties as wife and mother (Andrade 39). She is not only daring when it comes to opposing men, Lucia is also strong in regard to her social commitment to her sister that suffers among the weight of womanhood. With her courage, Lucia creates opportunities that become possible for women in a changing and unstable Shona society (Berndt 100).

Lucia seems to have resisted male domination and oppression her entire life. However, her interference at the patriarchal dare presents a significant moment in her rebellion. At the dare, the patriarchy has gathered to discuss Lucia's situation - her pregnancy without a husband (Dangarembga 138). Lucia has enjoyed her sexual freedom with Jeremiah as well as his cousin, Takesure. Babamukuru, as usual, takes control over this family issue. In order to find out who the father is and how he will decide the matter, he summons the male family members. Lucia, unsuccessful in her plea for help from Maiguru, independently intervenes and interrupts the exclusively male meeting. Her unauthorized vindication turns into a humorous scene.

[S]he just strode in there, her right eye glittering as it caught the yellow paraffin flame, glittering dangerously at Takesure, who wisely shrank back into his corner of the sofa. 'Fool!' snorted Lucia [...]. And she whirled to face Babamukuru [...] 'Look at him, Babamukuru! Look at him trying to hide because now I am here.' [...] 'If you have an issue with me,' Lucia advised [Takesure], 'stand up and let us sort it out plainly.' In two strides she was beside him and, securing an ear between each finger and thumb, she dragged him to his feet. Let me go, let me go,' he moaned. I always maintain that I saw smiles slide over the patriarchy's faces, but it might have been my imagination because I was laughing myself. We were all laughing outside. (Dangarembga 146)

As the scene goes on, Jeremiah and Takesure's continue to appear cowardly and deceptive. In contrast, Dangarembga presents Lucia as determined and brave, exposing men's hypocrisy (Katrak 186). Authorized by Babamukuru to speak, Lucia explains why she disobeyed his request to leave with Takesure. She has stayed at the homestead because she did not want to leave her sister "with [Jeremiah] who has given her nothing but misery since the age of fifteen" (Dangarembga 147). This is an important gesture of Lucia's solidarity and support for her sister. She goes on that she will not go with Takesure who is very poor and already supports two wives. She concludes that she can provide better for herself. Lucia is not afraid to speak her mind openly. The patriarchal myths and prejudices of women's dependency and wifely destiny have no influence on her. "[Lucia] explodes the myth of male dominance, exposing both Jeremiah and Takesure as weaklings and threatening to destroy Babamukuru's hierarchical structures by leaving without a man, and with her sister" (Bosman 308).

Lucia is bright despite her lack of formal education. She continually manipulates Babamukuru for her own benefit. She knows that he likes to solve problems and be the patriarchal savior, therefore, she slowly works his mind, presenting him with the intricacy of her situation and appealing to his dignity. She cannot go with Takesure, go back home, nor can she stay at the homestead; yet she wants to stay closer to her sister to be of support. Lucia presents Babamukuru with the idea of getting a job, stressing the strength of her healthy body. As a result, Lucia reaches her goal and gets a job in the kitchen of the girls' hostel. Meanwhile, Babamukuru is "pleased with himself" for providing such good help and solving the problem as the patriarch of the family (Dangarembga 160). He receives befitting praise and worshipping by Lucia and Mainini in the traditional kneeling, ululations and clapping. "By feeding his ego and pride, Lucia is able to advance herself" (Katrak 186). Nyasha criticizes Lucia for her groveling before Babamukuru. Lucia comments, "Babamukuru wanted to be asked, so I asked. And now we both have what we wanted" (Dangarembga 162). Eventually, Lucia has a baby and starts going to school in the evening, "a tremendous decision at her age" (Palmer 188). Being an intelligent woman, she has passed her exams by the end of the novel and continues her education (Palmer 188). In contrast to the passive Maiguru and lethargic Mainini, Lucia is actively shaping her life and improving her situation.

Lucia's female solidarity and nurturing help is shown at different moments in the story. Lucia comes to the homestead to help her sister. Seeing how hard Mainini's life is, she threatens the patriarchy to take her sister with her. Later on, Mainini suffers from a severe depression and once again Lucia comes and "save[s] her sister [...] from emotional paralysis and starvation through an insightful approach" (Lund 173). She revives Mainini's nurture instinct and brings her back into the female community (Lund 173). While Tambu "detaches herself emotionally and in a way abandons [her mother]", Lucia takes vital care of her (Treiber 90-91). She also stands up to Babamukuru for Tambu when she feels that her niece is punished too severely. Lucia embodies female solidarity and community, dispositions that the novel highlights as crucial in a society taken over by Western individuality.

Lucia's successful escape is indicated immediately and contrasted to the entrapments of Mainini and Maiguru. Lucia's rebellion is bodily in the way she literally stands up to the patriarchy at the dare. Unmarried, she controls her own body, chooses her sexual partners and enjoys her sexuality – such a “bodily autonomy” that men fear (Katrak 186). She also rebels with her body against traditional female roles by giving birth to a baby as a single mother. Lucia is also verbally aggressive and persistent and thus resists male hegemony. She voices not just on behalf of herself but also for her sister and niece, showing her female solidarity. She manipulates Babamukuru in order to achieve more financial independence: “[e]ven if she disapproves of Babamukuru, she is savvy enough to use his position and power to get herself a job” (Katrak 186). Katrak concludes that the rejection of marriage prevents Lucia from an immediate male domination and provides her with the chance to become a rather autonomous single mother (186). In her rebellion, however, she is still dependent on men. Lucia negotiates “her female agency from within patriarchal structures to her own benefit” (Katrak 186). Nevertheless, using the system to create new possibilities and advance is acceptable since it eventually can lead to options and resources to change the system.

The strongest female character in the novel [...] is Lucia, who upsets the gender dynamics on the homestead by asserting herself against and in spite of the limitations placed on her by cultural expectations: she is sexually promiscuous, speaks her mind in front of the male elders, exposes Babamukuru's chauvinism, refuses to be a subservient wife, becomes a single working mother in town going to school part-time. (Treiber 90)

She rebels more against the domination of men than the Western educated Maiguru, and acts more pragmatically than the radical Nyasha. Hence, Lucia works as an important example representing the emancipation of a simple Shona woman (Booker 197, Veit-Wild 333). Her “resilience, resourcefulness, courage, and independence of spirit” as well as her female solidarity are traits that make her an impressive character. Palmer concludes that “Lucia is one of the most attractive characters in the novel, and it can be easily seen that she is central to the author's overall feminist design” (188).

4.7. Sites of Resistance

Dangarembga describes the “interdependent colonial and gender dichotomies that especially restrict black women’s possibilities and make them victims of double colonization” (Berndt 109). All five women suffer from nervous conditions in the late colonial era in Rhodesia. Their mental disruptions are characteristic for a womanist novel (Ogunyemi 74). However, *Nervous Conditions* focuses on women’s resistances to oppressive situations. Dangarembga’s characters breach with the traditional black Rhodesian female role.

African women are represented [...] as agents and actors; they engage in multiple experiences, maneuvering within and around oppression, certainly, but living their lives in spite of it. [They] do not merely react; they act. And in their very action lies their resistance. (Aegerter 231)

Although their rebellious actions vary in their degree of success, there are some similarities in their utilization of sources.

Dangarembga’s female characters utilize their bodies for their rebellion. The body represents the root of oppression and has been a typical site of resistance in postcolonial life-writing (Moore-Gilbert 48). Fanon is constantly aware of the colonized body as a prime target of control, therefore the body also functions as a prime location of resistance (Childs 45). Dangarembga rewrites Fanon’s masculine bodily resistance into women’s bodies. Nyasha’s case is the most extreme and most self-destructive example. Refusing to be appropriated by patriarchy or colonialism, Nyasha destroys her own body to a threatening degree. Tambu’s body turns into a kind of rigor on the morning of her parents wedding. This finally gives her the courage to object to her uncle’s will. Maiguru uses her body in the form of an escape. She temporarily leaves her husband to demonstrate that he also depends on her. Lucia uses her body to satisfy her own sexual needs, disregarding men’s prejudices and rumors. Against decorum, she gives birth to a child as a single woman, using her body’s natural function without conforming to societies rules. In order to rebel against her helpless situation, Mainini stops taking care of her body. “Despite tragic and negative conclusions [...] in women’s texts, it is important to recognize the strategic use of [...] female bodies, often the only available

avenue for resistance” (Katrak 3). The use of their bodies is a symbolic re-appropriation and re-evaluation of the female body that has been signified and demeaned by men and patriarchy (Moore-Gilbert 35).

The women in *Nervous Conditions* also use food as site of their rebellion and way of expression. Food provides a “resource that is most accessible to women” and also “charged with colonial and traditional meaning” (Wixson 223). Mainini and Nyasha’s way of resisting oppression is their denial of food. For Nyasha, food symbolizes her father’s controlling, patriarchal will and the colonizer’s hypocritical, racist infiltration. Her rejection of food stands for her rejection of these oppressing systems. For Mainini, food is the only medium with which she can rebel. She does not have a say in her children’s lives and, in an act of desperation, she stops cooking for the family and stops eating altogether. In Tambu’s early rebellion against the trivialization of her education, she uses the knowledge and skills she has acquired in agriculture. She grows her own maize in order to sell it and raise money for her school fees, thus using food to help get the education she desires. When Maiguru refuses to cook the food for the family gathering during Christmas, she refuses traditional female work and female servitude. In the patriarchal tradition, food traps women in their inferior role. Wixson summarizes the significance of food:

The various meanings of food, as escape or entrapment, as resistance or oppression, pervade [...] *Nervous Conditions*. As the locus of the overlapping and intersecting ideologies of colonialism and patriarchy, food is the vehicle through which the women of the novel pursue their agency. (230)

Dangarembga successfully depicts how Zimbabwean women with restricted avenues of agency utilize their bodies and food to voice their opinions.

Nervous Conditions depicts the multiple factors that make up third world women’s situation, such as patriarchy, poverty and colonial exploitation. Regarding colonialism, alienation forms a major theme in the novel. Nyasha’s alienation from her parent’s Shona culture and her hybridity between the Western and the Shona world is a highly nervous condition for her. She refuses to be appropriated by the colonizer. Nyasha symbolically throws up the colonizer’s food and tears apart their history books. Her resistance is ideologically strong but threatens her life. Tambu’s eagerness to

emancipate herself from her parents homestead leads her to embrace the English culture too eagerly. She is prone to become mentally colonized and to devalue her ancestry. However, several factors protect Tambu from a full alienation. Unlike Nyasha, Tambu's childhood experiences are deeply rooted in the Shona culture, providing her with an identity layer of authenticity. Her brother and cousin serve as warning examples of the dangers of alienation. Conversations with Nyasha also helps raise Tambu's awareness regarding colonial ideologies. Furthermore, Tambu's friends and family express their fears that she will forget them – a reminder about the danger of full assimilation. One message the novel sends is the warning about the eager embrace of Western culture and the danger of a full assimilation. This reminds us of Fanon's request of his fellow Algerian people not to follow or imitate Europe but to find their own way (251-253). Another message is the advice to keep in touch with your ancestral culture. In other words, there are two imperatives in the novel: "to avoid undervaluing indigenous culture and to avoid overvaluing exogenous culture" (Geller 160). Hence, Tambu's key to survival is to find a place in society that keeps her rooted in Shona culture while it lets her expand into Western spheres.

Nervous Conditions highlights the significance of healing within a community (Lund 184). Friendship and "communal ethic" between women are viewed as significant sources of power (Aegerter 234). It is not just the story of Tambu's development but also "the story of four women whom [she] loved" (Dangarembga 208). The story rejects an individualized sense of advancement. The plot starts out with Tambu's assimilationist and individual attitude, and shifts to her realization of the significance of her Shona culture and community (Androne 276). Forgetting her friends and family would risk forgetting who she was. The story suggests that the strongest and most resilient women are not the educated and emancipated ones, but the ones that have a strong tie with their African culture and support collaboration and solidarity (Androne 176). Maiguru represents the Western individualized woman that does not seem to value female solidarity. During the incident of the hearing, she refuses to join the women in their rebellious states of mind and ignores Lucia's plea for help. Tambu, aspiring to become like Maiguru, embraces the Western ideal of individual advancement. On the way to her personal goals she forsakes female solidarity. However, the guilt of abandoning her

mother and cousin weighs heavily on her conscience. Lucia, with the most successful rebellious behavior, represents the strongest advocate for female solidarity in *Nervous Conditions*. She “demonstrates a firm understanding of the necessity for female-bonding” (Uwakweh 81). She speaks up for the women in her family. The friendship between Nyasha and Tambu plays a central role in the theme of the communal ethic. “[Their] friendship [...] forbids the fracturing of the identity and enacts a womanist subjectivity in which each young woman is agent and arbiter of her individual, African, female destiny within the framework of community” (Aegerter 234).

By decentering the self [...], Dangarembga demonstrates that the story of an African life is necessarily the story of African lives. Replacing the primacy of the individual protagonist with the relational, interlocutory dimensions of dual-communal-protagonists allows Dangarembga to “add to herself” [...] rather than allow colonization’s Manichean mechanisms to alienate her from herself and her cultural community. She reveals [...] the plural aspects of black women’s subjectivity. (Aegerter 234)

Additionally, Dangarembga’s device of dual protagonists successfully ‘decenters’ the notion of the typical Western single protagonist and ruptures the supremacy of individualism. Women’s solidarity and rootedness in childhood and culture are depicted as two reservoirs of strength in women’s rebellions against the oppression of patriarchy and colonialism (Sugnet 39-40).

The novel also stresses that awareness and courage are the blueprint to resisting oppression (Uwakweh 83). With the help of Nyasha, Tambu slowly starts to develop an awareness of social injustice – a process of expansion that starts towards the end of the novel and is suggested to continue to the moment she sets down the story. Tambu’s successful escape lies outside the story and is realized in her status as the narrator of the story. As the interpreter, she has acquired awareness of oppressive systems and domination in society. Although *Nervous Conditions* is not an autobiography, Dangarembga reclaims her own childhood experiences and wants to create a just picture of a Rhodesian Shona family in the late colonial era. Although Nyasha resembles Dangarembga, the author gives Tambu, the poor, rural girl, the status of the narrator, symbolically giving voice to the more marginalized girl. Lucia embodies courage in the novel. Her activeness is contrasted to Mainini and Maiguru’s passivity. Lucia has the courage to break out of the patriarchal set of mind. Furthermore, Dangarembga shows

that only ideological and radical behavior such as Nyasha's can be ineffective and dangerous. The more practical and resourceful approaches from Lucia and Tambu are depicted as more successful. They are able to take advantage of the "socio-political changes", whereas Mainini is "robbed of the little comfort" she enjoyed in the traditional Shona structures (Berndt 101). In addition, both of them take help from Babamukuru in their quest for emancipation. Hence, *Nervous Conditions* favors change from within. "Women writers portray how their protagonists resist patriarchy or colonial oppression covertly from within the system rather than overt political resistance or imprisonment depicted more commonly by male postcolonial writers" (Katrak 3). Lucia and Tambu succeed in their undertakings because they do not refuse help from the oppressor. However, that this is a thin line to walk and is exemplified when Tambu gets too comfortable in the role of the grateful, poor relative and stops questioning things. Dangarembga implies;

that the female quest for awareness, and resistance to [...] subordination, cannot be sustained if it lacks the necessary support base, such as a strong cultural heritage and the communal bonding of females against a common dominant power. (Uwakweh 82)

4.8. Excursion: Zimbabwean Women's Sabotage of Patriarchy

Rebellions of Zimbabwean women are not a fictional occurrence, but are substantiated by sociological studies (Jeater, Barnes and Win, Schmidt; qtd in Wells 102-103). In the early 1990s, an oral history project was carried out at the University of Zimbabwe by Julia Wells (101). This study shows that women in Zimbabwe actively undermined patriarchal customs through defiance of "family norms, by choosing their own marriage partner, prioritizing the formal education of their daughters and finding ways to generate income to secure greater degrees of autonomy" (Wells¹⁴ 101). The latter strategy is depicted in the novel by Lucia's successful acquisition of a job, and by Tambu growing her own maize garden. Wells criticizes that women are not given enough credit for their active role in the advancement of gender equality. It is often portrayed that "natural socio-economic evolution" or the "post-independence legislation" have changed society

¹⁴ All page references in this section refer to Wells. For the purpose of readability her name is omitted.

(102). However, these justifications undermine the significant part that women played to emancipate themselves. Wells' study suggests that women's sabotage of patriarchy was crucial and "translated, over the generations, into higher educational and economic status for their daughters and granddaughters" (102).

Wells' study was part of a course on Women in African History. The students were asked to interview three generations¹⁵ of women within a family in order to highlight changes in women's lives over time (103). The study is limited in the representativeness of the sample¹⁶. The reactions of the students to the stories signify the major changes that have shaped Zimbabwean's society over three generations.

For many of the student interviewers, it was a startling experience and a journey into an unfamiliar past. Most were surprised at how constrained the lives of elderly women had been. Some became uncharacteristically emotional and could not maintain academic objectivity. All were struck by the very dramatic level of changes[...]. (105)

The study shows that the actions of the oldest generation (grandmothers) were pivotal for the future of their daughters and granddaughters. In *Nervous Conditions*, the grandmother's decision to let her oldest son be educated by the missionaries eventually brings great wealth and status to his family. However, this older generation did not openly challenge male authority. The majority of the older generation decided not to run away, despite their resentment of male domination. Reasons for this can be found in the stigmatization of urban women. The women chose traditional values and respectability. Tradition emphasized the priority of the good of the lineage above the freedom of the individual (109-110). However, they did not live submissive and obedient to males, but instead they subtly resisted male power and slowly loosened the patriarchal grip (106). Lucia and Tambu also resist patriarchy from within the system, pragmatically and manipulatively. Dangarembga's depiction of them, as the most successful women in their emancipation, mirrors the stories of the women in Wells' study. The middle generation (mothers) profited from some changes in traditional customs. Forced

¹⁵ The youngest generation will not be regarded here, since it relates to the time period after the setting of the novel.

¹⁶ Due to most University students interviewing relatives or close friends, there is a bias towards interviewees with an education higher than the average Zimbabwean. For further information on biases in the interview sample, please consult Wells (2003).

marriage and polygamy had mainly disappeared by the 1950s, and the harsh moral stigma of urban women was lifted (106). However, life was split into two worlds, a condition with which many characters in *Nervous Conditions* struggle. The only available jobs for educated women in the 1960s were nursing or teaching. Wells describes this generation as bitter and frustrated, descriptions that fit Maiguru's character. Wells summarizes the discrimination in the education of children:

From the 1920s through to the 1960s, the prejudice against educating girls was extremely potent. Where funds were limited, sons always got preference. No female informants of the older two generations reported receiving equal access to education as their brothers. Most painted a grim picture of the heartache of exclusion from schooling which they often desperately wanted. Their stories closely echo the sentiments expressed in [...] *Nervous Conditions* [...]. (110)

The discrimination of girls and the strong desire to receive an education is exemplified by Tambu's story. This type of discrimination sparked the rebellion of the first and second generation of women. They were extremely determined to come up with the money and circumvent their husbands' prejudices in order to provide their daughters with education (110). They often succeeded by selling extra crops and vegetables or receiving money from grandmothers and educated sons (110-111). They taught their daughters not to accept discriminating traditions, acted in solidarity with other women and built loyalties with sympathetic supporters (115). One strategy to secure an education for their daughters was to send them to relatives in urban areas. The intention often had to be disguised so that the husband would agree. Cover stories, such as a relative needed help with housework or children, were invented (111). Relieved of agricultural work and with easier access to schools, urban environments provided a better possibility for a girl's education.

Christian schools played a significant role in the education of women. They provided the "easiest path to education and future economic and social emancipation for young women" (107). The irony of missions was that they intended to "instill submission, obedience and domesticity into girls", meanwhile they trained their minds and gave them the skills to become more independent and emancipated (112). Very desperate women, for instance, beaten by their husbands, gave their daughters to the missionaries in order to prevent them from the same maltreatment (109). Within African families that lived on

mission states, the fathers urged their daughters to gain as much education as possible. “Although the creation of an independently earning woman was not their target, they understood that conformity to Western values, religion and culture offered an important avenue to survival in the colonial world” (108). This discrepancy is highlighted in the cases of Nyasha and Tambu. Babamukuru urges both to succeed in school, while informing them that their only goal is to become decent wives.

Some interviewees mentioned that the pivotal moment for their emancipation was their rejection of an arranged marriage, their rejection of the inheritance by a younger brother of their deceased husband or their choice to remain single. This was a break-out from the patriarchal structure. The husbands they chose were usually supportive of their emancipation and the “deconstruction of many aspects of customary patriarchy” (112). This strategy is applied by Lucia. Her persistence in staying single keeps her assertive and independent with an unbroken spirit. She rejects the request to live with Takesure, the possible father of her child, because she is certain she will fend better for herself. Although the interviewees did not explain why their families did not insist on these traditions, it was apparent that the women were confident to be able to support themselves without a husband (112).

The youngest generation (daughters) is reaping the fruits of the revolution that their grandmothers started. This generation is able to acquire a higher education and have more occupational choices. Wells concludes that “many black African women are feminists at heart” and that the “richness of the women’s testimony underscores the lopsided nature of the written colonial records” (114). Wells’ study underscores the non-fictional aspects of *Nervous Conditions*, the way it draws a picture of the lives and resistance by Zimbabwean women. The study and the novel both highlight that Rhodesian women actively resisted. Both texts give the subaltern a voice, exposing political messages within personal stories.

5. Conclusion - The Private Voice a Political Voice

Nervous Conditions is a story about Rhodesian women struggling for equal treatment. Every female character suffers from some form of male supremacy in the last years of colonial Rhodesia, despite their age or level of education. Uwakweh describes *Nervous Conditions* as “a microcosm of patriarchal dynamics in Africa as a whole” (83). The private stories of five women become a political voicing for third world women and a significant contribution to the history of Rhodesia. They illustrate the patriarchal conditions with which women in Rhodesia were confronted. However, Dangarembga does not just victimize her female characters but highlights their efforts to attain agency and put up resistance. With limited voice, the women make use of their bodies and food in order to draw attention to their needs. Female solidarity and collaboration are viewed as vital elements in the resistance of women. The text favors a pragmatic approach that allows help from within the hegemonic system rather than a radically ideological rebellion. The struggle of women against oppression is an important issue in Zimbabwe, with gender inequality and misogynistic practices (such as domestic violence) still prevalent today.

“*Nervous Conditions* pushes the limits of Western feminism just as it pushes the limits of postcolonial theory” (McLeod 172). Feminism has been criticized for its Western homogenized model of the third world woman and its exclusive focus on male domination. *Nervous Conditions* does not only address patriarchy but aims at generating public awareness of power relations, their interrelatedness and injustices. Hence, the impact of colonial oppression and Western superiority, and the collaboration of traditional and Western patriarchy is illustrated. Dangarembga depicts “multiple women’s voices and subject positions as a way to subvert signal and singular representations of African women” (Aegerter 232). The promotion of wholeness and black togetherness for women, both womanist goals, is evident in the novel. *Nervous Conditions* is a successful example of a novel that defeated the discrimination encountered in Zimbabwe by female writers or feminine texts. Dangarembga succeeded at publishing her womanist novel in the male dominated Zimbabwean publishing society in the 1980s.

While the story's focus lies on male domination and female rebellion, it also explores the repercussions of colonial domination. Uwakweh summarizes how "[r]acial and colonial problems are explored as parallel themes to patriarchal dominance because both are doubtless inter-related forms of dominance over a subordinate social group" (83). With *Nervous Conditions* Dangarembga produced a postcolonial text that scrutinizes the oppressive effects discourses of power have on the native.

Dangarembga foreground[s] the ways in which colonial and imperial rule silenced, oppressed and marginalized the people whose lands it affected. [She] shows that [...] it led to the exploitation of resources, hypocrisy and – for those who internalised a sense of being second rate [...] – it could be seen as leading to a personal destructive unease. (Wisker 22)

Similar to Frantz Fanon, Dangarembga analyzes the mental condition of the colonized that results from psychological manipulation and degradation. She illustrates the constructiveness of the native intellectual and the Manichean world, discussed in Fanon's works. *Nervous Conditions* vividly depicts the process and perils of cultural alienation via the colonial infiltration. Dangarembga's text warns about two related processes in the contact with the colonizer's culture. It cautions the colonized from unrestrained embracement and overvaluation of the Western culture, and it conveys that the colonized should not devalue or humiliate his indigenous culture. In relation to this, Dangarembga sends the message that a healthy rootedness in one's indigenous culture is a significant prerequisite to explore the colonizer's culture and to develop a stable identity.

This paper applied the notion of the personal story as political message. The framework of the personal as political has the powerful imperative to validate women's personal and domestic experiences. *Nervous Conditions* arose from within specific socio-historical circumstances. Dangarembga wove a story with images and reflections of her childhood experiences in colonial and white minority ruled Rhodesia. Although Dangarembga chose not to write an autobiography, she incorporated many aspects of her own childhood in order to "leave a very real taste of life during the times that [she] grew up" (George and Scott 311). She was afraid that the Rhodesian people from her childhood would pass unknown, therefore she set them down in this story (George and Scott 311).

Rhodesia's history was shaped by colonial racism and exploitation. Dangarembga captured a social moment of Rhodesia in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This was a time full of changes and instability for Rhodesians. The status of women and patriarchal beliefs of men are depicted as well as the poverty of rural life. The repercussions of colonial politics and Western culture play significant roles in the life of the characters. However, Dangarembga chose to omit the national struggle for independence in order to give space to the struggle of women. In this way, Dangarembga responds to the omission of women during Rhodesia's nationalist movement. Torti, Kilb and Stein conclude that "[i]n narrating her story [Dangarembga] writes women's problematics into Rhodesian history" (254). Stone-Mediatore points out that third world women such as Dangarembga have increasingly expressed their resistance to patriarchal and (post-)colonial powers in experience-orientated texts (1). Such texts of marginalized experience should not be trivialized as just subjective stories. *Nervous Conditions* belongs to the group of narratives that provide relevant criticism of traditional institutions and ideologies from a standpoint of historically muted groups (Stone-Mediatore 2). "[Dangarembga's text] protest[s] official versions of 'History'. Orchestrating multiple marginal voices, her novel serves in itself as textual resistance to the kind of one-sided colonial representation of history" (Aegerter 232). The story is written as a personal account of a young girl's formative years, but it is also a political statement about the conditions and struggles of women in colonial and patriarchal Africa. Dangarembga politicizes marginalized spaces via her exclusive focus on domestic spaces in *Nervous Conditions* (Wilson-Tagoe 190). *Nervous Conditions* produces another kind of history from voices that had been silenced and marginalized. Dangarembga successfully transformed raw experience into critical insight and power (Stone-Mediatore 11).

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der Roman *Nervous Conditions* von der Autorin Tsitsi Dangarembga war eine Pioneerleistung für die Emanzipation der afrikanischen Frau in den 1980er. Die Publikation des Romans war ein Kampf gegen die Diskriminierung von Autorinnen und feministischen Themen Zimbabwe. Dangarembga gibt der niedrigsten aller sozialen Schichten, einem schwarzen Mädchen vom Land, eine Stimme. Durch die Kindheitserzählungen eines zimbabwischen Mädchens spricht Dangarembga wichtige sozialpolitische Themen für afrikanische Frauen an. Diese persönliche Geschichte zeigt den Kampf der Frauen mit den Machtsystemen Patriarchat und Kolonialismus. *Nervous Conditions* ist Teil einer neuen Form von feministischer Bewegung, Womanism. Er ist die Antwort auf den westlichen, weißen und vom Mittelstand dominierten Feminismus. *Nervous Conditions* beschreibt, im Sinne des Womanism, die komplexen Zusammenhänge der Mächte und der Unterdrückung durch Sexismus, Kolonialismus und Rassismus.

Ein zentrales Thema des Romans ist der Umgang der Frauen mit ihrer restriktiven patriarchalischen Umwelt. *Nervous Conditions* zeigt auf, dass das Patriarchat in den uransässigen Stämmen vorhanden war und sich mit Einzug der europäischen Siedlern und Sitten zu einer neuen, verstärkten Form von patriarchalischen Unterdrückungen entwickelte. Zusätzlich führte die rassistische, koloniale Schul- und Landwirtschaftspolitik zu einer Verarmung der afrikanischen Bevölkerung, die besonders hart die Frauen traf. Der Roman beschreibt die tief verwurzelten patriarchalischen Ansichten der Männer über Frauenrollen und Feminität. Jedoch zeigt Dangarembga, dass durch Sozialisation das Patriarchat auch in den Ansichten und Einstellungen der Frauen verankert ist bzw. jahrelange Unterdrückung einen Zustand von Apathie auslösen kann. Der Roman zeigt aber nicht nur die unterschiedlichen Formen der Viktimisierung der Frauen sondern auch deren verschiedenen Wege sich gegen die Männer aufzulehnen und Widerstand zu leisten. In Abhängigkeit von ihren Situationen und Eigenschaften zieht sich der Erfolg der Frauen von Unabhängigkeit über teilweiser Selbständigkeit bis hin zu anhaltender Unterdrückung. *Nervous Conditions* zieht einen

pragmatischen Widerstand von Frauen, die sich die vorhandenen Machtbegebenheiten zu nützen wissen, einer rein ideologischen Rebellion vor.

Der Roman spricht auch eine postkoloniale Agenda an und kritisiert implizit androzentrische Theoretiker. *Nervous Conditions* beschreibt wirtschaftliche und vor allem psychische Folgen des Kolonialismus. Die Autorin zeigt, dass kulturelle Entfremdung durch westliche Lebensweise und koloniale Schulung eine große Gefahr für die Entwicklung einer gesunden Identität darstellt. Als Antwort auf die Auslassung von Frauen und deren Rolle im Kampf um die Unabhängigkeit, verschweigt Dangarembga größtenteils die zimbabwische Freiheitsbewegung und konzentriert sich auf die Probleme der Frauen im Alltag. Der Fokus auf die afrikanische Frau gilt auch als Kritik an frühen Postkolonialtheoretikern, welche sich nur mit dem kolonisierten Mann beschäftigten.

Mit autobiographischen Aspekten und historischer Einbettung stellt Dangarembga's Text eine wichtige Verbindung zwischen persönlicher Erzählung und politischem Gedanke dar. Die Geschichte eines jungen Mädchens und ihrer Familie wird eine politische Aussage zum Patriarchat und Kolonialismus in Afrika. Der Roman gibt der am meisten benachteiligten und ausgegrenzten Bevölkerungsgruppe eine Möglichkeit sich auszudrücken, soziales Bewusstsein zu wecken und bis dahin wenig beachtete Themen zu beleuchten. Dangarembga formte erfolgreich aus persönlichen Erfahrungen einen sozio-politisch kritischen Roman.



Europass

Lebenslauf

Angaben zur Person

Nachname(n) / Vorname(n)

Adresse(n)

Telefon

E-Mail

Staatsangehörigkeit(en)

Geburtsdatum

Geschlecht

Mokry Irene

Schreygasse 4/12 1020 Wien

Österreich

06.08.1985

Weiblich

Berufserfahrung

Datum

Beruf oder Funktion

Wichtigste Tätigkeiten und Zuständigkeiten

Name und Adresse
des Arbeitgebers

Tätigkeitsbereich oder Branche

Juni 2009 – August 2009

Praktikantin

Unterstützung bei Organisation und Durchführung diverser Kurse

Nanaya – Zentrum für Schwangerschaft, Geburt und Leben mit Kindern
Zollergasse 37, 1070 Wien

Soziale Dienstleistung

Datum

Beruf oder Funktion

Wichtigste Tätigkeiten und Zuständigkeiten

Name und Adresse
des Arbeitgebers

Tätigkeitsbereich oder Branche

Mai 2009 – Juni 2009

Ehrenamtliche Mitarbeiterin

Leitung der Gruppe ‚Englische Konversation‘ für Erwachsene

Hilfswerk-Nachbarschaftszentrum Josefstadt
Florianigasse 24, 1080 Wien

Soziale Dienstleistung

Datum

Beruf oder Funktion

Wichtigste Tätigkeiten und Zuständigkeiten

Name und
Adresse
des Arbeitgebers

Tätigkeitsbereich oder Branche

Oktober 2008 – Januar 2009

Psychologiepraktikantin

Mitarbeit bei diversen Studien und Projekten

Institute for
Social Research
and Analysis

S O R A

SORA-Institute for Social Research
Linke Wienzeile 246, A-1150 Wien

Sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung

Datum

Beruf oder Funktion

Wichtigste Tätigkeiten und Zuständigkeiten

Name und Adresse des Arbeitgebers

Tätigkeitsbereich oder Branche

Juli und August 2008

Ferialpraktikantin

Kundenbedienung

Ströck

Bäckerei

Datum
Beruf oder Funktion
Wichtigste Tätigkeiten und Zuständigkeiten
Name und Adresse des Arbeitgebers
Tätigkeitsbereich oder Branche

2004 – 2005
Au Pair in Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A.
Kinderbetreuung
Au Pair in America
Dienstleistung

Schul- und Berufsbildung

Datum
Bezeichnung der angestrebten Qualifikation
Hauptfächer/berufliche Fähigkeiten
Name und Art der Bildungs- oder
Ausbildungseinrichtung

3/2010-1/2011
Diplomarbeit „Tsitsi Dangaermbga vocing the Subaltern“
Betreuer o. Univ.-Prof. Dr. Ewald Mengel

Datum
Bezeichnung der erworbenen Qualifikation
Hauptfächer/berufliche Fähigkeiten
Name und Art der Bildungs- oder
Ausbildungseinrichtung

Seit 2005
Magister
Diplomstudium Psychologie und Diplomstudium Anglistik/Amerikanistik
Universität Wien
1999 – 2004
Matura
Ausbildung zur Kindergartenpädagogin und Horterzieherin
BAKIP 10; Bundeslehranstalt für Kindergartenpädagogik

Persönliche Fähigkeiten und Kompetenzen

Muttersprache(n)
Sonstige Sprache(n)

Deutsch
Englisch

Soziale Fähigkeiten
und Kompetenzen

- Führungsqualitäten
- Gute Kommunikationsfähigkeiten
- Teamgeist

Ich habe diese Fähigkeiten durch meine langjährige Erfahrung als Mitglied einer Handballmannschaft, im sozialen Umfeld Schule und Universität sowie durch meine bisherigen Arbeitserfahrungen erworben.

Organisatorische Fähigkeiten
und Kompetenzen

Ich arbeite sehr pflicht- und verantwortungsbewusst und lege viel Wert auf Effizienz. Ich habe organisatorische Erfahrung durch die Mitarbeit als Voluntär bei der 6. Tagung der Fachgruppe Arbeits- und Organisationspsychologie der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Psychologie sowie der Handball Europameisterschaft der Männer 2010 erworben.

Technische Fähigkeiten
und Kompetenzen

In meinem Psychologie-Studium habe ich mir ein gutes statistisches Wissen sowie praktische Erfahrung mit SPSS angeeignet.

IKT-Kenntnisse und Kompetenzen
Sonstige Fähigkeiten und Kompetenzen
Führerschein(e)

Gute PC-Kenntnisse: Word, PowerPoint und Excel
Ehrgeiz, erworben im Sport sowie im Doppelstudium
Klasse B