The Trials of African Women in Patriarchal African Society:
A Critical Study of Tsitsi Dangaremba’s Nervous Conditions

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University of Toronto
The Trials of African Women in Patriarchal African Society:

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ABSTRACT

This thesis engages with Tsitsi Dangaremba’s *Nervous Conditions* (1988), a novel that reflects how the organization and use of space mirrors the entanglement of hierarchies of class, race, and gender in colonial societies and the subordination of women. The novel captures the destructive impacts of colonization on the African people of then Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, and tension in postcolonial structures where family members struggle with their identity, between African tradition and modern culture. The thesis provides an in-depth analysis of the novel and
gives attention to the various female characters and the struggles they encounter that stem from gender oppression in their community. In providing a feminist analysis the thesis examines the different ways in which African patriarchy manifests itself regarding the subaltern position of women. It demonstrates that the tension between modern and tradition accounts for the negative representation of women and oppression in *Nervous Conditions*.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Place Where You Were Born

"Being born into this world in a particular place is like having the signature of that place stamped upon you. The essence of your place of birth cloaks and protects your walk through this life, and whatever you do becomes registered in the ledger of that geography. You can end up thousands of miles away from your birthplace, and if you are involved in a healing ritual that is meant to work, you have to invoke the spirits that are at the place where you were born in addition to those who are natives of the place you are in. The spirits that witnessed your birth at that place are still there, and your calling them will awaken their attention to your direction. If you embrace this concept, you will find that human mobility does not remove a person's original connection to the birthplace. Your footprints still lead back to the place where you began" (Malidoma, Soma, 1999, p.6).

Introduction

Matters related to identity continue to be contested as political, economic and social conditions intersect to marginalize women. The narrative in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s (1988) Nervous Conditions brings to fore the invention of forms of African traditions that contributed to shifting traditional social boundaries to disadvantage and marginalize women during the colonial and post-colonial period (Spear, 2003). Because of those colonial inventions, males dominate in positions of authority in the political, economic, religious, educational, military, and domestic spheres. They set the bar just high enough so women cannot reach it, keeping males in the
dominant position. Patriarchy operates in a way that keeps us blind to its effects. Increasing opportunities for women are taken as evidence that the “woman problem” has been fixed, causing people to disregard the problems still associated with female inequality. Family traditions are passed down to each generation, ensuring that males continue as the heads of the households and females remain housewives. The patriarchal system continues due to society’s unconscious learned behaviours, stereotypical assumptions, and selective perception. Before women’s rights movements, women looked out on the world and saw themselves reflected in only a few narrow aspects of life. This thesis examines the narrative in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*. The study demonstrates that the organization and use of space mirrors the entanglement of hierarchies of class, race, and gender in colonial societies intersect to Subordinate women (Collins, 1990; 2000; Crenshaw, 1989; 1991; Stasiulis, 1991).

Interestingly, the two main characters in *Nervous Conditions* are women.

The narrative in *Nervous Conditions* captures tension in postcolonial structures where members of a family are seen to be struggling with their identity, between African tradition and modern culture. For example, between male and female education, whether women’s position belong in the private space at home or in the public sphere where they can attain western education. Western education for the main characters who are women leads to assimilation of western values and neglect of African traditions. The narrative depicts women’s experience as one of domination by men. In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambudzai (Tambu for short), Nyasa’s cousin
narrates the story of women as victims of being female who are entrapped, but are trying to escape from victimization. Within African culture, it is unusual for a sister not to regret the death of a brother. Yet according to the narrative, that is what Tambu does. Tambu did not regret when her brother Nhamo died due to resentment of gender ideologies policies that privileged the education of boys over girls. Such policies perpetuate gender oppression. As the only brother, Nhamo was the heir and essential to the continuity of the family’s patrilineage. Tambu’s lack of remorse about the death of her brother Nhamo was triggered by Tambu’s feelings of “gendered exclusion from education and her brother’s comparative advantage over her. Tambu’s education can be suspended or terminated just because she is a woman. Under such a gendered ideology of public and private sphere, men go to school, while women stay at home and adapt to their natural inclination to life defined by cooking and not intellectual achievement (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997, p.62). Nfah-Abbenyi (1997) adds, the “essentializing linkage between men and education vis-a-vis women’s stay at home is clearly exposed by Dangarembga who shows difference between intellectual advancement for men’s biological needs, but not for women” (1997, p.62). Because of such discrimination, women’s intellectual capabilities were doubted.

Following colonial contact, culture was dominated by males in the patriarchal system in which the men ruled and the women followed. Males were characterized as the “breadwinners” and “head of the household” while women were confined to working in the domestic sphere, and to a few caring and nurturing centred jobs. Women’s rights are now protected by law, but the
patriarch still rules. The values and ideals of the past are still embedded in our unconscious thinking, even if we are unaware of them. The source of the oppression of women in 21st century Africa is an issue that has generated a lot of controversy in the scholarship on African women. This is because women’s oppression forces Africans to take stock of whatever it is we call Africa and examine how that entity relates with the category woman. This is a contentious issue because it engages the nerve centres of race, class, gender and the creation and distribution of power. I argue that patriarchy and capitalism have contributed to gender inequality in Zimbabwe. For the past decades, patriarchy has been supported by legislation and attitudes that preclude women from achieving a legal or political identity, and this relationship of subordination between patriarch and woman is tantamount to slavery. Schaefer (1998) defines gender inequality as the incongruity among individuals due to sexual identity. Gender inequality implies that women have less power than men do, which disadvantages women. For this thesis, Dangarembga’s portrayal of African female oppression calls for a classed, anti and decolonized reading of the African woman question. Dangarembga’s portrayal of the oppression of the African woman centres on patriarchy as a complex and fluid concept, one that mutates and reinvents itself when need be. Tsitsi Dangarembga draws a lot of her writing from her real-life experiences. In an interview with Wilkinson (1993), Dangarembga emphasizes that she not only uses her life experiences, but she aims to bring out the reality of women characters in the context she is dealing with. When Wilkinson (1992) asked if the women characters become her careful constructions of reality, she replied “exactly” and went on as follows:
I think it is very difficult to separate constructions from reality and even to understand which way the influences were working, whether the constructions were working on the reality or vice versa. So, I think the question which you're asking me, as far as I understand or can interpret it, refers actually to the process of writing. How much of your real experience do you reproduce as real experience, and how much do you mold your experience into a theme or an ideology? To answer that question with respect to Nervous Conditions, I would say that the one thing I was very concerned with was to leave a very real taste of life during the times that I grew up (p.311).

These ideas illustrate the importance of self as a method (Berg & Smith, 1988; Charmaz & Mitchell 1997).

The narrative in Dangarembga’s (1988) *Nervous Conditions* is about tension in postcolonial structures where members of a family are seen to be struggling with their identity, between African traditions and modern culture. For example, between male and female education, whether women’s position belongs at home or in the public sphere where women can attain western education, which leads to western assimilation and neglect of African tradition by educated African women. From the narrative, Tambudzai (Tambu for short), did not show remorse or grief after the death of her brother Nhamo as illustrated in her sensational announcement “I was not sorry when my brother died”. And went on “Nor am I apologizing for my callousness as you may define it, my lack of feeling. For it is not that at all. I feel many things these days…” (Dangarembga, 1988, p.1). While Tambu wanted very much to get
educated, due to poverty her uncle chose to educate Nhamo simply because he was a boy, and happened to be older than Tambu. On the other hand, Tambu’s cousin Nyasa who studied in England is afraid that she is not an ideal African since she did not grow up in Zimbabwe.

Rationale for the thesis

Through this thesis and additional short works, the reader will engage in inquiry around the following questions:

• How does one’s culture contribute to or constrain who they are as a person?

• What is the relationship between an individual and the society in which he/she lives?

• How does the experience of colonialism shape the psychology of the colonized?

• What is culture? For this thesis, culture refers to “signifying, symbolic or meaning systems” (Delaney & Kaspin, 2011, p.13).

• What sustains a culture (labor, language, socialization, gender roles, spirituality and traditions)?

The experiences of African women during colonialism and in post colony after many African countries attained independence continues to attract intellectual interests. This particular study is important because the narrative in Nervous Conditions speaks to the lived experience of women and girls in Rhodesia, preset day Zimbabwe, where I was born. I am therefore an insider because I can relate to the experiences of the women whose experiences are highlighted in the narrative. Thus, I was aware that interpretation of the narrative may have been informed by my
positionality under the Outsider-Insider debate because I may not be neutral (Asselin, 2003; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). As a Zimbabwean woman of Shona background, I share communal background with the women in the novel. In addition, as an educated African woman, I also share class background with some of the women in the narrative. Nonetheless, I recognize shared communal background may not be necessarily sufficient to ensure rapport between the researcher and the researched. However, I believe that my political awareness and commitment towards the achievement of equity for women and elimination of oppression against women makes me an outsider.

**Brief biography of Tsitsi Dangarembga**

The novelist and playwright Tsitsi Dangarembga was born in 1959 in Mutoko in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). At the age of two, she went to England with her family where she began her education in a British school. Like her central character, Nyasha in the novel, Dangarembga spent her early childhood in England (age two through six). Although there are many autobiographical parallels between Nyasha and Tsitsi, she says her novel is not an autobiography (Wilkinson, 1992, p. 190). However, Dangarembga identifies herself with both of her central characters: Nyasha, who received her education abroad, and Tambu, who was educated in Zimbabwe. In an interview with Jane Wilkinson in 1989, Dangarembga said that she wrote “of things I had observed and had direct experience with, larger than any one person’s own tragedies... a wider implication and origin and therefore were things that needed to be told” (1992, p 190). In the light of this, Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* contains autobiographical elements in the sense that many of the events that take place in the novel are things she confronted in her real-life experiences. The difficulties Dangarembga faced when she
returned from England are clearly discernible in Nyasha, who is discriminated against on the
grounds that she is black, female, educated and most of all anglicized.

Dangarembga returned to then Rhodesia when she was six years old and concluded her
early education. She returned to England in 1977 to study medicine at Cambridge University,
hoping that she would serve the people of her society; however, she did not complete her studies.
She then returned to Rhodesia just before it attained independence in 1980. On her return to
Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, she continued with her educational pursuits. She enrolled at the University
of Harare to study psychology. While studying in Harare, Dangarembga held a job at a marketing
agency as a copywriter. She was also a member of a drama group affiliated with the University.
Dangarembga considers this period as the most significant for her creative development. She
wrote many plays that were put into production at Harare University. In 1983, Dangarembga
wrote a play titled *The Lost of the Soil*. She subsequently became an active member of a theatre
group called Zambuko, which was directed by Robert McLaren. In this group, she was
instrumental in the production of two plays, *Katshaa* and *Mavambo* (Brüner, 1993, pp.196-197).
In 1985, Dangarembga explored prose writing, writing and publishing a short story in Sweden
titled “The Letter.” In 1987, she published a play in Harare called *She No Longer Weeps*.

Dangarembga was almost unknown until she published *Nervous Conditions*, which
appeared in 1988. Her first real success and popularity came at the age of 25 with the publication
of this book. Nervous Conditions was the first novel to be published in England by a black
Zimbabwean woman. Dangarembga had some difficulties in getting *Nervous Conditions*
published until she took it to Women’s Publishers. Commenting on the rejection of
Dangarembga’s manuscript, Doris Lessing said, “it was criticized by male critics as being
‘negative,’ and presenting an unfair picture of the lives of African women” (Wilkinson, 1992, p. 3). In 1989, Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* was awarded the Commonwealth Writers Prize. Prior to this, she had won a prize from the Swedish aid organization SIDA’s short story competition. After *Nervous Conditions* was published in Denmark, Dangarembga travelled there in 1991 to be part of the Images of Africa Festival. Dangarembga continued her education in Berlin at the Deutsche Film und Fernseh Akademie, where she studied film directorship. While studying, she made many films, including a documentary for German television. She then made a film entitled Everyone’s Child (1996).

**Aims and objectives of the thesis**

This study examines how the narrative in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* with respect to the use of space mirrors the entanglement of hierarchies of class, race, and gender oppression in colonial society in Zimbabwe in particular and Africa in general.

**Outline of the Thesis**

The study consists of two main parts. Since the incidents depicted in *Nervous Conditions* take place in Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, which used to be a British colony. Chapter 2 presents short history of the British Empire, especially concerning the colonization of Rhodesia. Following this short description of the British Empire and the process that led to the independence of Southern Rhodesia under the name of Zimbabwe, this study investigates the detrimental impact of colonization on the indigenous people in Rhodesia, especially on women. This is a way of building the future by interrogating the past to generate a new representation of history that can accommodate a multiplicity of experiences. More importantly, it contributes to
discussions that speak through lived experiences and how we can re-learn our culture as well as
discover and recreate our true selves and recognize the multiple ways of knowing to envision a
liberated identity.

This study’s main argument is that patriarchy leads to gender inequality and the
subordination of women to the extent that women have no power over all aspects of their lives.
Thus, this thesis further examined the interplay between feminism, patriarchy and culture within
the Shona culture in Zimbabwe. The three variables are interwoven to the extent that any efforts
to separate them are fruitless. Following a consideration of relevant theoretical frameworks
provided in Chapter 3, the second part of this thesis engages in an in-depth analysis of Tsitsi
Dangarembga’s novel *Nervous Conditions* and focuses on the various female characters in the
novel and the struggles they encounter that stem from gender oppression in their community.
Attempts are then made to highlight how patriarchy is reinforced through the socialization
process, which begins in the family, and how patriarchy infiltrates other sectors of society like
such as religion, education, the economy and politics. Lastly, patriarchal practices which lead to
the control of female sexuality by males will be highlighted. Disgruntled at the patriarchal
depiction of culture by their male counterparts, African women writers have learned to use
writing to make their voices heard on their own terms. In addition, the women have used writing
as a tool of communication to bring to the attention of their own people and, by extension, to a
wider readership aspect of culture that are of most concern to women but which have not been
addressed at all or insufficiently addressed. The women’s writings provide the literary spaces
where questions on women are posed, discussed, and, in some cases, answered.
The narrative in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s novel *Nervous Conditions*, demonstrates how women are represented as the “Other” in relation to the dominant male culture, which denies women education. For instance, Tambu, Nyasa’s cousin narrates the story of women as victims of being female who are entrapped, but are trying to escape from victimization. When women were educated, they were sent to missionary schools, where they were subject to domesticity to disempower them, to become good wives (Nakanyike-Musisi, 2007). Furthermore, domesticity has been cited as the leading factor in the formation of class, gender, and race relations in Africa (Nakanyike-Musisi, 2007; Robertson, 1986). Under domesticity, women were disadvantaged as they were taught mostly areas related to the domestic sphere such as agriculture and home science.

Within African culture, it is unusual for a sister not to regret the death of a brother. Yet according to the narrative that is the case. Nfah-Abbenyi (1997) observes that

gendered exclusion from education and her brother’s comparative advantage over her. Tambu’s education can be suspended or terminated just because she is a woman. Under such circumstances, women’s education is not a priority. Moreover, within such a gendered ideology of public and private sphere, men go to school, while women stay at home and adapt to their natural inclination to life defined by cooking and not intellectual achievement (p.62).

Because of such discrimination, women’s intellectual capabilities will always be challenged by elite patriarchal men.
From the narrative, Tambu’s conflict with the social context is apparent in fighting the identity label that portray women as inferior relative to men. Tambu notices how intelligent her cousin Nyasa is. Nyasa rebels against the binary opposition of maleness/femaleness as she pursues self-determination and independence. However, Nyasa’s problem may lie in hybridization because she grew up and got educated in England. As a result, she cannot speak Shona, her local language and feels the effects of alienation. According to Nfah-Abbenyi (1997) Nyasa’s “alienation from living in England creates a gap between her tradition and English culture which shapes her identity and subjectivity” (p.63)

In addition, the violence subject to women in the novel illustrates that the colonial period in Zimbabwe as was the case elsewhere in Africa was violent. That experience illuminates Crawford Young’s (1994) *Bula Matari* thesis “that colonization was a violent and traumatic experience that marked a fundamental shift in the history of the entire African continent” (p.1). Therefore in many ways the violence that happened in Southern Rhodesia then (Zimbabwe today) against the women is rooted in colonial violence (Young, 1994). That is the case because through ‘invention of traditions’ colonialists changed gender relations in ways that disadvantaged women and continue to do through civil violence today (Ranger, 1984). In other words, Zimbabwe’s colonial legacy is responsible for the country’s contemporary problems especially violence against women highlighted in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s novel *Nervous Conditions*. 
**Personal Location Statement**

I experienced a schooling system that made me conscious of Western culture but ‘useless’ at understanding my own African identity. As a student in this formal education system, I soon realized that the knowledge it produces, validates and disseminates was not the same knowledge I received from my grandparents and the local community. The elders in my community emphasized our connection to the environment and the need to respect the spiritual and metaphysical world because it is the source of all knowledge and life.

We live in a world where limited beliefs and thinking are accepted. In the culture I grew up in, not going to school and being the “kitchen girl” was acceptable. I was taught that only male students could achieve academic excellence. Looking at my life today and finding it barely recognizable, I am grateful that I have been able to attend the University of Toronto, one of the best universities in the world. I was named a Dean’s List Scholar in 2012 and was one of two students who graduated with distinction in 2013. I received a $25,000 scholarship to do my Masters degree at the University of Toronto, but that was not where I started. I struggled for six years in the educational system, thinking I was not good enough. The words “stay at home and do the dishes” and “don’t go to school” were threaded through my life.

In 2006, I immigrated to Canada. I was very excited, but not yet living my dream of being a sophisticated woman living her academic dream. I was excited, but why was I excited? I look back at the six or seven years of my adulthood during which I struggled because I did not dream big enough at that time. I did not know then that my dreams were covered and smothered by cultural limitations, that I was defined by who my parents were, by ideas about what our
culture can do and what our community can do. When I look at all the areas of my life—
financial, mental, emotional, familial, geographical - I feel that all of those things put me in a
box. Some of our boxes are very big, and we think they are amazing; some of them are small,
and we feel that they are choking the life out of us. We are trained to be realistic, to be logical, to
be practical, but there is nothing realistic or logical about Nelson Mandela leaving prison after 27
years and leading the largest forgiveness movement ever. Neither is there anything realistic about
my journey.

I was born and raised in Zimbabwe, after it attained independence yet I had to fight just
as had to go to school; I was told that my place was in the kitchen. I went on to have a child
before I got married. My son and I were in and out of shelters just to keep a roof over heads. I
look at my life, and I was not supposed to become who I am today. Something turned for me, but
it did not come from outside; from my family or my coach or my community. Rather, it came
from within. The change was not practical and not logical. I did not know how I was going to
get there. There were no examples of how I would get there, there were no instructions and no
GPS; no one around me had any idea of how to help me. All there was my intuition, my internal
GPS, my internal God, my will and desire, and the big dream inside my belly. I was willing to
keep at it until I gave birth to something greater than myself.

I am excited about analyzing Nervous Conditions, firstly because Tsitsi Dangarembga
was the first Zimbabwean female author to receive wide acclaim for her work. Furthermore,
because I believe that the central themes and problems explored in this novel are relevant to the
struggles that women in Africa face every day. Many young girls and women living in both
urban and rural communities in Africa choose to or are forced to put their education on hold or
drop out of school due to family responsibilities or lack of financial support from their families. It is also an established condition that many African families are headed by fathers or men in general whose authority is final within the domestic sphere over their families. Men are the sole decision makers, making women voiceless and compelling them to live in passive silence, making them victims of emotional and sometimes physical abuse. In Southern Africa and many other African countries, this is how it has always been, taught and passed down following colonial contact. I believe *Nervous Conditions* depicts these themes well and opens up debate.

In the patriarchal society that we live in, many African women, lacking education, and subject to the respectability masculinity paradigm believe that it is the duty of a good woman to be submissive to her male partner (Ayisi, 1979; Matsinhe, 2015). Respectability implores African women to behave themselves and be good women. For women respectability translates into male dependence within or outside marriage and ultimately domination. I wish to make the reader aware of these unjust practices, their physical consequences as well as the psychological impact such biased attitudes have on women. The psychological ramifications are extensive, and they can be said to be a way of keeping the cycle of oppression going in Africa; this cycle will inevitably hinder a country’s development. For this thesis, a literature search was conducted to explore what mind-sets need to change to achieve equity and equality of opportunity in institutions of higher education in Zimbabwe. I conclude that patriarchy, including the subservience of girls and women, the confinement of girls and women to the kitchen, the creation of double-binds for women, the existence of glass ceilings and sticky floors and glass escalators all have to be re-visited with changed mind-sets if communities are to succeed in eradicating the ugly face of misogyny.
Even though I am a graduate from one of the most accredited universities in the world, there was a time when I was broken. The University of Toronto gave me a chance to resume my studies here in Canada, and that experience gave me the energy to take my academic work more seriously than ever before. I would therefore rank my determination to get a university education through the Transitional Year Program as my greatest accomplishment so far. Having come to The University of Toronto (U of T) and performed exceptionally well, and having made it this far given my other commitments as a single mother and other barriers I faced, have been the motivating factors for me to write my thesis on this topic. Accordingly, I believe that my multiple margins as a woman of colour, a single mother, and a mature student have exposed me to multiple intersections of oppression. Additionally, as a woman, I have also been subject to the discriminatory aspects of patriarchy introduced by colonialism.

**Contextualization, Themes and Operationalization of Key Words**

This thesis assumes that knowledge produced and disseminated in the context of formal schooling should be relevant to the local people and their environment. Unfortunately, the post-colonial schooling system in Africa not only negates knowledge that exists in the community but also persuades and even forces students to unlearn the already acquired knowledge from the community. Below are definitions of key terms used in this study including *patriarchy, gender inequality* and *influence of colonialism*.

**Patriarchy**
Patriarchy literally means the rule of the fathers. Patriarchy in some African communities has its roots in colonial inventions (Sear, 2003). It was later institutionalized by post-tribal societies into more complex religious, social and legal systems and formal governmental structures such as the senate of ancient Rome and most subsequent governments (Sear, 2003). This is so because it permeates every sphere of human endeavor. Seen along the same lines as capitalism and socialism, patriarchy and feminism have become bedfellows. Even in countries where legal equality of women and men has been established, the deep psychological and cultural roots of patriarchy survive as a belief system in the minds of many women and men. In general, patriarchy is a social structure that is built on the systematic oppression of women through societal and institutional conditions, norms and rules that perpetually disenfranchise women and are intrinsically linked to issues of power and control. Patriarchy is male-dominated in that positions of authority, be they in the political, economic, legal, religious, educational, military or domestic sphere, are generally reserved for men. When women find themselves in such positions of oppression, there is generally some bewilderment as people begin to ask if women will measure up. In a patriarchy, what men say tends to have greater credibility than what women say, which buttresses the privileges of men. Patriarchy is an authoritative male system that is both oppressive and discriminatory. It is oppressive in social, political, economic, and cultural environments. It is discriminatory in its control of access to power, management of resources and benefits, and manipulation of public and private power structures. Patriarchy is grounded in the assumption that the individual European male is a universal reference point and the source of defining visions of the cosmos, society, citizenship, and the individual self within hierarchical concepts of gender, race, and class relations. Moghadam (2004) has written that
under classic patriarchy, “the senior man has authority over everyone else in the family, including younger men, and women are subject to distinct forms of control and subordination” (p.141).

Furthermore, property, residence, and descent all proceed exclusively through the male line. Today, however, this definition may be considered an overly simplistic description because the phenomenon has evolved substantially over time. Kethusegile et al., (2000) assert that under patriarchy, women tend to lose their rights under both customary law and general law. They may not be able to implement effectively the formal rights they have under general law, while at the same time they are deprived of their rights under customary law because of the way society and the courts interpret it. Men are often better at manipulating both the state and traditional legal institutions to their advantage, excluding women from rights to land and deny them rights to matrimonial assets at divorce by referring to the traditional communal property rights of their kin group.

_Nervous Conditions_ is concerned with women who live in a traditional African society in Zimbabwe (former Rhodesia), who struggle to find their place in the patriarchal system and who search for their independence. Each female protagonist in the novel finds her own way of dealing with her situation; however, this essay focuses on two characters-Tambu and Nyasha whose response to the male power is very different. While Tambu escapes from the environment of inequality in order to seek her liberation, Nyasha chooses to resist the patriarchy but her rebellion against her father ends up tragically as she suffers from the nervous conditions. The theme of
female struggle against male dominancy is presented throughout the novel and the narrator. So it is necessary to understand the system, which keeps women dominated and subordinate, and to unravel its workings in order to work for women’s development in a systematic way. Because patriarchal institutions and social relations are responsible for the inferior or secondary status of women. Patriarchal society gives absolute priority to men and to some extent limits women’s human rights also. Patriarchy structure has been a major feature of the traditional society. It is a structure of a set of social relations with material base which enables men to dominate women (Stacey, 1993; Lerner, 1986; Humm, 1989). It is a system of social stratification and differentiation on the basis of sex, which provides material advantages to males while simultaneously placing severe constraints on the roles and activities of females. The rise of capitalism surely did lead to the development of a new form of masculinity patriarchy. Today the family structure in Africa no longer neatly fit the family characterization of respectability, but rather alternative forms (informal structures). These days due to globalization and immigration the duality demands of respectability do not follow the core structure or institutions and its attendant ideology of norms and standards within most African societies (Matsinhe, 2015).

However, such changes have not triggered an alteration in the basic structure of patriarchy and masculinity since the historical shift did not have great effects upon gender relations, “men remained the dominant gender; all six patriarchal structures continued across this period; only a minor shift in the relative significance of public and private sites of patriarchy, which can be identified as far back as the seventeenth century, accelerated” (Walby, 1990, p. 200). What is more disturbing about patriarchal ideals in African culture, is its continued focus
on the African boy child. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s hugely popularised TEDxEuston Talk by Beyonce’s hit Flawless talks of this; “we define masculinity in a very narrow way…”

“Masculinity becomes this hard-small cage. We teach boys to be afraid of weakness, fear, and vulnerability. We teach boys to mask their true selves” (2013). This is a tilted view on the age-old patriarchy debate, which moves us away from boxing African women as the only victims of patriarchy in African Culture. But allows us to see how we are all victims of a very complex and difficult system. In the Shona culture, patriarchal practices shape and perpetuate gender inequality and strip women of any form of control over their sexuality due to the fact that:

Custom in Africa is stronger and dominant the law, and in some societies stronger even than religion. Over the years, customary practices have been incorporated into religion, and ultimately have come to be believed by their practitioners to be demanded by their adopted gods, whoever they may be (Lightfoot-Klein, 1989, p. 47 as cited in Okome, 2003, p.71).

Long after Lightfoot-Klein made this important assertion, it is only appropriate that we continue to assess how culture continues to impact negatively on the lives of women.

**Patriarchal Practices which lead to the control of female sexuality by males**

Because African culture is patriarchal and patrilineal, female sexuality is largely in the hands of males (Khumalo & Garbus, 2002). The payment of lobola, arranged marriages, rape and levirate marriages will be used as examples.
Payment of lobola

In the Shona culture, by virtue of the payment of lobola, children belong to the father and inherit the father’s surname, totem as well as citizenship. Furthermore, married women cannot pass on their citizenship rights to their children even though single mothers can. This is due to the fact that, many Zimbabwean laws follow cultural customs, which are part of the patriarchal system in which women occupy subordinate positions. Among young people the meanings and functions of lobola are hotly contested, but differ markedly from those set out in the academic literature. While many students see lobola as a valued part of ‘African culture’, most also view it as a financial transaction which necessarily disadvantages women. All the same, lobola gives a man all rights whilst the woman is stripped of all freedom and rights. She is even further reduced to the level of acquired property. The scenario is made worse in cases where the lobola was set at a high price as this can lead to abuse if the wife fails to be obedient to her husband even though she was ‘paid for’. As a result, lobola, which is part of the patriarchal nature of our society breeds inequality and widens the gap between men and women, thereby placing women in a subordinate position. Lobola or roora is a traditional custom that has endured for centuries (Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010, p.3). As postulated by Stoneman and Cliffe (1989), nearly all traditional marriages in Zimbabwe were – and still are – expected to involve this ritual.

According to Bourdillon (1976, 1998), as is the case in many African societies, the normative marriage customs of Shona-speaking peoples are characterized by the negotiation and payment of lobola. Accordingly, men, who play a central role in the lobola negotiation process, should also be urged not to turn lobola into a money-making project for this has far-reaching
implications for women and for marriages. The state should also be implored, in its protracted efforts to curb domestic violence, marital rape and other social ills, to consider re-educating society on the dangers of allowing exorbitant amounts of money to be paid as lobola in marriages.

Levirate Marriages

African people respected marriage to an extent of trying to protect it at all costs. One of the protective measures was the introduction of levirate, in which the deceased’s brother was expected to marry the widow. According to Shona custom, when one’s husband dies, the widow is expected to marry one of her late husband’s brothers. Levirate marriage can, at its most positive, serve as protection for the widow and her children, ensuring that they have a male provider and protector. Robison (2012, p.1) explains that the term “levirate” is derived from the Latin levir, “husband’s brother,” and that levirate marriage is therefore the duty of a man to marry the widow of his deceased brother if his brother had produced no male heir. Levirate marriage can be a positive in a society where women are not self-sufficient and must rely on men to provide for them, especially in societies where women are under the authority of, dependent on, in servitude to or regarded as possessions of their husbands, and to ensure the survival of the clan. The practice of levirate marriage is strongly associated with patriarchal societies. If the woman fails to comply she risks being sent back to her parents leaving behind her children and all that she toiled for. On the other hand, if a man is widowed, he is given his late wife’s young
sister as a wife. The wife he is given must be a virgin and consent is not sought from her, she just
has to comply because that is culture. Levirate marriage is one of the traditions which pastoral
caregivers should be alert to, as they may need to find ways to help women should there be signs
that they are being forced into such practices against their will.

Arranged marriages

From my experience, arranged marriages are familiar within the Shona traditions and
elsewhere in Zimbabwe and beyond. These can be based on religion such as in the apostolic sect
where young girls are married off to older male members of the sect based on prophetic
revelations. These girls cannot deny getting married to these men who in some cases are old
enough to be their fathers for fear of being cut off from their families. In some cases, when there
is a drought spell in the country parents marry off their daughters to affluent members of the
community in exchange for money or grain. In extreme cases, some fathers marry off their
daughters to their debtors when they fail to repay their debts. Furthermore, in order to appease
angry spirits following murder, a young girl (a virgin) is given to the wronged family as a wife.
In all these cases, consent is not sought from the young women concerned but they are forced to
comply with cultural traditions.

Rape
Women’s lack of control over their sexuality is also displayed through the rape of young girls by male relatives (Human Rights Monitor, 2001). Following the myth that sex with a virgin is a cure for HIV, young girls have been in many instances subjects for that experiment. Married women on the other hand cannot use contraceptives if their husbands do not want them to do so. Furthermore, even if they suspect their husbands of infidelity they cannot insist on safe sex because men control the sexual encounter (Meursing & Sibindi, 1995). Prostitutes cannot insist on condom use with their male clients and this scenario of women’s powerlessness has no doubt fueled the spread of HIV in the African continent. All women are ducks waiting to be shot, whether young, married or single. Rape is a very serious form of male violence against women and in the annual report of Stígamót for 2008 it says that women who have been raped in most instances are filled with feelings of shame and many have a bad self-esteem, furthermore, anxiety, sadness and guilt are also very common feelings (Stígamót, 2008). When women should be extremely angry and feeling hatred towards the offender they both are feeling ashamed and guilty. This sounds strange but the reason could be that some women do not have a high self-esteem and thus put the blame on themselves instead of the offender.

Gender Inequality

The theme of gender inequality is explored by many authors in African literature portraying African patriarchal societies during and after independence. However, Dangarembga surpassed all her counterparts in her vivid depiction of this inequality in her masterpiece novel
Nervous Conditions. The setting is colonial Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, in the 1960s and 1970s. Focusing on the characters of Nyasha and Tambu, who are cousins leading different lives during their teenage years, the novel highlights the issue of gender inequality in patriarchal society, where women are neglected and men have power over women’s lives. This novel further how this inequality is enhanced by imperial government and by the perpetuation of colonialism via gender dominance and class division.

The theme of gender inequality in this novel unfolds through the unique characterization and more so the author’s personal experience in colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe. Dangarembga presents female characters who stand up against the internal societal strictures to break the yoke of patriarchal dominance that perpetuates gender inequality. The road to challenging gender inequality is a bumpy ride; the characters pass through severe stress and rejection but ultimately there is light at the end of the tunnel as the society portrayed in the novel is gradually taken over by an unstoppable force for change. Women characters struggle against the currents opposing their equality and strive to be accepted.

Tambu, the main protagonist, is raised in a poor family in which her well-off paternal uncle takes on the obligation to educate Tambu’s brother, Nhamo. Gender inequality is depicted as Tambu is not entitled to be educated because the culture constructs young women as objects confined to performing household chores and later to be married off. Her dreams of education come true only when her brother Nhamo dies, which is why she is not touched emotionally by his death but sees it as a blessing since she has no other brothers. Gender inequality is also brought out in realities encountered by Nyasha, a teenage girl who spent her influential years in England when her parents were on scholarship education. Upon return to Africa, the ugly truths
of the vast cultural differences between Africa and Europe especially where women are concerned appear before Nyasha. Dangarembga portrays the plight of African woman through the eyes of Tambu and Nyasha in a dominating culture of patriarchy. The women’s freedom is curtailed, and despite Nyasha’s efforts to study hard, her lateness coming home is challenged by her parents, who have experienced a different culture.

The economic dependence of women on men is another factor that contributes to gender inequality in the patriarchal society. Tambu’s father Jeremiah preferred traditional domestic life for his daughter rather than formal education. However, Tambu retained some values outside African culture and maintained her African culture. Yet she was still not seen as a strong woman. Paradoxically, in African culture African women are strong in their ideologies, but lack transformation agency required to empower them in areas like education for women. The biological factor that determines masculinity and femininity consequently promoted distinction in female identity, sexuality and difference with focus on strong African women. From the narrative, the level at which women are oppressed can be understood by looking at different horizons in women’s struggles to access socio political and economic resources, which they are deprived of since women lack power and agency to fight for their rights in communities where they live. The oppressive tendency towards women is one, which encourages the homogenous representation of identity, sexuality and difference. For example, the narrative demonstrates how women are represented as the “Other” in relation to the dominant male culture, which denies women education. For instance, Tambu, Nyasa’s cousin narrates the story of women as victims of being female and entrapped and challenges of trying to escape from victimization. In such circumstances, women’s education is not a priority.
Tsitsi Dangarembga (1988) presents a situation in which the women are entrapped economically and thus have to depend on men to survive. Tambu’s mother is also entrapped, bound by straps of social stratification and culture as a result of colonialism and so is her aunt Maiguru, who depends on Babamukuru for money. As per the society’s stereotypical constructs, Tambu’s mother does not believe Tambu’s education would help that much. Even the educated women like Maiguru are entrapped due to the inequalities of gender. Maiguru does not enjoy any status because of her education as she is subjected to the demands of the men in her community and those of her husband, ingrained in the culture. The female characters strive to become independent, and this is the way toward ending gender inequality. In the novel, Tambu, Nyasha, Lucia and later Maiguru are on a path to break the chains of demeaning culture and uplift the place of woman in a male-dominated society. To sum up, insights into gender inequality are highlighted by Dangarembga, and it clearly emerges that cultural stereotypes are to blame for the injustices suffered by girls and women in contemporary society. Dangarembga succeeds in bringing out the theme of gender inequality through her vivid plot development and characterization in a colonial and patriarchal setting. It is therefore doubtless that women in Africa and around the world should not only liberate themselves from cultural entrapment but also systems that deny them equality.

The Influence of Colonialism

In the narrative the effects of a Eurocentric education on personal identity are central. Tambu’s education changes her and alters her perception of herself in relation to her community.
She begins her education with the goal of achieving success so she can lift her family out of poverty; she wishes to succeed where her father has not succeeded. But as she allows herself to be incorporated into the school system, she becomes enamored of European culture and tradition and grows to scorn her shabby African roots. She wants all those "white" things, and her original reason for pursuing an education becomes an excuse, a facade behind which she hides her own sometimes unconscious but very real desires. The essential action of the novel involves Tambu’s experiences in a Western-style educational setting, and the mission school both provides and represents privileged opportunity and enlightenment. Despite Ma’Shingayi’s strong objections, Tambu knows the only hope she has of lifting her family out of poverty lies in education.

However, the mission school poses threats, as well: Western institutions and systems of thought may cruelly and irreversibly alter Africans who are subjected to them. Nyasha, who has seen firsthand the effect of being immersed in a foreign culture, grows suspicious of an unquestioning acceptance of colonialism’s benefits. She fears that the dominating culture may eventually stifle, limit, or eliminate the long-established native culture of Rhodesia—in other words, she fears that colonialism may force assimilation. The characters’ lives are already entrenched in a national identity that reflects a synthesis of African and colonialist elements. The characters’ struggle to confront and integrate the various social and political influences that shape their lives forms the backbone and central conflict of *Nervous Conditions*. The concept of colonialism has often been used interchangeably with the idea of imperialism, even though there is a fine line between them.

According to Ngugi (1987, 1989) and Fanon (1967) the experience of colonial
domination reveal that in the effort to perpetuate exploitation, the colonizers not only created a system to repress the cultural life of the colonized people, but also provoked and developed the cultural alienation of a part of the population. They did so through assimilation of indigenous people and creating social gaps between the indigenous elites and the popular masses, for example, those who can speak English and those who cannot. The urban elite assimilate the colonizers mentality and consider themselves culturally superior to the masses. Thus, for Ngugi (1989) argues that in order for culture to play the important role in the liberation movement, the movement must be able to preserve the positive cultural values of every well-defined social groups, of every category towards a national dimension. Such necessity implies that the liberation [decolonization] struggle is above all, a struggle for the preservation and survival of the cultural values of the people and for the harmonization and development of these values within a national framework. In that regard, undervaluing the cultural values of indigenous (African) peoples has done a lot of harm to indigenous communities in Africa and here in Canada among Aboriginal peoples.

Ngugi wa Thiongo (1986, 1987) is emphatic that when it comes to issues of contemporary post-colonial discourses, the medium of printed literature needs to be seen as but one of many media which communicates to the people. Thus, Ngugi tackles questions regarding the production and distribution of post-colonial cultural discourses. For Ngugi, the use of
European language in modern literary production raises questions about the politics and economics of publishing, about literacy, access to and distribution of literature. Ngugi sees them as containing and conveying essential and unchangeable ideological values; further he sees the ongoing cultural hegemony of European in Africa as both a cause and reflections of neo-colonialism. Ngugi is adamant that English is the language of the ruling class minority, and ethnic language as the primary language of the majority of African populations (1987). It was this consciousness which informed Ngugi’s position to switch writing novels in English into his native Kikuyu.

We (African people) are aware of the terrible role played by language policy during colonialism in creating amongst us a false understanding of ourselves (Biko, 2002). Black consciousness has tended to be seen only in the context of narrow party-political terms. Biko however, had always been ambivalent about whether philosophy should be boxed into a political party. Philosophy to Biko was about “the transformation of the way in which people lived and related to each other, as a basis for whatever they did in politics, economic activity, cultural pursuits, professional practice or in whatever activities they choose to commit themselves” (p. xviii). Biko’s main point is that African cultures should mutually influence each other because under African systems or indigenous systems African culture was dynamic.

Accordingly, Dei (2002) argues that African people promote responsibility towards one another (communal values) (p.340). I can relate to this through my lived experience in Zimbabwe where communal practices like spiritually connected me to my cultural values and practices. Such activities promote spiritual harmony. As a result, Wane (2006) observes that
Spirituality helps our self to connect with the souls, and the community in which we belong. For example, Wane (2006) cites her lived experience to locate herself as a colonized subject which allowed her to make the spiritual connection to her ancestral roots. Thus, the connection between spirituality and learning is critical to the decolonization process. Since moving to Canada I have made every effort to make similar connections and grapple with issues such as what constitutes knowledge. In addition, how do we learn what we now know about our communities? This study takes the position that while knowledge may mean different things to different people, my lived experience as an African woman, for example, has taught me that knowledge can be experienced. This is certainly not the Western notion which claims that knowledge production is only legitimate if it is produced through empirical research (Nyamnjoh, 2002; 2004). However, this is not my experience and how I value knowledge. Therefore, the use of the concept of colonialism in this thesis implies that the exclusion, deprivileging and delegitimatization of indigenous knowledge in the conventional approaches to knowledge production, validation and dissemination constitute colonial imposition.

Conclusion

The patriarchal nature of Shona society has shaped and perpetuated gender inequality to the extent of allowing male domination and female subordination. This sad state of affairs has been fueled by the socialization process, therefore to amend the situation this calls for resocialisation. All those who are involved in mass teaching or any form of public lecturing should aim at highlighting how culture has created a huge gap between men and women.
Lectures and seminars addressing the impact of culture should be encouraged. Furthermore, men should also be involved in these lectures so as to make great impact. In addition, patriarchy should be seen as it really is, that is, as a social construction and not a biological construction. Women should also be educated so that they understand how culture imprisons them since the majority of them have accepted the status quo to the extent that they worship male domination. The young should be socialized that men and women are equal because biological differences do not mean that the other sex is inferior. The family is a major social institution and if this re-socialization starts in the family it will permeate into the other social institutions. In addition, laws should be made and policies amended so as to accommodate women, to grant them the same sexual freedom that their male counterparts enjoy. In order for these changes to materialize it needs passion, determination and commitment of everybody in society, man or woman. In the next chapter, I briefly discuss the history of Zimbabwe and Tsitsi Dangarembga’s bibliography.
CHAPTER TWO: HISTORY AND IMPACT OF COLONIALISM ON ZIMBABWE

This chapter provides the discussion of Zimbabwe history and culture and the context in which Tsitsi Dangarembga’s Nervous conditions was written. The chapter is organized into three sections. First, a brief history of the British Empire; second the impact of colonization on Zimbabwe and how it influenced the narrative in Nervous Condition.

A Brief History of the British Empire

Before the arrival of British commissioners in the 1880s, Rhodesia was known as South Zambezia and was ruled by the powerful Matabele tribe headed by King Lobengula. South Zambezia was a country with fertile lands and rich gold mines, an enticing site to be plundered by European powers. Portugal was the first European country to raid South Zambezia, but it was not until 1888 that South Zambezia faced a serious invasion. Cecil Rhodes, a British diamond magnate, signed a contract with Lobengula and began his profitable commerce in South Zambezia (Bonello, 2010). Under this treaty, indigenous rulers agreed to avoid entering into any new relationships with the other European countries without the permission of their British masters. Rhodes was not merely a trader; he was the agent of the British Empire in Southern Africa and was so influential that Rhodesia was named after him. Nowhere was secure for the white settlers. Moreover, the Rhodesian government was debilitated by international sanctions and gradual emigration of the whites (Bonello, 2010).

Zimbabwe attained independence in 1980 after a protracted guerrilla uprising over among other concerns land and voting rights that had been denied to them by the white minority
Therefore, the coming to power of black-majority government in Zimbabwe in 1980 marked a critical turning point in the history of the country. The election of ZANU-PF’s Robert Mugabe as Prime minister set the stage for a new political configuration of power, with implications for Zimbabwe’s political economy (Dashwood, 2000). However, the root causes of the land question in the country, unfolded over a period of 100 years, depositing a residue of memories of dispossession, trauma and hardships amongst the deprived blacks, and of conquest and superior production among white land owners (Sachikonye, 2005, p. 2). White settlers acquired expansive land holdings through state sanctioned evictions of blacks from better endowed land which began in 1890s, but contained well into the 1950s and 1960s. Memories of dispossession among the majority blacks were stoked by the liberation struggle, which was mainly waged in rural areas including areas where there was commercial farming land (Sachikonye, 2005, p.3). Memories of dispossession by the white settler community among the majority blacks were stoked by the liberation struggle, which was mainly waged in rural areas including areas where land was designated for commercial farming (Sachikonye, 2005, p. 3). Overall, Whites occupied 56.8% of the total and also best lands, while Africans occupied only 43.2% of total land holdings, but mostly in areas that were not suitable in terms of rainfall and therefore suitability for farming (Patsanza, 1988, p.175). The unequal land distribution even after political independence forced veterans of the liberation war (Chimurenga) to forcefully invade and occupy white owned farms (Sachikonye, 2005). For this thesis, the unsettled land question and the attendant violence contributes to the nervous conditions of the natives, in the sense that anxieties over land have escalated after independence due to political corruption and cronyism from the ruling African majority under President Mugabe who simply
took over some of the expansive farm holdings from White settlers to the disadvantage of the majority, who remain landless. This is the lasting and destructive impact of colonialism in Zimbabwe.

**Impact of Colonialism on Zimbabwe**

The discussion in this thesis reflects Zimbabwe’s colonial history as it relates to the present. African history and the colonial experience manifest itself today in profound changes to indigenous culture, values and traditions. This study asserts that colonialists changed gender relations in ways that disadvantaged African women then and now. That was the case because the colonial impact through “the invention of African traditions” changed traditional social boundaries to marginalize women (Spear, 2003, p. 3). Put differently, Zimbabwe’s violent colonial encounter is responsible for the country’s contemporary problems especially oppression against women captured in the narratives in Nervous Condition. For this thesis, this is important since such extensive changes negatively impacted African women as they shifted existing traditions that were egalitarian and inclusive of women (Spear, 2003). That is why understanding the past helps us to know what was lost during the colonial encounter. Through cultural imperialism, the African culture was appropriated and dominated; African memories and language were lost, resulting in alienation from traditional culture.

Under the domination of imperialism, the colonizers modified their African subjects’ notions of authority and power, and reformulated their conceptions of justice as well as forging new African identities (Bonello, 2010). In the process, the English language gained supremacy over indigenous languages, resulting in the suppression of African values, beliefs, traditions and
knowledge systems. Colonization is responsible for creating a backward, static, and traditional society of the colonized. The concept of civilization altered the perceptions of the colonized Africans who came into contact with European values through colonial education and who subsequently abandoned traditional beliefs and values. Although education is a space of learning and understanding, colonial education, by controlling our knowledge production, coerced us into rejecting our African indigeneity and our sense of self-worth. Colonial education delegitimized indigenous ways of knowing; thus, the value and authenticity of storytelling, proverbs, fables, and myths is eroded. The colonizers succeeded in alienating the colonized subjects from their ways of knowing, thus, instilling in them a world view that devalued African traditions, customs, and moral values. At the same time, we continue to participate consciously and unconsciously in the very systems that continue to negate our cultures, history, values and beliefs. Thus, colonialism is visible in the ways in which we continue to unquestioningly normalize and embrace ideological forms of domination and structures of subjection, i.e., ‘them’ and ‘us.’

For this study, the narrative illustrates how under colonialism, female bodies became commodity in high demand on abusive terms. Nfah-Abbenyi (1997) argues that what Tambu encountered was victimization. According to the narrative “submitting to an alien system of education also meant a transformation of traditional cultures and a threat to existing structures of power within the family, clan and community” (Dangarembga, 1992, p 26). In such circumstances, family represents identity of space. The tension witnessed within the family is an act of displacement from someone’s rightful location in society. The narrative reveals that Western system of education produced a new class of elite who disorganized the cultural
hierarchy in African society. Consequently, political or social status was no longer ascribed, but rather achieved through class informed alienation. The tension, which surrounds Tambu’s desire for education, comes from within her family. For Tambu, education would alter her vulnerability as a woman. Yet, for her uncle, there was the fear that western education would expose Tambu to immoral behavior since girls who went to colonial schools most likely lost their sense of place in the traditional family structure.

There is tension around her mother with regard to fear of losing a daughter, as well as a domestic helper. From the narrative, Nyasa, Tambu’s cousin discourages Tambu from going to a convent school for intellectual and political grounds since a woman’s place in the civic arena was marginalized. In any case, the colonial education women were allowed to attend was to train them to become proper mothers (Nakanyike-Musisi, 2007). Moreover, colonialism and missionary churches through missionary schools worked together to promote the domesticity ideology where the education of the girl child was facilitated (Denzer, 1992). From the narrative, the perceived tension between modernity and African traditions influenced Tambu’s family to discourage her from acquiring modern education, notwithstanding its focus on domesticity. Education was seen as a threat to patriarchal norms in Shona family dynamics (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 164). The argument against colonial education plays out through binaries of tradition and modernity, national pride versus cultural imperialism, particularly with women. Here, one comes to terms with hybridity in various aspects in post-colonial Africa. Hybridization settles the problem of space and sense of belonging to a dynamic culture since the effect of hybridity neutralizes space in postcolonial Africa. Eventually traditional restrictions on female will erode
and pave way for modernity. However, names are given to people based on their race, ethnicity, class and gender. They seek to create space, which is free from the codes of established discourses of gender differences, sexual and racial differences justified only in naming through daily use of ordinary language.

Dangarembga argues that the supposed clash with modernity would involve the perils of colonial education: a change in old ways, a threat to traditional symbols of power, a passive student being worked over by the western world, confusion and vacillation, and exile and alienation (Nair, 1995). In addition, the clash restrained within their place in rooted in colonial patriarchy, since Dangarembga set her novel during military struggle in Rhodesia against white supremacy, with divisions and nervousness at all levels of society during the period in Zimbabwe. Taking into account the power of educational institutions to colonize, it is possible to understand that the very system that has shaped us through the process of domination is a space where, as a collective, we need to question the status quo. From a pedagogical perspective, this requires the collective to re-examine the internalized hegemonic values perpetuated by the education system. In this light, education is a space to reclaim what was lost in colonization. Thus, education can be used to stimulate change to ideological hegemony; education can be an important space to enact change and speak on our own behalf. Ultimately, decolonization produces moments of inspiration and promise to bring positive change to our African educational system. Decolonization involves enshrining memory and associated processes of storytelling as privileged ways of knowing (Wane, 2006).
The discussion in this chapter reveals that the negative changes subjected to women in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Condition* are a consequence of the changed social, economic and family structure introduced as a result of European contact during the colonial era (Sear, 2003). These changes rooted in patriarchy negatively undermined gender relations in Zimbabwe. The changes in gender roles were so far reaching to the extent that women voices were silenced as colonialists ‘invented’ traditions’ that favored men over women (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1984; Ranger, 1984; Sear, 2003), as highlighted in the next chapter.

Colonialism was extremely violent in Zimbabwe because the minority white settler community employed violent means to maintain their grip on the majority. On the other hand, in keeping with Fanon’s suggestion that colonial violence must be met with violence, African liberators seeking to liberate the country from minority rule also employed brutal and violent methods in the military struggle to defeat the White settler community. This was happening at a time when Tsitsi Dangarembga was growing up and perpetuates the lasting legacy of gendered violence inflicted on the women subjects. Hence, the title, *Nervous Condition*, to reflect Sartre’s epigraphy in Fanon’s (1968), *Wretched of the Earth* that “the status of the native is a nervous condition” (p.17)

**How Language Policies and Education in South African Countries Discourage Liberation of African People’s Minds**

Black consciousness calls for black realization of the humanity of black folk.
Realization that freedom is a standard much higher than equality, rightful aim of black liberation is simply put freedom, freedom, and freedom (Biko, 2000, p. xi).

Tsitsi Dangarembga Nervous Conditions (1988) is an ingeniously written novel. The novel’s biggest strength lies in its superior crafting or, rather, in how its narrative instruments, from the obvious to the veiled, enhance effectively the work’s layers of meaning. In Dangarembga's Nervous condition, we are presented with the westernization of various characters through education. The comparison between Nyasha and Tambu is anchored in translation theory and psychoanalysis, while highlighting the Shona linguistic undercurrent present in the text of the novel. In examining Tambu, it pursues the question of translation (both literal and figurative) and the parallels between the female subject's relation to language, on the one hand, and to the maternal, on the other. British education plays a great role in the novel where Tambu, Babamukuru, Nhamo and Nyasha, all bear the impact of this education, manifested in domesticity teachings. Such missionary education triggers the neuroses of female subjects, who are not just devalued but unrecognized and denied agency to challenge their marginalized status. For instance, in the narrative, “Tambu talks about “white wizards” from the south who were "well versed in treachery and black magic" educated her uncle Babamukuru” (pp. 18-9). Tambu knows that the British education is an important way to enable her to evade her two major biological roles, that of being a woman and of being black, which have imprisoned her in her culture. When the novel starts Tambu is indifferent about her brother’s untimely death. Instead Tambudzai, repudiates family expectations and frames her brother as an antagonist and rival in matters related to accessing education. On their part, Tambu’s mother see her as a sellout for insisting to have an education so she could challenge the traditional cultures as well as
oppression within the family. The mother feared that the colonial education, even in its focus on domesticity would lead Tambu to behave like Nyasha and identify with alien culture at the expense of Shona traditions. Her concerned the father rebukes her thus, “can you cook books and feed them to your husband. Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean and grow vegetables” (Dangarembga, 1988, p.15). With such utterances, Tambu’s father is firm in his refusal to invest in his daughter’s education claiming that Tambu will have no use for it in her domestic future and in case, any the benefits will accrue to her husband’s family and not hers.

The intersection of language, education and culture has implications for African intellectual production because language is central to the representation of African culture as either ‘authentic’ or ‘imitated’ in the ongoing tension between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’. In Southern Africa, as is the case elsewhere in Africa, the official or national languages are likely to be the language of the former colonial powers namely; Britain, France or Portugal. For example, since Southern African countries were under British rule, English is one of the official languages along with Shona. The debate about national language is a contested and important one, but is not the focus of this thesis. It suffices to mention that the issue of national language is closely tied to Nervous Conditions, which is that current language policies in Southern Africa discourage the decolonization of their people’s mind because they are Eurocentric and thus do not raise Black consciousness that is required for liberation. In the context of this thesis, I argue that Black consciousness has to be directed to the past to seek to
rewrite the history of Black people and elevate the black heroes of the past to teach something meaningful to the current generation.

Among colonized peoples, debate rages as to the relevance of indigenous systems of knowledge and language in this modern age where globalization is on ascendancy (wa Thiongo, 1985; 1986). Many scholars question African ways doing of things and condemn outright African backgrounds as irrelevant. However, as captured in the quotation on top, Biko indicts the educational system for the lack of freedom in colonized and oppressed regions.

Dangarembga was born in Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia), spent ages 2-6 in Britain where she began her schooling. She notes that she and her brother began to speak English there "as a matter of course and forgot most of the Shona that we had learnt" (p.196). When they returned to Zimbabwe, when she was six, she learned Shona again and later attended mission school in Mutare and then a private American convent school. Dangarembga notes that she did not learn "much about anything indigenous at all" in these schools (p.190). She cites one problem that Zimbabwean people of her generation—and Nyasha’s—have is "that we really don’t have a tangible history that we can relate to" (p.191); "that was the [colonized] system we were living under. Even the history was written in such a way that a child who did not want to accept that had to reject it and have nothing”—which, she states, is Nyasha’s problem (p.198). The solution is to return to the oral history which served African communities well before colonial contact. Within feminist scholarship, there is an ongoing debate among researchers as to how best to undertake a culturally sensitive research particularly among people who have been invisible in historical research such as African women (Geiger, 2004, 1986; Nakanyike- Musisi, 1996).
Moreover, oral life history narrative is considered to be a decolonizing theory of research that takes into account the conditions and contexts. Oral history not only talks about women, but also ensures that the women are allowed and encouraged to tell their stories in their own voices (Geiger, 1986; 2004). Subsequently, Alcoff calls on researchers to be mindful of “positionality” while analysing “marginality and representatives” because it is the place from which values are interpreted and constructed rather than the locus of an already determined set of values” (as quoted in Geiger, 2004, p.401).

Dangarembga also calls her first language English—the language used all through her education—and Shona her second language: "Sometimes I worry about Shona: how long it’s going to survive…. There are very few people who can speak good Shona and even fewer who can write it. Maybe we’ve caught it just in time with the [Zimbabwean] Government’s policies of traditional culture and so forth, so maybe it’s not as sad as it seems" (p.196). Later on, when Dangarembga was working in a publishing house, Zimbabwean historians were beginning to "rewrite the history. I was editing this Grade Seven text and I can remember saying to my editor that, if I had read that particular version of history when I had been at school, I would have been a much more integrated person" (pp.197-198). This thesis argues that educational systems ignored African systems and opted for alien systems and languages. Hence, the need to engage with African systems of thought by employing a decolonizing methodology in education if
freedom is to be realized by colonized and oppressed peoples. Thus, adopting African systems of thought and languages would be the equivalent of a revolution in education and is necessary because anything short will not raise Black consciousness to the sufficient level to usher in freedom. As Biko noted, Black consciousness is required for “Black peoples to appreciate that blackness was a key dimension of their eventual liberation” (Biko, 2002, p. ix). Certainly, that can be attained by putting emphasis on African epistemology.

The intersection of language and culture speaks to issues surrounding representation of African people and their culture by the European hegemonic languages (Wa Thiongo, 1985; 1986). It is related to the debate over the nature of an “authentic” African or national culture because language should reflect the content of African peoples, their values and culture. That is why Ngugi (1986) argues that African literature or literature in African languages is important because believing in our African values per se will not itself bring about the renaissance in African cultures if that literature does not carry the content of African people’s imperialistic struggles to liberate their productive forces from foreign control. Similarly, Fanon (1967) argues that colonialism destroyed the culture itself within the communities it has colonized. Fanon argues that popular culture forms the basis of anti-colonial struggle and cannot therefore exist within the history and domination of colonialism. Thus the use of the master’s language cannot decolonize the mind. Which raises the questions, why is decolonization so hard to achieve let alone implement (Dei, 2000; Wane, 2006)?
Fanon (1967) goes on to observe that while masses maintain intact traditions that are completely different from those of the colonial situation, the intellectual throws him or herself in frenzied (intellectual imitation) into the frantic acquisition of the culture of occupying power and takes every opportunity of unfavourably criticizing his or her own national culture, or else takes refuge in setting out and substantiating the claims of that culture in which that is passionate but rapidly becomes unproductive. This leads to contradictions. For example, the literature produced by natives becomes differentiated and makes itself into a will to a particularism. The intelligentsia becomes producers and serves the occupying power in a cathartic process. For Fanon, national consciousness leads to international consciousness. For this study such critical awareness Ngugi and Fanon talks about is being hindered by the use of foreign language in Africa, languages which are not accessible to the majority of the people. Thus, the intersection of language and culture matters because it demonstrates that English and French are used to represent negatively unfamiliar African traditions to the West to the extent that certain Africans are forced to imitate Eurocentric notions towards African cultures.

For Ngugi wa Thiongo (1986, 1987), when it comes to issues of contemporary post-colonial discourses, the medium of printed literature needs to be seen as but one of many media which communicates to the people. Thus, Ngugi tackles questions regarding the production and distribution of post-colonial cultural discourses. For Ngugi, the use of European language in modern literary production raises questions about the politics and economics of
publishing, about literacy, access to and distribution of literature. Ngugi sees them as containing and conveying essential and unchangeable ideological values; further he sees the ongoing cultural hegemony of European in Africa as both a cause and reflections of neo-colonialism. Ngugi is adamant that English is the language of the ruling class minority, and ethnic language as the primary language of the majority of African populations. This thinking informed Ngugi’s position to switch writing novels in English into his native Kikuyu.

Biko (2002) argued that African history as taught in foreign languages in schools was a pathetic tale, African kings who had built strong empires such as Ama Zulu, Xhosa, and Shaka, King of the Zulu were defeated by European colonialists and reduced to little significance or importance or presented as tyrants, thieves, thereby undermining African thinking and perspectives. The main point Biko was expressing was that African cultures should mutually influence each other because under African systems of thought, African culture was dynamic. He suggested that blacks have a duty to celebrate that success by developing, promoting and popularizing those symbols and practices of African culture that are modern innovations and adaptation (Biko, 2002, p. xxiv).

Furthermore, going back to the drawing board would address Biko’s concerns: “black impotence and dependence could be cured by education” (Biko, 2002, p.ix). In addition, Rodney (1994) observes that “educated people are undeniably part of the white imperialist system…they have no confidence in anything that is not white and are actively pro-imperialist” (p.32). This is
the case because many elites have ignored or continue to despise African languages in favour of foreign languages as the official or even national language. This failure is the reason this study focuses on education reform because the educational system must transform the elite to believe in indigenous languages and Black consciousness which seeks “to infuse the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, culture, their religion and their outlook to life” (Biko, 2002, p. 49). More important, education reforms where African knowledge beliefs are given some prominence should help to bolster black self-confidence to challenge oppression and liberate themselves from all forms of oppression, including mental oppression if colonized peoples are to truly enjoy “freedom, freedom, freedom (Biko, ix). For that to happen, the “Black intelligentsia must be transformed into the servants of the black masses, to overcome white cultural imperialism, fight the inferiority label which has fully conditioned them to thinking white” (Rodney, 1994, p. 32).

Moreover Ngugi (1986, 1987) argues that language, any language has dual characters. It is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture and history. Additionally, communication between human beings is also the basis and process of evolving culture. In that sense, culture embodies moral, ethical, and aesthetic values, the set of spiritual eye glasses. Thus, values are the basis of a people’s identity, their sense of particularity as members of the human race. According to Ngugi (1986), all these are carried by language. Therefore, language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people’s experience in history. For example, while Africans may speak English or French, it will never convey their culture. In that regard, culture
is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis and transmission from one generation to another.

Furthermore, given Biko’s and Rodney’s observation on the education system, this study argues that if colonized regions and peoples are to realize freedom, they must take pride in their indigenous languages as well as systems of thought and fuse them with ‘modern’ ones (Western epistemology) through substantial education reforms, reforms that must embrace the best decolonizing methodologies in their pedagogy, especially in terms of language policy. In other words, to raise Black consciousness, which seeks to eradicate Eurocentric notions of superiority-inferiority and allow “black people the “freedom on our [Black people] part to innovate without recourse to white values since the existing educational system ensured Euro domination” (Biko, 2002, p. 96). Certainly, the freedom Biko talked about will not be realized until the educational system is reformed drastically to wean itself from Eurocentric curriculum that hardly teaches any Black consciousness and gives scant attention to African epistemology. Moreover, as Fanon (1967) argued, “liberation requires setting a foot a new humanity”, which amounts to saying it “requires literally, changing the world” (as cited in Biko, p. xi). Clearly recognition of Indigenous knowledge language and attendant system can play a meaningful role in raising awareness among colonized peoples in Africa. Freedom is something that can only be taken, not given” (Fanon as cited in Biko, p.xi). Yet, freedom is the highest
form of liberation and we cannot attain it unless we have an education system that represents our values and respects our history.

As Biko (2002) observed, colonized peoples are undoubtedly entitled to engage in activities that raise their consciousness [minimize white power], and determine their identity and humanity. As noted above, decolonizing educational reform centered on African systems of thought and indigenous languages at least in lower schools levels would allow Black people to take control of their destiny and more important their countries. Indeed, as Biko noted, such educational reforms would “bolster black self-confidence to challenge oppression, to liberate themselves” and thus not “merely, a methodology or means towards an end” (Biko, 2002, p. 51). In the process, such a decolonizing education would go a long way in “correcting images of ourselves [Blacks] in terms of culture, education, religion, economic”, and undo the destructive legacy of the “role of education and religion in creating amongst us a false understanding of ourselves” (Biko, 2002, p. 51). For example, it would respond to claims that African knowledge is ‘traditional; while western knowledge is ‘modern’. Biko observes that “children were taught under the pretext of hygiene, good manners and other such vague concepts, to despise their mode of upbringing at home and to question the values and customs of their society” (Biko, 2002, p. 94). Unfortunately, language policy in Africa continues to privilege Western languages especially English and also French as the official and/or national language to pass on knowledge from one generation to another. In such an environment
decolonizing methods that emphasize black consciousness and African languages would go a long way in reversing the notion of white superiority and black inferiority, which continue to divide African society along class and gender lines.

The point here is that an educational system anchored on African systems of thought would liberate Black/oppressed/colonized peoples from an academic curriculum which taught them to accept their “inferiority” in relation to the White. From an African perspective, which calls for Black realization of the humanity of Black folk, such decolonizing education would usher in a new and proud “attitude of mind and a way of life” (Biko, 2002, p.91). Once black peoples realized new ways to view themselves by going back to systems and ideas that served their great parents well before colonialism came to muddle water, they would move closer to enjoying some freedom. Ultimately, black people would eradicate the thinking that taught them to accept their inferiority and that their cultures were barbaric and thus had to be “civilized” by apologists of white brutality. This is where emphasis on African systems of knowledge and languages would go a long way in ushering a new thinking, away from such oppressive philosophy such as respectability for women rooted in domesticity (Nakanyike-Musisi, 2007).

Accordingly, a decolonizing education curriculum that emphasizes African/indigenous knowledge over Eurocentricity would be a good beginning towards the liberation and ultimately freedom Ngugi, Biko, Rodney, Fanon and others had in mind because it would create the necessary conditions towards the required radical transformation of oppressed people. It is
always the mind and if the mind is not clear, not much can be achieved. Therefore, this essay contends that such an approach would allow African people to put their mark on the education system which to this day perpetuates white domination. Indeed, as Biko observed, this is what black consciousness rooted in African systems of thought and languages seeks to eradicate because there is “no objectivity in the history taught us and we have to destroy the myth that our history starts from colonial contact” (Biko, 2002, p.95). To attain the critical level of Black consciousness necessary and sufficient for our mental liberation in order to enjoy freedom to “say what we want” (Biko, 2002) and study what is relevant to our identity and self, in languages the masses understand we need to embrace African knowledge and its rich insights.

For this study, decolonizing education reforms to promote social justice for all would include areas such as the overall curriculum; the areas to emphasize would include adding important authors such as Biko, Diop, Fanon, Cessaire, Senghor, Ngugi wa Thiongo etc. These readings will help transform students with Africanist ideas and discourses containing epistemological and methodological possibilities more suited to theorizing black consciousness and African subjectivities with a view to countering archaic racist ideas in the colonially imposed curriculum for example. Accordingly, the novel contends that such reforms would encourage respect for pluralism through discourses on anti-oppressive ideas and move black people to a level of [Black] consciousness that will allow them to “elevate [their] his own position by positively looking at the values system that make him/her distinctively a man/woman in
society” (Biko, 2002, p. 145). Additionally, it would promote “freedom on our part to innovate without recourse to white values” (Biko, 2002, p. 96).

Moreover, it is only through such decolonizing educational methodologies that African people would realize the meaning of black consciousness articulated by Biko. According to Biko, Black consciousness entails, “Black people’s appreciation that blackness was a key dimension of their eventual liberation” and calls for black realization of the humanity of black folk, realization that freedom is a standard much higher than equality, and that the rightful aim of black liberation is simply put “freedom, freedom, and freedom” (Biko, 2002, pp. ix-xi). Clearly, reversing cultural dominance and Eurocentric hegemony can only take place among colonized/oppressed societies if we have in place a curriculum that critiques the current power relations that has weakened black people in the region and denied them the freedom to chart their own cause, ironically in areas such as education. That would be in line with Biko’s Black consciousness movement’s emphasis to “to infuse the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, culture, their religion and their outlook to life” (Biko, 2002, p. 49).

This thesis acknowledges that while such decolonizing education reforms would fall short of Biko, Ngugi and Fanon’s standard, it would nonetheless provide black people with the necessary conditions to realize their freedom. For example, an alternative curriculum that privileges African ideas would help to “correct images of ourselves [Blacks] in terms of culture, education, religion, economic and reverse the role of [Eurocentric notions of] education and
religion in creating amongst us a false understanding of ourselves” (Biko, 2002, p. 94). In other words, it would expand our space for freedom, freedom to study authors who have hitherto been marginalized, freedom to emphasize values that have since been marginalized and above all, the freedom to put emphasis on areas and issues that matter to the masses in African countries, irrespective of gender or class. For example, freedom to hold our leaders accountable and ensure political, social and economic affairs and freedom for all, both the boy and girl children through the provision of mandatory free primary and secondary education. In addition to inclusive governance structures and systems. More important, a decolonizing educational system would allow for the creation of an education system that fights the inferiority label and allows students to “revaluate themselves as blacks and undertake a redefinition of the world from their standpoint” (Rodney, 1994, p.34). The gist of this argument is that an education system anchored on strong African/Indigenous knowledge and supported by indigenous languages is best suited to serve African /colonized peoples in their struggles against all forms of oppressions.

The insights from Biko, and Ngugi wa Thiongo’s argument is that radical education reforms would lead to transformations in the social, political and economic systems that have not been affected in the post-colonial period and thus put into place conditions that would allow black consciousness to grow which will ultimately, allow black peoples to enjoy their freedom in all spheres of their lives. Certainly, that would be a significant improvement over the colonial curriculum which perpetuates a situation of dependence and a ‘colonizer’ attitude towards black/colonized people and imposes ‘Europeanized’ ideas of superiority-inferiority’ on
generations of colonized peoples that perpetuates gender oppression against the girl child and women in general. The educational reforms suggested here would weaken the colonial stranglehold where black people are indoctrinated to accept the superiority of European domination.

To maintain the European dominance over black/colonized people, the imperialist pushed the constructed ideologies of superiority-inferiority through colonial education conducted in foreign languages. These institutions served the imperialist goals of expansion and retention, while denying freedom to colonized peoples. As a result, school children in Africa and other colonized regions are coerced to learn about and to adore imperial symbols (Fanon, 1967, p.48). In the process, students were denied the freedom to study their own heroes and master their languages. In Africa, students do not have the freedom to study in their local languages because the colonial curriculum deemed them “inferior”. Moreover, if one was caught speaking their native language they would be subject to disciplinary action in the form of caning. If that is going to change, Africans need to embrace radical reform and to begin to be proud of who they are as people. For example, as proud Shona, Baganda, Zulu, Asante or Kikuyu competent and literate in their mother tongue. That is some of the freedom radical education reforms would restore Indigenous knowledge in the struggle for decolonization (Dei, 2000; wa Thiongo, 1985; 1986).

Accordingly, a successful decolonizing educational model should be anchored on
indigenous systems of thought that imbibes consciousness and empowers African/indigenous people with the freedom in the form of choices to chart their future without undue limitations. That way, the majority of blacks can embrace Black Consciousness as an ideology, “to innovate without recourse to white values” (Biko, 2002, p. 96). Additionally, the changes in curriculum sketched here would allow African peoples to move away from the Eurocentric values and instead embrace the need for values and issues that concern themselves with their social, political and economic position as African peoples. In other words, freedom to pursue choices that empower African people irrespective of gender, class or ethnicity. Towards that goal, decolonizing methodologies privileging African knowledge and indigenous languages in education are imperative to improving the conditions of African peoples and raise their consciousness as argued by Biko.

In that regard, education as a necessary condition for freedom would be boosted through educational reform because reforms would be the first step for black people in regaining control and self-determination over the direction and future of their countries, not only in education but also in politics, economics, and foreign affairs as ably articulated by President Mbeki in his famous “I am an African” speech where he outlined the African renaissance agenda and thus African countries’ freedom and choices to chart their agenda. It is clear that education reforms or choices would mean that African people can start to have confidence and the freedom to
pursue their choices without imitating whiteness. Certainly, until educated people stop suffering from what Fanon (1967) called the “lactification of consciousness” where many internalize the negation of [black] selfhood to the point of supporting racist discourses instead of resisting them, the freedom Biko so passionately talked about will continue to elude them. Until, the black intelligentsia is transformed into servants of the black masses, black people can’t have the “freedom on their part to innovate without recourse to white values” (Biko, 2002, p. 96).

For this study, the ideal position would be a revolution in the educational system in Africa where the current educational order would be totally and completely replaced, such a revolution would transform society and usher in the kind of reforms Biko had in mind with his ideology of Black Consciousness. However, as noted elsewhere in this thesis that would not be possible given the entrenched position the current educational system enjoys among the elite who will do anything to perpetuate it and to defend the oppressive and discriminatory policies against the girl child in particular and the poor in general use of foreign languages as the national language. That is why the freedom of African peoples would be served better under decolonizing education reforms anchored on indigenous knowledge to counter the Eurocentric curriculum with alternatives that embrace black consciousness and its ideals.

For this study the freedom Biko (2002) talked about through his ideology of Black consciousness can only be realized through radical education reforms anchored in decolonizing
methodologies and supported by African systems and languages. Additionally, the thesis shows that such a decolonizing education system would usher in the necessary and sufficient conditions for black peoples to realize what Biko called “freedom, freedom, and freedom (Biko, 2002, p. xi), and address Biko’s concerns about “black dependence” (Biko, 2002, p.ix).

Moreover, if such freedoms are to be expanded, education reforms should help to bolster African or Black self-confidence to challenge oppression and liberate black people from all forms of oppression including mental oppression if colonized peoples are to truly enjoy freedom. Ultimately, the freedoms Biko talked about will not be realized until the educational system is reformed drastically to wean itself from a Eurocentric curriculum that hardly teaches any black consciousness or recognizes indigenous perspectives and ideas. Thus, as Ngugi (1986) argues, African literature can help African leaders to reconnect themselves to the revolutionary traditions Fanon (1967) talks about to defeat imperialism and create a higher system of democracy in Africa. In other words, ‘authentic’ African ideas would free the masses from Eurocentric notions of thought that have hindered the struggle against imperialism and foreign domination in Africa. But above all, African literature that is accessible to the masses in their languages could raise African consciousness and awareness to decolonize their minds and repudiate gender oppression rooted in colonial paradigms such as respectability rooted in “colonial inventions” (Ranger, 1984).

This thesis argues that until the educational system is reformed, the critical
transformation in Black consciousness required to provide new thinking and freedoms cannot be realized. The idea of freedom for blacks must transcend the oppressor’s authority. Therefore, our [black] vision for freedom cannot unfold within the dominant culture, language and concepts of history, but only by privileging and acknowledging African systems and languages that served our ancestors well. As Biko observed, “You cannot in pursuing the aspiration of black people achieve them from a platform which is meant for the oppression of black people” (Biko, 2002, p. 145). Education systems must be reformed if African peoples are to enjoy some freedoms and realize their goals including gender equality and inclusion for all.

Conclusion

This chapter presented and discussed Zimbabwe’s history, culture and the impact of colonialism on various aspects of Zimbabwean society. The chapter demonstrated that colonialism through the feminization of space laid the conditions for gender oppression through an educational system that focused on domesticity. It was that environment which triggered the neuroses of the female subjects whose experience is documented in Nervous Condition. In such an environment female bodies became commodity in high demand on abusive terms. The discussion in this chapter revealed that the negative changes subjected to women in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s Nervous Conditions are a consequence of changes in social, economic and family structure introduced as a result of European contact during the colonial era.
CHAPTER 3: THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents and discusses the textual analysis of Nervous Conditions. I conducted a feminist literary analysis of Tsitsi Dangarembga’s novel *Nervous Conditions*. This analysis draws upon a number of sources to elaborate the major themes in the novel, namely, the exploration of the effects of patriarchy and gender inequality in Africa in terms of employment and education. Sources include my own research, news reports and scholarly articles and other publications.
There is a brief discussion of the Black feminist theory which is a useful tool to understanding the Nervous Conditions. It covers the Missionaries and Colonization in Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions, hegemony* and its relation to Zimbabwe, de-colonizing the academy: counter-hegemony in Zimbabwe, synopsis of Fanon’s (1968), the Wretched of the Earth and the African culture and the role of women. In addition, the chapter seeks to define and discuss concepts such as African women, colonization, patriarchy, violence and resistance so that they form the framework and lens for the dissertation.

African women’s literature is of significance for feminist theory because it focuses mainly on issues from women’s perspectives and experiences such as sexism, gender relationships, marriage, politics, education and employment. In essence, African women’s literature portrays their quest for emancipation from male dominance. Central to African women’s literature are the motives of resistance, positivity, triumph, quests for a better life, and emancipation from sexism, racism and poverty. When in crisis many women do not just fold their arms in tears and self-pity but often seek liberation from subjugation through writing. African women’s literature depicts African and diasporic women searching and finding success and happiness outside marriage, suggesting that marriage and motherhood are not the only keys to female happiness and fulfillment. African women writers explore ideal and actual issues concerning black women using autobiography and other literary forms. Their literature is ‘post-colonial’ in that it explores new relationships and identities within societies that have recently acquired liberation from oppressive colonialists.

**Feminist Theory**
The feminist theories - black and radical - are explained to identify women’s relegation as represented in Nervous Conditions (1988). Feminism entails the advocacy of women’s rights on the grounds of sexual equality. Feminism is defined as a collection of “…concepts, propositions and analysis that describe and explain women’s situations and experiences and support recommendations about how to improve them” (Code, 2000, p. 195). Code (2000) cautions that due to the persistent diversity among feminist theories “…it does not seem to be possible to state any principle, doctrine, method or vision common to them all” (p. 195). The implication is that depending of the form of feminism one examines, it is possible to find different or unique means for understanding and dealing with the problems that women encounter in society. Common forms of feminism include liberal feminism, Black feminism socialist feminism, Marxist feminism and radical feminism (Code 2000; Collins, 1990; 2000; Mandell & Duffy, 2000).

Although women are united with a common notion that male domination is oppressive and there is a need for liberation from all forms of women’s oppression. Feminism is viewed as a multiple: feminisms analyze the diversity of women’s cultural, political and other specific experience. While feminism emphasizes the inequalities between men and women, black feminists emphasize the diversity within the concept of ‘woman’, which for much feminist analysis is construed as a unitary category (Collins, 1990; 2000). Black feminism is critical of liberal feminism. Liberal feminism accepts the socio-economic relations that contribute to the inequality of the sexes, and this is the basis of more radical feminist criticisms of this particular form of feminism (Code, 2000, p. 303).

Black feminism
The history of colonization and enslavement has fused together a significant element of common experience between the women of Africa and the diaspora. This commonality is not as evident amongst women of all racial groups and classes. These differences will be highlighted in the succeeding paragraphs. Running through Black feminist analysis is the principle of the simultaneity of oppression (Collins, 1990; 2000a). Black feminism activism pushed for inclusion, equality, recognition of racism and recognition that black women were not homogenous. Furthermore, that Black women occupy different locations, identity and perspectives (Collins, 2000a; 2000b). Collins (2000a; 2000b) the pioneer of Black feminist thought argued that Black women prefer that theorizing about their lived experience by individuals who understand and can relate to their experience as a marginalized racial groups. In addition Wane (2002) observes that that Black feminist theory is meant to elucidate and analyze the historical, social, cultural and economic relationships of women of African descent as the basis for development of liberatory praxis.

It is a paradigm that is grounded in the historical as well as the contemporary experiences of Black women as mothers, activists, academics and community leaders (p. 51). In the case of the women of Zimbabwe, their experience is ground in the history of colonialism and patriarchy and colonialism (Collins, 2000a).

One of the fundamental challenges black feminists have made, relate to their analyses of patriarchal power relationships between black men and black women (Crenshaw, 1991). They argue that women experience different perspectives on roles within their family and women’s relationships with members of their household and that colonization and its policies had the effect of either reinforcing existing gender equality or creating a new form which was more
oppressive to women. Accordingly, some black feminists argue that to understand black women’s lives and their family structures we have to examine how colonization shaped and affected the sex/gender systems of a society, and how these are changed by migration (Collins, 2001). Black feminism counters that although all women are affected by gender discrimination, they are not a homogenous mass and the way they are affected varies greatly depending on their diverse situations along class and sexuality among others. For the purpose of this study, I appropriate the notion that black women experience multiple and intersecting oppressions in the form of racial, gender and class oppression (Collins, 2000a; Crenshaw, 1989; 1991). That is the context in which Dangarembga’s Nervous Conditions, set in the 1960’s highlights the different forms of oppression women suffered in the then Rhodesia. The protagonist, Tambu met difficulties (associated with race, class and gender) to achieve her desire for advancement.

**Missionaries and Colonization in Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions***

It has been almost 30 years since the novel ‘Nervous Conditions’ was published in 1988. Written by Zimbabwean author, Tsitsi Dangarembga, it was her third novel and to date is one of only four novels the author has published (a sequel to ‘Nervous Conditions’ was published in 2006). Set in the late 1960s and 70s in Rhodesia, which was an unrecognized state from 1965 to 1979, and is now Zimbabwe. The novel explicitly addresses patriarchal oppression that every single female character of the *Nervous Conditions* is constrained by. The recent coup of the national party, Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the forced resignation of revolutionary turned dictator, Robert Mugabe who ruled the country for 37 years
prompted a look back at this novel. The interesting thing about the novel is that it is not overtly political. It is set in the 60s and 70s, before Zimbabwe became independent from British rule and before Mugabe became president. The novel follows a little girl named Tambudzai as she navigates the oppressive patriarchal domination in her home. After her older brother, Nhamo, dies, Tambu is sent to the missionary school where Nhamo studied; she is away from home with her wealthy middle-class uncle Babamukuru and his family. She finds it difficult to assimilate into the culture of the missionary school and is alienated from the white British missionaries and their children who speak Shona rather than English. Her cousin, Nyasha, returns from England, and struggles with the oppressive patriarchal landscape of Rhodesia. The novel highlights the way in which assimilation is not necessarily a positive thing but can be a difficult and traumatic experience. It also explores how women experience assimilation might differ from a man’s experience. The politics and colonialism of the novel is not overt, but it is represented in the characters and natives of the countries it has affected. It’s certainly not the first, but it is an important representation of African feminism and the struggles which black women go through. The novel however does not wallow in despair, it’s certainly dark at times but it’s ultimately uplifting, and recommended reading for everyone, especially young black women.

Dangarembga’s style of writing is unconventional and awakens a literary consciousness. This is reflected in the opening sensational statement by Tambudzai “I was not sorry when my brother died”. “Nor am I apologizing for my callousness as you may define it, my lack of feeling. For it is not that at all. I feel many things these days…” (Dangarembga, 1988, p.1). Such lack of grief is rather unusual and thought provoking culturally. Generally, in Zimbabwe, one
neither speak evil of the dead nor blatantly utter and find joy in it. The opening statement not only sets the tone for the whole book, but also directs the conversations about African women’s struggles and in itself challenges cultural thinking. The statement illustrates the colonial condition associated with the specific history of colonialism in Zimbabwe and how it became the ambivalently privilege condition associated with the male subject. However, Tambu’s categorical tone points towards critical self-examination and consciousness to deflect the guilt associated with what to many appears insensitive and contrary to moderate African communalism over her brother’s death. It acknowledges that struggles affecting African women are unacceptable and therefore, demand unconventional ways to resolve. From the onset, readers are aware what the story is and what Dangarembga wants them to see and possibly change. In *Nervous Conditions*, she writes about the lives and emotions of Rhodesian girls and women. Hers and other stories are based upon the lives of real people. They are startling, truthful depictions of women in post-colonial African societies. Dangarembga points out the duality of oppression for women living with the burdens of colonialism and patriarchy. These institutions allow them no chance to escape psychological and physical strains and are something it may be difficult for the modern reader to fully realize except through in-depth analysis.

Tsitsi Dangarembga's (1988) *Nervous Conditions* also portrays the role of missionary work in colonization and in changing Zimbabwean culture. Chapter Six of the novel opens with the main character, Tambu, explaining the difference between white people and white missionaries. She depicts the missionary as a "special kind of white person" since the missionaries come to the country to bring enlightenment, love, and an opportunity for salvation.
One would argue that this passage is jarring and makes one wonder what the real difference is between the colonizers and the missionaries. They both travel to foreign places to assert their superior knowledge and way of life. Both the missionary and the colonizer disrupt the African lifestyle and impose Western ideologies. Both signify exploitation of a people. In reading this complicated novel, then, critics have talked about, among other things, Dangarembga’s feminist leanings, her appropriations of Frantz Fanon, her manipulation of food, language, psychosis, the poetics of vocal resistance and, in this case, the matter of space. A hugely important but critically underdeveloped issue in the novel, the idea of space had to date received what seems to be its more involved treatment in Basu (1997). It also highlights the long lasting impact of missionary education and its influence on people’s consciousness through its focus on domesticity (Denzer, 1992; Nakanyike-Musisi, 2007). After all, as Tambu points out, this group of missionaries represents only a minority of all missionaries. For instance, Tambu speaks about the perceived inferiority of Africans to white settlers thus,

I used to feel guilty and unnatural for not being able to love the Whites as I ought. So it was good to see the healthy young missionaries and discover that some whites were as beautiful as we were. After that it did not take long for me to learn that they were in fact more beautiful and then I was able to love them” (Dangarembga, 1988, p.104).

The point Dangarembga makes here is not about whether these whites actually were beautiful, kind people, but rather about the way in which the now established missionary education contributed to a feeling of inferiority among the Zimbabweans. From Tambu’s language, her claims of feeling unnatural, her reference to “learning” that the white people were more beautiful, one can clearly see the way in which missionary education contributed to and
perpetuated the colonial mentality. In general, missionary education trained female students in
domesticity in areas such as cooking, hygiene, gardening, and sewing (Bloch & Vavrus, 1998;
Nakanyike-Musisi, 2007). Missionary intent was not benevolent towards African pupils,

is not a benign good at every moment of its historical path, but rather it is a set of
practices that have been used differently by individual, groups, government, and
international agencies, depending on their intention, power, and conception of gender (p.
4).

These observations illustrate how missionaries worked hand in hand with colonial authorities to
promote their desired goals.

**Hegemony and its Relation to Zimbabwe**

Colonization was a bitter phenomenon during the nineteenth and the first half of the
twentieth century. Imperial powers colonized particular territories and plundered their resources.
Beside economic damage, the colonizers obliterated local cultures and imposed new ideologies
on native people. Western cultural hegemony resulted in the formation of a new hybrid identity
in the colonized natives. Rhodesia was a settler colony where the minority whites deposed local
rulers in the late nineteenth century and began to administer the territory. According to
Gramscian notions of hegemony, a dominating relation develops, not only by means of force, but
also consent through political and ideological leadership. The dominant class is able to persuade
the subordinate class to accept their values and ideas by building a network of alliances based on
those values (Gramsci, 1988). Hegemony results when the dominant class is successful in
persuading others to accept and internalize their views, values and norms. The hegemonic conception of reality becomes pervasive, directing and informing the behaviour and thoughts of all groups in society (Gramsci as cited in Hoare et al., 1971, p. 57). In other words, the ruling class achieves domination not by force or coercion alone, but also by creating subjects who “willingly” submit to be ruled. Hegemony is, therefore, achieved not by direct manipulation or indoctrination, but by playing upon the common sense of the people (Loomba, 1998, p 9), what Williams (1976) calls their “lived system of meanings and values.” (p.10).

According to Abrahamsen (1997), the hegemonic order is constructed and reinforced by the state as well as by the various institutions of civil society like the church, the educational system, the media and so on. In the case of Zimbabwe, educational and religious (Christian) institutions have played vital roles in establishing Western hegemony through the persuasion and coercion of their members (students/Christians) to accept the Western knowledge and value system over the indigenous ones (p.147). Moreover, the lack of local reading materials means that schools have to rely on Western educational texts, provided in the form of aid to Zimbabwean schools. These books are written, reviewed, and sourced from the West. As Nossal (1998) observes concerning the content of books from the West, “the theory is American, the experience is American; the focus is American and in [most cases], the voices are explicitly American” (p.12). In addition, these books were highly critical of local cultures, values, and knowledge. This situation presented an enabling environment for speedily spreading Western knowledge, cultures, and values among Zimbabwean students. Schiller (1997) notes the West, over the years, has used its doctrine of freedom to promote its political, economic and cultural values by whipping “alternative forms of social organization” into a ridiculous defensiveness. It
is, therefore, not surprising that even in the absence of the colonizer, the Western knowledge and
values system continues to dominate local culture, values, and knowledge in Zimbabwe.

Bourdieu’s (1978) analysis of cultural capital complements the theory of hegemony. In
his epistemology, Bourdieu constructs society as a field that shapes individuals’ habitus and
informs their practices. That is, habitus always drive practice. Cultural capital is about the
accumulation of knowledge, skills and resources an individual acquires from socialization within
family, formal education and wider social networks (Bourdieu, 1978). This leads to struggle over
resources. Jenkins (2002) argues that a field is therefore a structured system of social positions—
occupied either by individuals or institutions—the nature of which defines the situation for their
occupants. It is also a system of forces that exist between these positions; a field is structured
internally in terms of power relations. Positions stand in relationships of domination,
subordination or equivalence (homology) to each other by virtue of the access they afford to the
goods or resources (capital) that are at stake in the field (Jenkins, 2002, p.85). These goods or
resources are categorized as economic capital, social capital, cultural capital and symbolic
capital. Cultural capital basically legitimizes knowledge of one kind or another. In this case, the
conventional knowledge of the ruling class becomes part of the standard that can place
individuals in certain positions in the field of power. Once individuals learn to imitate or acquire
this knowledge, their position in the field of power and privilege increases.

As noted earlier on, because Western knowledge is produced in the classroom of
learning aided individuals to get employment in both corporate organizations and state agencies
in Zimbabwe, it became very attractive and rewarding to mimic this knowledge and value
system. Similarly, the imperial language (English) became the ‘standard,’ whose speakers
conveyed superiority and excellence, while indigenous languages were marginalized and considered impure and inferior. In fact, one’s ability to speak English fluently places one at the top of the social ladder. In most cases, to proceed to university or other higher school of learning, one needs, at least, a credit (grade C) in English language studies. This also implies that getting employed at the management level in Zimbabwe requires not only a credit in English language studies, but also the ability to prove in an interview that the candidate can challenge the white interviewers in their own language. Iseke-Barnes (2004) observes that class stratification and cultural assumptions connect to reproduce social order. Ngugi wa Thiongo (1985), recounts the power of the English language to determine which citizens in Kenya stay at the top of the social ladder thus,

The main determinant of a child’s progress up the ladder of formal education [is the English language] … [N]obody could go on to wear the undergraduate red gown, no matter how brilliantly they had performed in all the papers in all other subjects, unless they had a credit (not even a pass) in English Language. Thus, the most coveted place in the pyramid and in the system was only available to holders of an English language credit card. English was the official vehicle and the magic formula to colonial elitedom. (p.115).

In addition, Hymes’ (1996) argues that the Western education system seems to Function to instill linguistic insecurity among the colonized subject by discriminating linguistically and channeling children in ways that have an integral linguistic component, while appearing open and fair to all: “All have
equal opportunity to acquire membership in the privileged linguistic network. If they fail, it is their fault, not that of the society or school (p.84).

These ideas illustrate how Euro-American knowledge has become the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth’, ‘order’, and ‘reality’ are established in Zimbabwe.

**De-Colonizing the Academy: Counter-Hegemony in Zimbabwe**

According to Gramsci the hegemony of the ruling class could be deconstructed if the subordinate class could construct a counter-hegemony using all the stakeholders within the superstructure. In other words, a hegemonic class is one that succeeds in associating its interests with other groups and movements to create what Gramsci (1988) called a national popular collective will. In the case of Zimbabwe, a successful counter-hegemony should involve all the institutions including education and religion to deconstruct Western hegemony. This is based on the notion that decolonizing knowledge production should be seen as a political process of constructing counter-hegemony (Dei, 1996; Dei, 2000; Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001; Wane, 2006).

In addition, decolonizing conventional approaches to knowledge production and validation in Zimbabwe should be seen as counter-hegemonic. Kwame Nkrumah, the first Prime Minister of Ghana, has argued that it is only when the essence of colonized thinking (in which local peoples’ knowledge and value systems are considered inferior) is questioned that the stirrings of revolt will begin, and the whole structure of colonial rule will come under attack (Nkrumah, 1963). Therefore, rethinking indigenous knowledge in the classroom of learning
could be the site of a stirring academic revolt in Zimbabwe to trouble the asymmetrical relations of power that support Western hegemony.

Tsitsi Dangarembga took the title of her novel from Jean-Paul Sartre's preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of The Earth* (1961), in which Sartre argues that the condition of natives in a colonized society is a “nervous condition” (p.20). The wretched natives are displaced by the colonizers from their ancestral lands and forced to work for the minority white settlers as slaves. Dangarembga applies Sartre’s words in the epigraph to her book. Her choice of title maps the thematic content of her novel. *Nervous Conditions* deeply explores the consequences and psychology of colonialism. Dangarembga’s portrays her characters as inflicted with “Englishness,” which is equated with a developing neurosis. Each character chooses his or her own way of dealing with it; some succumb, while others revolt. Nyasha, the deuteragonist of the novel, is portrayed by Dangarembga as revolting against the ills of colonialism and patriarchal order, and thus attempting to cure the “colonial neurosis” that Sartre talks about.

Fanon produced remarkable books that have elucidated the workings of colonialism. He has expanded our understanding of the decolonization struggle. Fanon’s book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968) provides an overview of violence against colonized peoples. Fanon sought to shed light on several core questions concerning violence. Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, in which the author clearly shows the destructive impacts of colonization on the indigenous people in Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, focuses mainly on the oppression of females as well as the formation of the hybrid identity in this territory. As depicted in this novel, the British Empire imposes its cultural practices on the natives to the extent that they forget Shona, their native language, both willingly and unwillingly, and endeavour to speak English in order to
indicate their social prestige. The hegemony of the British Empire ruins the cultural identity of the colonized people, and motivates them to adopt a new identity.

**Synopsis of Fanon’s (1968), The Wretched of the Earth**

Frantz Fanon (1968) in *The Wretched of the Earth*, explored the implications of violence on colonized peoples. In so doing Fanon sought to shed light on several core questions concerning violence. For example, is decolonization served by violence? Is there a need for national culture? Does violence contribute to national consciousness? How should colonized people respond to violence? More broadly, the aim of this book was to raise consciousness among colonized people. Fanon’s views served to unite the colonized people towards the common goal of ending colonization and gaining independence. Indeed, his views helped to empower colonized people through their resistance and defiance, which ultimately created some unity among them and laid the foundation for independence after the fighting ended. Fanon (1968: 25) argues that “national liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to the people, commonwealth: whatever may be the headings used or the new formulas introduced, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon” (p.25). This book, which was Fanon’s last, was greatly influenced by his experiences in Algeria during the independence struggle, and thus played a major role in anti-colonial movements in Africa and the Caribbean.

The book is organized into several sections that are not quite chapters, and includes a preface by Jean Paul Sartre (pp.9-34). The most important part is entitled *Concerning Violence* (pp.35-94). This is followed by *Violence in the International Context* (pp.95-106), *Spontaneity: 
In Concerning Violence, with his forceful articulation of the idea that colonial violence could only be met with self-defensive violence of the native people, Fanon inspired colonized masses in Africa and beyond who were being oppressed by colonial rule. In his analysis, the question about the use of violence is inevitably the debate between means and ends. Do means matter, or does the end justify the means? Fanon (1968, p.35) believes that the end justified the means; hence he expressed his support for violent means against the ultimate violence of colonial rule in Africa, in countries such as Algeria, Zimbabwe, Angola, Mozambique and Kenya. The key idea from the book is the recognition that decolonization is always a violent phenomenon, which was also observed in the countries named above. Building on his ideas of violence, Fanon (1968) observes that the mandatory end of decolonization as a necessarily violent phenomenon is the “meeting of two forces opposed to each other by their very nature” (p.36). In other words, the savagery of colonial violence can only be confronted with greater liberating violence by the native masses. This is a powerful insight that was successfully embraced by the movements and the masses of many countries to free themselves from colonial rule. Fanon believed that violence empowered the colonized people, and that it had a therapeutic effect on them.

Thus, Fanon’s work not only speaks to the narratives in Nervous Conditions, it also gave rise to the title of Dangarembga’s novel. This link is apparent from Sartre’s (1968) observation in the preface that “the status of the native is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by its Strength and Weakness (pp.107-147), The Politics of National Consciousness (pp.148-205), On National Culture (pp.206-248), Colonial War and Mental Disorders (pp. 249-310) and conclusion (p.311-316).
the settler among colonized people with their consent” (p.20). Accordingly, “the native cures himself of colonial neurosis by thrusting out the settler through force of arms” (Sartre, 1968, p. 21). That is what happened in countries with entrenched white settlers such as Algeria, Mozambique, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Angola. It was nervous condition because the native did not know what the violent settler would do next since they were under military threat from African liberators keen on decolonizing their territories from colonial rule.

The natives were nervous because having been subject to colonial violence, they were anticipating further violence especially in Africa where the struggle for liberation and independence mirrored Fanon’s thesis. Fanon argued that it was the creation of extreme violence by the colonialists which forced natives into such violent means. In other words, violence was a necessary evil against assumptions of superiority of colonial occupation. Fanon therefore believed that the non-violent approach was an attempt by the colonial authorities to buy more time and plunder local economies (Fanon, 1968, p. 49). Given the greed and superiority ideas of the colonial state, violence in his view was indispensable in resistance against such government, “blood had to be shed” (1968, p.49). Moreover, Fanon believed that violence was a sign of bravery and cleansed the natives. More importantly, Fanon believed that the only way to fight the colonizers was to impose the same violence that was imposed on the colonized people. Under such circumstances, natives were nervous. In the narrative, Babamukuru’s behaviour illustrates the quote “nervous condition of the Native”.

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Fanon (1968) fully embraced the notion of violence as an effective means against all forms of colonial oppression. For Fanon the savage means used by the colonial occupation itself was the ultimate brutality and violence towards the colonized. It was indeed necessary for the colonized people to employ the same means if they were to liberate themselves from subjugation and continuing humiliation. However, Fanon preached violence not only because what was good for the goose was also good for the gander, under “tit for tat tactics”. He also recognized that successfully defeating such violent greed as the colonizers displayed provided the national strength to help resist neo-colonialism. Thus, Fanon (1968) introduced the notions of National Liberation and National Consciousness into his argument, and advanced the position that solving the problem of colonial oppression required violent means.

Fanon (1968) saw violence as the “tabula rasa” (p.35), which characterized the outset of decolonization. Thus, he was of the view that the end of long term national independence justified, in abstract and moral terms, the means. Therefore, it was irrelevant how one achieved his or her goals; what mattered was the goal and not the journey itself. He justified violent means because the colonial machinery needed to be broken and violence was the only way colonized people would be free from the various forms of the colonizer’s grip. Sartre (1968) added that “the only violence is the settler’s but soon they will make it their own. That is to say the same violence is thrown back upon the settlers” (p.17). Fanon (1968) observed that “the development of violence among the colonized people will be proportionate to the violence
exercised by the threatened colonial regime” (p. 69). For Fanon, the only plausible way under which the colonial machine would be destabilized and eventually broken was through constructive violence, and only then would the colonized people be free from the yoke of colonial occupation.

Fanon (1968) also argued that unless violence was rendered onto the oppressors, the oppressed would turn it against themselves in the form of inter-ethnic violence. This is important to the narrative in Dangarembga’s Nervous Conditions because the five women oppressed by patriarchy recognized that the oppressor, Babamukuru, the male and head of the home was capable of inflicting violence. This similarity which equates natives during colonialism to women under patriarchy leads to nervous condition. Fanon (1968) believes that the practice of violence would bind the oppressed together, as each individual would “recognize each other and the future nation as indivisible” (p.69). Interestingly, this perspective bound the five women together to resist against any further gender oppression.

Sartre (1968) largely reinforced this position with the statement that in “the period of their helplessness, their mad impulse to murder is the expression of the native’s collective unconscious” (p.18). It was this “collective unconscious” which caused the colonized to turn on themselves and each other, and which must be turned outward on the colonizer. Hence Sartre also seemed to support the justification of violence as a necessary although not sufficient means to the desired end. For Sartre, the human condition matters because it represents the historical
longing of human beings to escape the bonds of oppression. Human beings desire to make the conditions of their lives of their own making, which some of the women in the novel try to do. Sartre wanted to make the case that human beings can be free, active agents, endowed with a will and ability to change the world. Sartre was a proponent of existentialism philosophy, which posits that the existence precedes essence. It thinks that the existence of the individual is the highest truth. To it existence is more important than essence, for in essence; we are not able to find out the individuality. In Sartre’s philosophy there is an accord between the feeling of anxiety and freedom. He believed that existence manifests itself in the choice of actions, anxiety and freedom of will. Sartre does not accept any kind of determination. Our past does not determine the present and we build up our own future. But since the future is uncertain, we have no escape from anxiety and despair. Sartre was of the opinion that many paths are open before us and among them we choose one. But since we are not able to choose the other opportunities, we are always under the shadow of anxiety. The higher the man's responsibility leads to higher anxiety, which is apparent from Babamukuru’s nervous condition. The responsibility of building one’s future lies in his or her hands, which fits with the narrative in Dangarembga’s Nervous Condition. Sartre’s approach does in many ways capture something about us that other writers have missed because it is the human condition that matters more than anything. We must consistently struggle to improve the human condition, for example, affirmative action and employment equity laws, and social justice advocacy are intended to improve the human condition.
In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon (1968) argued for the efficacy of violence as a means of uniting people, and of allowing a critical and confident new African Consciousness to emerge in the struggle against colonial occupation and in the effort to achieve true independence. Fanon called for the full abolition of colonialism and all its effects or for the expulsion of the colonizer by any means necessary. Fanon (1968) argues

decolonization is nothing but the complete calling in question of the colonial question…it is a violent phenomenon, a programme of complete disorder from which emerges a historical process leading to decolonization: it is the meeting of two forces oppose to each other by their very nature, and involved in a murderous struggle …colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is maintained by naked violence: violence in its natural state and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence (pp.35-36).

These ideas illuminate the merits of violent strategies against both the intended and unintended consequences colonial occupation. Fanon figured out correctly that in countries such as Algeria, Kenya, Angola, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique, where the colonizer used violence to subdue the natives, violence was justified because it would force the colonizers to the negotiating table and ultimately usher in a peaceful ending to colonial occupation. Fanon (1968) observed that, “the colonized man finds his freedom in and through violence” (p.67).

Furthermore, Fanon (1968) believed that that use of violence was a cleansing force which empowered the African in his struggle against the colonizer. This happens when the native
discovers that his life, his breath, his beating heart are the same as those of the settler. He finds out that the settler’s skin is not anymore valued than a native’s skin; it must be said this discovery life is worth as much as the settler’s, his glance no longer freezes and his voice no longer turns me into stone. I am no longer on tenterhooks in his presence; in fact, I don’t give a damn for him. Not only does his presence no longer trouble me, but I am already preparing such efficient ambushes for him that soon there will be no way out but that of flight (p.45).

Once that happens, the native is emboldened to carry on with the national liberation struggle since he is no longer afraid of killing the colonizer. Furthermore Fanon (1968) argued that it was the creation of extreme violence by the colonial forces which forced the natives into such violent means. In other words, violence was a necessary evil that had to be set against the assumptions of superiority of colonial occupation. Thus, he believed that the non-violent approach was an attempt by the colonial authorities to buy more time and plunder local economies. Given the greed and ideas about white superiority of the colonial state, violence in Fanon’s (1968) view was indispensable in resistance against such governments: “blood had to be shed” (p.49). Fanon believed that violence was a sign of bravery and cleansed the natives.

Fanon (1968) saw violence as the means of humanity recreating itself when he asserted that “the native who now affirms that the colonialist understands nothing but force” (p.84) and he did not attempt to hide his view that anti-colonial violence was necessary. Fanon (1968) added that “for the native, violence represents the absolute line of action” (p.84). However, given the results in Africa, there is a mixed record regarding Fanon’s prescription of violent means.
Countries such as Ghana and Tanzania that used non-violence have remained peaceful. Others that embraced non-violence, such as Nigeria and Uganda, became violent at later times. Countries that embraced violence, such as Algeria, Angola, Kenya, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, continue to endure violence long after national independence.

Fanon, in “National Culture”, attacked negritude as a concept which mirrored the radicalization and continental dynamics of colonialism itself, and as something that constituted a metaphysical rather than a material politics. Fanon distinguished culture from pre-colonial aesthetic traditions and customs, to the extent that the modern intelligentsia possessed a monopoly on cultural production. For Fanon, colonialism destroyed the culture itself within the communities it colonized. Thus, Fanon (1968, p.206) argued that “to take part in the African revolution is not enough. To write a revolutionary song; you must fashion the revolution with the people. And if you fashion it with the people, the songs will come by themselves and of themselves.” (p.206), Fanon (1968) claimed that this process was “fundamental to the legitimacy of a nation” (p.207), because a National culture “serves as authentication of a future national culture” (p. 210). Thus, “national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence” (p. 233). In other words, it is the ‘people’ who form the
basis of anti-colonial struggle. Therefore, national culture cannot exist within the history and domination of colonialism.

For Fanon, the sphere of politics alone constituted that totality. He argued that the unconditional affirmation of African culture had succeeded affirmation of European culture. He took issue with the historical necessity according to which the men of African culture found themselves reacting to racialized ideas (and was therefore, for example, critical of Senghor’s negritude). Fanon believed that their claims to speak more of African culture than of national culture (Ngugi’s use of Kikuyu, for example) would tend to lead them to a blind alley. Fanon (1968, p.148) characterized this phenomenon as one of the pitfalls of National Consciousness, and claimed it would lead to cultural obliteration since it negated national reality.

Under colonialism, every effort was made to bring the colonized person to admit the inferiority of his culture, which had been transformed into instinctive patterns of behaviour, to recognize the unreality of his ‘nation’ and in the last extreme, the confused and imperfect character of his own biological structure. Consequently, Fanon stated that, while the masses maintain intact traditions which are completely different from those of the colonial situation, the intellectual throws himself in frenzied intellectual imitation into the frantic acquisition of the culture of the occupying power, and takes every opportunity of unfavorably criticize his own national culture, or else takes refuge in setting out and substantiating the claims of that culture, in manner that is passionate but rapidly becomes unproductive. This leads to contradictions. Accordingly, for Fanon, a national culture under colonial domination has to be sought in systematic fashion. It very quickly becomes a culture condemned to secrecy and thus empty.
For example, the literature produced by natives becomes differentiated and makes itself into a will to a particularism. The intelligentsia become producers and serve the occupying power in a cathartic process. For Fanon, national consciousness leads to international consciousness.

The strongest sections of *The Wretched of the Earth* which are also relevant to the narrative in Dangarembga’s Nervous Condition are those on violence, national consciousness and national culture, with no noticeable major weakness. Fanon was right about the use of violence as a form of liberation for colonized people, in that it united the colonized masses around an issue in their struggle against colonial power. He propagated that view convinced that the end justified the means. According to Fanon, it did not matter how one achieved his or her ends, as long as the desired end was achieved. These views were captured in a letter a few days before his death, where he stated that “we are nothing on earth if we are not in the first place the slaves of a cause, the cause of the peoples, the cause of justice and liberty” (Bulhan, 1985, p. 35). That is what made Fanon’s ideas appealing in the struggle against oppression and injustices during the independence movement, and why he remains relevant today. Fanon’s warning on the ‘The Pitfalls of National Consciousness’ in *The Wretched of the Earth*, apply today. For this study, some of those pitfalls contribute to the nervous condition of the natives captured in Dangarembga’s novel, Nervous Condition. Fanon’s ideas are a valuable and practical resource in the decolonization struggle. However, Fanon would be disappointed with the post-colonial leadership in former colonies such as Zimbabwe and others. Disappointingly in many African countries for example, the new leadership-the bourgeoisies – simply imitated the colonial class in
exploiting and oppressing the masses. Many leaders who took over from the oppressive colonial regimes have turned out to be dictators, politically and economically corrupt and maintained policies and measurers that marginalized women in all sectors of society. That is why we have to heed Dei’s (1996) observation that “there is a need at this time for African scholars to have uncomfortable conversations sometimes about our history and what has happened to us” (p.44). This is what this thesis tries to do to expose injustice sin Zimbabwean society.

Nonetheless, there are a lot of good ideas going on especially in education where Fanon’s ideas continue to inform and shape debate about decolonization of the education sector (Dei, 2010). For example, his ideas inform anti-racism education in Western society (Dei, 1996; Dei, 1999; Dei & Johal, 2005; Wane, 2006). Decolonizing education is important because it has the potential to cultivate consciousness within individuals. Anti-racist thoughts posit that decolonizing education curriculum that emphasizes African/indigenous knowledge over Eurocentricity would be a good beginning towards mental liberation and ultimately freedom because it would create the necessary conditions towards the required radical transformation of oppressed people (Wane, 2005).

To conclude, The Wretched of the Earth is probably Fanon’s most influential book, given the reception of its central ideas on the use of violence. It was a valuable and practical resource in the decolonization struggle and remains great reading for students of colonialism and its violence throughout the world. It is a truly classic. Fanon viewed the use of violence as a form of liberation for colonized people in that it united the colonized masses around an issue in their
struggle against colonial power. Ultimately, Fanon highlighted the centrality of spaces and how for some people, including local communities, the racialization of such space is an alienating phenomenon. Thus, his insights contribute to our understanding of the racialization of everyday space. Fanon’s position illuminates the debate on means versus ends in resistance against oppression and empowered colonized peoples in Africa and beyond as the concept of resistance made it possible for the “subaltern to speak” (Spivak, 1988). This is something the five women, the central figures in Dangarembga’s Nervous Condition do to expand their freedom and resist patriarchal oppression. Their resistance ultimately drives Babamukuru into a nervous condition.

**African Culture and the Role of Women**

A culture contains structures and practices that uphold a particular social order by legitimizing certain values, expectations, meanings and patterns of behaviour (Weedon, 1987). In general terms, culture refers to the shared beliefs, values, traditions and behaviour patterns of a particular group (Peplau, De Bro, Veniegas, & Taylor, 1999, p.27). Every part of our existence is determined by culture; the lives of women and men are shaped in crucial ways by the social and cultural worlds they inhabit. As such, gender relations are contingent on the observance and acknowledgement of the power of culture. Social roles are prescribed by culture. How a member of each group should behave is influenced largely by cultural norms. Traditional cultures define distinct roles for males and females. The father is the acknowledged decision-maker for the family. In *Nervous Conditions*, male dominance is the accepted way of life as will be demonstrated in the analysis. These traditional attitudes about gender are prevalent within African communities and are strongest in rural areas.
Dominance and aggression are the province of men while nurturing and caring is the province of women. At times, women take over the task of being breadwinners, and are thus not strictly confined to the primary responsibility of cooking and taking care of children. Peplau et al. (1999) observes that in African culture the males have to demonstrate and earn their masculinity through engaging in awesome and strenuous efforts. Masculinity is something that boys must achieve through strenuous efforts, a process of virilization denied to women. According to Peplau et al. (1999) men are socialized to be masculine. These efforts require that they should be separated physically from females. The tasks that these males perform inculcate the endurance of pain and the ability to confront danger. These gender roles have their roots in societal norms that expect women to be subordinate. Peplalu et al. (1999) state, “The qualities that cultures link with masculinity and femininity are not innately male or female. Instead they are, in the language of social science, socially constructed” (p.19). Many Zimbabwean women state that it is ‘cultural’ for women to be subordinate to men (Sweetman, 1995, p 20). In subverting such utterances, Sweetman (1995) alludes to Chitsike’s inquiry thus, “what is cultural about a women earning all the food through her sweat in the fields and preparing food for her husband and the children to sustain them when the man is drinking the day away?” (p.120).

The novel’s protagonist, Tambu, is denied access to education because she is a girl. Tambu’s father’s refusal to further her education is influenced by cultural assumptions, which consider education to be a male preserve. Tambu’s proper place is presumed to be in the home, serving her family and, later, her husband. Women are construed as perfect managers of the household who pass on societal values to their children. Women in Africa often have their fundamental rights denied by governments who justify this deprivation through resorting to African culture and invoking other colonial inventions about traditions (Ranger, 1984). In African communities, the
father is the ultimate decision-maker for the family, and women are expected to remain docile. Women’s powerlessness is portrayed in Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* when Maiguru remarks to Tambu about her dissatisfaction with the manner in which Babumukuru (her husband) handles household finances. She resents her husband’s lavish support of his brother’s family partly from her wages. However, her position as a wife prohibits her from acting against her husband’s will. On this docile role of ‘wifehood,’ Boyce-Davies (1986), in a discussion of the Nigerian situation, argues that “the woman as a daughter or sister has greater status and more rights in her lineage. Married, she becomes a possession, voiceless and often without rights in her husband’s family, except for what accrues to her through her children” (p.9). In traditional African communities, a woman has a limited choice, if at all, of a partner. The same applies to betrothal. Some women are forced into marrying men far older than them. In such situations, women conform to these demands since refusal on their part is construed as a violation of a cultural norm.

The role of women in traditional African societies is further demeaned by the possibility of polygamous relationships. Women are forced to relent to their husbands’ desire for further relationships, and the emotional scars accrued due to this practice are not taken into consideration. At times, African men seek additional wives regardless of their socio-economic status. In some of these situations, men fail to cope with the demands of having more than one household. This is depicted in *Nervous Conditions* where Takesure, a distant cousin of Babamukuru, ostensibly comes to help Jeremiah in the fields when actually he is running away from his two wives, for he has no means of supporting them. While a man in a traditional African society can marry as many wives as he wishes, a woman may only have one husband at a time. Female infidelity is socially unacceptable and often results in heavy fines for both the wife's
father and her lover. If she persists, she could be divorced and deprived of her children.

However a man's infidelity commands no more than a rebuke from a wife's male relatives, who often politely suggest that they are not averse to providing a further wife if he can justify his need and ability to support her. Though women relent to their husbands’ desire for additional marital relationships, the prevalent feeling of resentment and anger breeds hatred against her rival(s). She may seem complacent to her husband and co-wives about the situation; however, lack of inner peace is sometimes signified by her retaliatory witchcraft attacks against her rival(s).

In some communities African cultural practices and traditions perpetuate the illiteracy of women. Women are thus economically dependent on others, especially their husbands. In addition, illiteracy leads to decreased participation in the formal economic sphere and in leadership positions. As long as women remain ignorant, they will be dejected, oppressed and incapable of sharing men’s pursuits and ideals. But when women are educated, they respond to the changed environment. It is education and useful organizations that can give true freedom and enlightenment (Sharma & Sharma, 1995, p.22).

When Ngugi wa Thiongo was interviewed in 1982 about his novels *Devil on the Cross* and *Detained*, he described women as the most exploited and oppressed section of the entire working class: exploited as workers, at home, and also by the backward elements in the culture (Boyce-Davies et al., 1986, p. 11). In some cultures, autonomy and assertiveness are highly valued as personal qualities and equivalent for males and females. However, female assertiveness is taboo in African cultures. Women are socialized into being silent and submissive. In most African marriages, women's assertiveness leads to conflict between spouses, and it is assumed that most physical aggression by men on women is induced by their assertiveness. Women's physical
abuse is a common practice. Their tolerance of such abuse emanates from notions that women should submit and let their husbands have absolute control over their lives. Being submissive is indicative of being a good wife. In instances where women are aggressors, they receive strong social disapproval from neighbours and the shame of their own kinspeople.

In some African communities, on the death of her husband, a woman is inherited by one of the man’s brothers (Magesa, 2000). She is obliged to conform to this cultural practice. Should a woman refuse to be taken by any of the rightful heirs, a claim may be lodged against her agnates for the return of the lobola (bride price) especially if she is still of child-bearing age. This cultural practice still prevails and is most common in rural communities. The hidden power dynamic in marriages is maintained by gender ideology and by unequal access to material resources. With all the power assigned to men, one may understand why men feel threatened by changes in the traditional family structure. Unequal power relations between men and women in marriage are observed by Basow (1992) when she states: “The wife lost her legal existence and is considered an extension of her husband’s will and identity. A wife took on her husband’s name and place of residence, gave up her right to accuse her husband of rape (he was legally entitled to her sexual services) and agreed to provide domestic services without financial compensation.” (p.221)

In almost all African communities, both men and women fervently desire children. A man is regarded as wealthy when he has a significant herd of cattle, a large piece of land, and many children. For a woman, on the other hand, the birth of children is the confirmation of her sexuality, the guarantee of her social status, and the provision for her old age. Children also relieve some of the crushing burden of agricultural labour. If they are sons, they help to guard their mother’s property rights. If they are daughters, they ease the burden of domestic labour. An
example in *Nervous Conditions* would be the reluctance of Tambu’s family to release her to go and study at the mission, as that would increase the workload of all those left behind. Changing the unequal balance of decision-making power and control between men and women- in the household, in the workplace, in communities, in government and in the international arena - will lead to women’s empowerment.

Studies show that although Nyasa lost part of her history, she comes up with a different type of history, one which lies in between her history and what she acquired in England. According to Nfah-Abbenyi (1997) the history in parts of her home country is patriarchal, and views femaleness as inferior to maleness. The other history in England is racist, views and “uses colonization and assimilation as a potent weapon of power and control’ (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997, p. 67). Nfah-Abbenyi (1997) demonstrates how the double history in post-colonial times has helped women like Nyasa, and Tambu to redefine their identity against cultural oppression. The women’s struggles reveal that subjectivity is a continuous process which is learnt through experience. That said, feminine writings about the identity of women is contentious along representation of gender, race and class. This is highlighted by Nyasa’s experience through interaction with other subjects open to analyze their situation (Nfah-Abbenyi 2000, p. 67).

Furthermore, Nyasha’s experience demonstrates how some women out of their consciousness construct their female subjectivity and the need for agency. Through agency, the liberated female expects to be treated without indifference. The way in which women in Africa are represented as the “Other” by men has created differences based on biological difference of female’s sexual body, rather than similarities in bodies of both men and women. The idea of ‘otherness’ creates separation between self and “other”, which is the perceived identity attributed to all African women within the narrative in Nervous Condition, whose origin dates back to colonial time.
Such negative representation demonstrates how the discourse of language degrades Africans (language has cultural and specific meanings), subject to various interpretation. When negative, it creates feelings of inferiority and undermines the ability of the marginalized subject to fully utilize her potential.

The narrative in *Nervous Conditions*, indicates that the education of women during the post-colonial period was a struggle to gain access to power and improve their living standards as suggested by Sartre’s existentialism philosophy. According to the narrative “submitting to an alien system of education also meant a transformation of traditional cultures and a threat to existing structures of power within the family, clan and community” (Dangarembga, 1988, p.26). Family represents identity of space. Therefore, tension in a family demonstrates an act of displacement within someone’s rightful location in her society. From the text, it is clear that Western system of education produced a new class of elite who disorganized the cultural hierarchy in African society. The tension which surrounds Tambu’s desire for education comes from within her family. For Tambu, education would alter her vulnerability as a woman. Yet, for her uncle Babamukuru, there was the fear that western education would expose Tambu to immoral behavior since girls who went to colonial schools most likely lost their sense of place in the traditional family structure. Similarly, there is tension around her mother with regard to fear of losing a daughter, as well as a domestic helper. From the narrative, Nyasa, Tambu’s cousin discourages Tambu from going to a convent school on intellectual and political terms since a woman’s place in the civic arena was marginalized. Evidently, tensions about Tambu’s family influences her decision to identify where the most threat is from, not her education, but patriarchy (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 164). The argument against colonial education plays out
through binaries of tradition and modernity, national pride versus cultural imperialism, particularly with women. Here, one comes to terms with hybridity in various aspects in post-colonial Africa. Hybridization settles the problem of space and sense of belonging to a dynamic culture since the effect of hybridity neutralizes space in postcolonial Africa.

In addition, Dangarembga argues that the supposed clash with modernity would involve the perils of colonial education: a change in old ways, a threat to traditional symbols of power, a passive student being worked over by the western world, confusion and vacillation, and exile and alienation (Supriya, 1995). Similarly, the clash restrained within their place in rooted in colonial patriarchy, since Dangarembga set her novel during the military struggle in Rhodesia against white supremacy, with divisions and nervousness at all levels of society during the period.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the literature on Dangarembga’s Nervous Condition, Fanon’s (1968), The Wretched of the Earth and Jean-Paul Sartre’s famous line from his preface to the “Wretched”: the status of the native is a nervous condition. (p.17). It has also expanded on Sartre’s existentialism philosophy, which influenced Tsitsi Dangarembga’s title, but also the narrative especially of the 5 women and Babamukuru’s anxieties. In addition, the chapter has traced and linked female oppression in Zimbabwe to colonial violence which erupted along the lines articulated by Fanon (1968) on the role of violence in the political struggle. Fanon saw violence as the means of humanity recreating itself when he asserts that “the native who now affirms that the colonialist understands nothing but force”, and does not hide it. He adds that “for the native, violence represents the absolute line of action” (p.84). These views are present in Dangarembga’s Nervous Conditions. In addition, the chapter has argued that matters related to
identity in post-colonial Africa are sometime portrayed as settled and homogenous, when in reality they are contested on the basis of gender. It emerges from Dangarembga’s (1988) *Nervous Conditions* that social, political and economic conditions in Africa have been gendered, and thus perpetuated the ideology of public sphere for men and private sphere for women. This discussion has also demonstrated that it is such an ideology that has worked to perpetuate the marginalization and oppression of women in post-colonial Africa by misrepresenting their identity as illustrated by the narratives about the main characters in the novel, *Nervous Condition*.

**CHAPTER FOUR: DATA FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

*Nervous Conditions* is focused on the colonized African clan (Sigauke clan, part of the Shona people) in the then Rhodesia during the 1960s. The novel explores the exposure of the Sigauke clan to westernization in various ways. At times this westernization would be at loggerheads with traditional customs, practices and beliefs, with disastrous consequences. As we shall see, colonialism is seen as a double-edged sword: on the one side, it is the ‘carrier’ of a discourse of western modernity which, in is emphasis upon education and democracy, enables a challenge to African patriarchy. On the other side, a colonial education alienates its African subjects from their culture, with disastrous psychological consequences.
The novel examines unequal power relations between men and women in the Sigauke clan which was largely steeped in tradition. Women (Nyasha, Maiguru, Lucia, Tambu and MaShingayi) challenge the practices of male domination in various ways, usually unsuccessfully. Each of these women makes an effort to question some of the decisions that were the prerogative of the patriarch. The women also attempt to break out of the role of domesticity and servility to the surprise of the men.

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convent school on intellectual and political terms since a woman’s place in the civic arena was marginalized. Evidently, tensions about Tambu’s family influences her decision to identify where the most threat is from, not her education, but patriarchy (Dangarembga, 1988, p.164).

The argument against colonial education plays out through binaries of tradition and modernity, national pride versus cultural imperialism, particularly with women. From the narrative, being a woman carries different burdens according to Tambu’s mother, a learning process that involves patient and sacrifice without the same dividends-money, status and power-reserved for a son, an educated husband, father and provider. This reflects the division of labour in Shona traditions.

For Tambu’s family, ‘modernity’ was a threat to traditional symbols of power as gender inequality among the Shona legal and social structures favored men. The women were expected to serve their husbands and their families. Tambudzai’s decision to leave for the mission school would have to be read in that context.

Thus, one comes to terms with hybridity in various aspects in post-colonial Africa. Hybridization settles the problem of space and sense of belonging to a dynamic culture since the effect of hybridity neutralizes space in postcolonial Africa. Furthermore, Dangarembga argues that the supposed clash with modernity would involve the perils of colonial education: a change in old ways, a threat to traditional symbols of power, a passive student being worked over by the western world, confusion and vacillation, and exile and alienation (Nair, 1995). Similarly, the clash restrained within their place in rooted in colonial patriarchy, since Dangarembga set her novel during the military struggle in Rhodesia against white supremacy, with divisions and nervousness at all levels of society during the period.

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“Wretched”: the status of the native is a nervous condition. It has also expanded on Sartre’s existentialism philosophy, which influenced Tsitsi Dangarembga’s title, but also the narrative especially of the five women and Babamukuru’s anxieties. In addition, the chapter has traced and linked female oppression in Zimbabwe to colonial violence which erupted along the lines articulated by Fanon (1968, p.84) on the role of violence in the political struggle. Fanon saw violence as the means of humanity recreating itself when he asserts that “the native who now affirms that the colonialist understands nothing but force”, and does not hide it. He adds that “for the native, violence represents the absolute line of action” (p.84). These views are present in Dangarembga’s Nervous Conditions. The chapter has also argued that matters related to identity in post-colonial Africa are sometime portrayed as settled and homogenous, when in reality they are contested on the basis of gender. It emerges from Dangarembga’s (1988) Nervous Conditions that social, political and economic conditions in Africa have been gendered, and thus perpetuated the ideology of public sphere for men and private sphere for women. This discussion has also demonstrated that it is such a familial ideology that has worked to perpetuate the marginalization and oppression of women in post-colonial Africa by misrepresenting their identity as illustrated by the narratives about the main characters in the novel, Nervous Condition.

The following sub-themes were used to analyze the findings. These are class and gender; colonialism; work and African women; African women and land rights; African women and their bodies; patriarchy and religion; violence; and women in African culture. The significance of culture, class, sexual/gender violence, colonialism, oppression, resistance and religion were the main themes used to interrogate Tsitsi Dangarembga’s Nervous Conditions.
Class and Gender

The narrator, Tambu, portrays entrapment as the oppression of women with regard to class, race and gender. In narrating her story, Tambu places herself in the triple jeopardy of the black women writer. She is faced with having to betray men, as is the case with Tambu when she talks about her brother, Nhamo, and his ill-treatment of her. The African women writer also has to contend with the community that would regard her as a traitor because she assimilated some of the western cultural traits. She may also have to be alienated from women that share a similar plight of subjugation, as the latter could be complacent with the status quo (Bosman, 1990, p. 94).

The narrator’s opening remarks in the novel are those of the entrapment of MaShingayi (Tambu’s mother) and Maiguru (Tambu’s aunt). She depicts her cousin, Nyasha, as being rebellious and bent on challenging the status quo within the clan. Tambu views herself and Lucia (Tambu’s aunt) as having escaped. She says ‘My story is not after all about death, but about my escape and Lucia’s, about my mother’s and Maiguru’s entrapment, and about Nyasha’s rebellion’ (1988, p.10).

Tambu’s story traces her hardships from infancy: she had to cultivate the fields, fetch water from Nyamarira river, look after her younger siblings, cook for the family, and sleep on the kitchen floor on cold days with a single, threadbare blanket as cover. Tambu also endured
humiliation from her brother, Nhamo, who made her an object of mockery. Her father, on the other hand, viewed her feeble efforts in trying to educate herself as ridiculous. Her mother tried to teach her how to tolerate hardships as a woman.

While Tambu was culturally restricted to roles that denied her opportunity to rise above domesticity, her brother, Nhamo, on the other hand was able to study. He was privileged to attend school with the whites who were part of the ruling colonial class. Furthermore, Nhamo was able to attend school despite the family having to eke out a living. This was consonant with the patriarchal beliefs of empowering male members of the family for perpetual domination.

The relationship between Tambu and Nhamo was reduced to that of the privileged and the non-privileged. Nhamo had all the opportunities because he was a boy, while Tambu had to be content with being groomed as a prospective bride. The relationship between these two siblings was mutually destructive. Nhamo tried by all means to bring her down, as when he stole her maize and gave it to friends, and to dominate over her as a male. Tambu, on the other hand, grew to hate her brother, to the point that even when he passed away, she felt no sadness as expected. In fact her opening remarks in the text are about her apathetic attitude to Nhamo’s untimely demise because she felt the mindset of the patriarchal society promotes male empowerment over women and girls.

This mindset is further corroborated by Tambu’s father, Jeremiah, when he asked her whether it was possible to “cook books and feed them to your husbands? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook, clean and grow vegetables’ (1988, p.15). This is domesticity per
excellence. These remarks by Tambu’s father escalated tensions and her contempt for her father, and brother. Tambu and her conservative father never agreed on anything significant and, finally, they simply co–existed in peaceful detachment. This is Tambudzai’s assertion of agency and struggle. With the gender-based tension between Tambu and Nhamo, it is not surprising that at the time of Nhamo’s death she showed no feelings; rather she had nursed sentiments of hatred towards her privileged brother. On the other hand her feelings for Babamukuru were somehow different because he took care of his family and provided all their needs. He provided for his wife a beautiful house that had furniture of quality. The five women whose experience is central in the narrative and the challenges they encounter in the family is rooted in Shona patriarchal system of domination, which for Shona women it is a parallel system of repressive authority to the colonial English system within their terms. The narrative highlights operations of hysterical resistance towards domination. That is why an alternative title for the novel would be: The consequences of Shona familial ideology on women.

Colonialism

The study explored the effect of colonialism on African women's lives in Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions. African women continue to fight the notions that women belong to the private sphere because in my opinion these notions of domesticated African women are colonial legacies that continue to haunt African women’s present and future. Ingrained deeply are colonial legacies notions and structures such that even human rights institutions overlook them and at times perpetuate them. The African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) (1981/1986) (Banjul Charter) pays attention to more than just civil and political rights
but also economic, social and cultural rights. Its thrust is the total candid liberation of Africa from colonialism, neocolonialism, and apartheid to mention a few. Dangarembga is critical of keeping African women out of spaces that are predominately and culturally for African men and explains them to Tambu to her best and make more money. Moreover, do not even control their earnings. Subsequently Maiguru equates Babamkuru’s behaviour to that of the colonial government, which cared less about the Africans and much less African women.

**Work and African women**

As much as work is a tool of emancipation for the African women, it is also a tool of domination. The problem is work is defined from a patriarchal driven point of view that results in the domesticity of African women. In Nervous Conditions, Jeremiah, Tambu’s father works when Babamukuru, his brother, is around from the mission. The same applies to Tambu’s brother Nhamo who only works when Babamukuru is on his way to visit. On the other hand, Tambu’s father in reaction to the lack of school fees for Tambu encourages her to ‘learn to cook, clean and to grow vegetables as she cannot cook books and feed them to her husband’. Tambu’s father gives a list of things that symbolizes the perpetuation of the domesticity ideology.

Jeremiah is putting the ceiling on Tambu’s expectations. Education is not one of them. Tied to all the work African women had to do are some cultural practices that allow the men to eat first before the women and children. Tambu questions this norm. During Babamukuru’s welcome feast at the homestead, Tambu’s female relatives serve all the good food to the men and other
patriarchal relatives. Tambu’s despondency is of concern. It reflects a nervous disposition that Tambu has. She knows she deserves, “the tasty meat” but she cannot demand it. This reflects the state in which many colonial and postcolonial African women may have and still find themselves in, accepting the ‘soup and vegetables. The ‘soup and vegetables’ scenario reflects dominance of the patriarchal system and the mind control it has on the rest of the women in the kitchen who did not query the lack of meat. The depth of the dominance is such that it creates a normalcy in a dire situation.

**African Women and Land Rights**

African women’s access to land during the colonial era was limited even though traditionally women had access to land via their ancestral lineage. Colonialism took away that critical aspect and made land be in the hands of a father to a son. Colonialism changed the means of social production in African society to the disadvantage of women (Harms, 1980). This is typical in Europe where women were required to marry before they can inherit a piece of land. Colonization introduced the commercialisation of land. This tendency carried into the postcolonial era. The male land ownership scenario encouraged son preference, which is still a problem today for African women. The opening statement of Nervous Conditions glaringly lays out the problem of son preference to African women. It represents male dominance and perpetuation of patriarchal tendencies. It affects the nervous condition of African women (Dangarembga, 1988).
African Women and their Bodies

Tying in with African women in marriage is reproductive health and body image.

Nervous Conditions questions the rights African women have to their bodies. Ma’Shingayi, throughout the story, seems to be perpetually pregnant as Tambu points out: ‘she was anxious my poor mother, because four babies, three of them sons, had died in infancy between birth and this pregnancy’. The story is not clear about the period between the pregnancies but I deduce that it is one baby after the other and all but Nhamo being girls. Ma’Shingayi seems not in control of her body. It is not clear if she is having children one after the other by choice or she felt she had to bow to her husband. However, readers empathize with Ma’Shingayi and her journey is significant to African women. Dangarembga touches on the right to determine control of African women’s bodies. Significantly, that happens in the private sphere and therefore, unclear to the outsider. Dangarembga presents the colonialist’s view about African women’s sexuality and their bodies. The society labels Lucia, one of Tambu’s aunts immoral because of her so called many partners. The same does not apply to the men, for example, Takesure who had impregnated more than one woman at the same time. Nyasha in a bid to refuse Babamukuru’s control of her body chooses to force vomit whatever she ate at Babamukuru’s table. She also refused to have him dictate her dress code and Tambu recounts Babamukuru’s reaction: ‘He wanted to know where his daughter thought she was going dressed up in such an ungodly manner and told her that…’ Tambu found Babamukuru’s acerbic comments sad as she thought Nyasha looked very pretty in her dress.
Patriarchy and Religion

Missionaries were among the first waves of European settlers in Africa setting up many of the schools while on civilizing assignments in the continent under the paradigm of domesticity (Nakanyike-Musisi, 2007). Considering the cultural ideologies of the Europeans, including their religions, and the inherent patriarchy of the indigenous people of the southern African region there was a significant and arguably detrimental intersection of beliefs about women. In Dangarembga’s Nervous Conditions, religion is grappled with chiefly through Tambu, the protagonist, and her uncle, Babamukuru, the head of the family and the mission school. We are told that he was taken to the mission early in his life, eventually educated there and then sent to South Africa and England for tertiary studies. Though coming from a Shona background, Babamukuru embraces Christianity – perhaps mostly because it guaranteed his salvation from squalor. He also requires belief from those in his family and discourages un-Christian rituals and behaviour. Being the leader of the family and a mission school very much narrows the freedoms and abilities of the women in his charge. In this way, Babamukuru represents both the mimic and the figurehead of the power structures against which the women in the novel attempt to rebel and define themselves.

During the colonial era, patriarchy and religion created a viable environment for the human rights violations of African women. Religion looks completely harmless. However, as Tambu narrates through her grandmother ‘they were holy wizards.’ Despite covered in a holy
cloth, the missionaries were still wizards. Edward Said (1978) rightly explains that ideas, culture and history can only through their source of power. Therefore, in studying foreign missionaries, one realizes that they believe in the enlightenment ideology of colonialists.

Women easily become the ‘other’ as allowed by patriarchy and religion, in the case of missionary gospel that encouraged women to be under the man. Religion is ideological and is entrenched in the social fabric. Both patriarchy and religion rely heavily on ideology to convince of its authority. Tamale notes that these robust structures and institutions’ task is to sustain the existing state of affairs. Thus, the condition of African women has not changed despite the presence of human rights; patriarchy continues to control space that African women occupy.

Violence

Violence, like charity, begins at home. The violence in the family is an expression of the violence of the oppressor successfully adapted to local conditions to make it a normal feature of life at home. In the novel, Babamukuru, as head of the family internalizes the humiliation of the colonized but instead of outward, the anger is directed inward towards the vulnerable wife and daughter. To the colonial apparatus that made him Christian and gave him western education with a degree and a career, Babamukuru is thankful no matter how much he unconsciously suffers the humiliation of being a second-class citizen. He is thankful for the fact that the education saved him from the poverty of his brother Jeremiah and the latter’s family. Babamukuru treats his brother and his family with condescension because he is in a position of superiority as far as they are concerned. They are in turn obsequious with Babamukuru for being
the big brother who brings a lot of stuff to them, gives them advice and wants to educate their children.

**Women in African Culture**

A culture contains structures and practices that uphold a particular social order by legitimizing certain values, expectations, meanings and patterns of behavior. In Nervous Conditions the male dominance is an accepted way of life, as it will be demonstrated in the analysis. These traditional attitudes about gender are prevalent within African communities and are strongest in rural areas. Tradition and cultural practices reinforce the power of men in African societies and are often embraced without any interrogation. This point is clearly depicted in Dangarembga’s Nervous Conditions. The novel’s protagonist, Tambu, is denied access to education because she is a girl. Tambu’s father’s refusal to further her education is influenced by cultural assumptions, which consider education to be a male preserve. Tambu’s proper place is presumed to be in the home, serving her family and, later, her husband. Women are construed as perfect managers of the household who pass on societal values to their children.

In African communities the father is the ultimate decision-maker for the family and women are expected to remain docile. Women’s powerlessness is portrayed in Dangarembga’s Nervous Conditions where Maiguru remarks to Tambu about her dissatisfaction with the manner in which Babamukuru (her husband) handles household finances. She resents her husband’s lavish support of his brother’s family partly from her wages. However, her position as a wife
prohibits her to act against her husband’s will. On this docile role of ‘wifehood’ Boyce-Davies (1986), in her discussion of the Nigerian situation, argues that ‘the woman as a daughter or sister has greater status and more rights in her lineage. Married, she becomes a possession, voiceless and often rightless in her husband’s family, except for what accrues to her through her children” (p.9).

The role of women in traditional African societies is further demeaned by the possibility of polygamous relationships. While a man in a traditional African society can marry as many wives as he wishes, a woman may only have one husband at a time. Female infidelity is socially unacceptable and often results in heavy fines of both the wife's father and her lover. This is depicted in Nervous Conditions where Takesure, a distant cousin of Babamukuru, had ostensibly come to help Jeremiah in the fields. Actually, when he came to Jeremiah’s homestead he was running away from his two wives, for he had no means of supporting them.

In some African communities, on the death of her husband, a woman is inherited by one of the man’s brothers. She is obliged to conform to such cultural attributes. Should the woman refuse to be taken by any of the rightful heirs a claim may be lodged against her agnates for the return of the lobola (bride price) especially if she is still of child-bearing age. This cultural practice still prevails and is most common in rural communities. The hidden power dynamic in marriages is maintained by gender ideology and by unequal access to material resources. With all power assigned to men one may understand why men feel threatened by changes in the traditional family structure.
Significance of the main themes

The 'nervous condition' is understood as explaining the position of the native who feels as though she or he occupies multiple identities, some of which contradict other identities. The colonizer who imposes ideas of ‘Other’ and its subordinate position upon the native creates this feeling for him or her. The distinction lies between having the nervous condition, meaning truly possessing it, and consenting to the nervous condition, meaning unknowingly accepting the colonizer’s 'diagnosis' and not having the faculties with which to rebel against this diagnosis.

Although the colonized may be diagnosed as having a nervous condition, what both the colonizer and the colonized sense is multinational hybridity, without knowing how to interpret it. The novel’s title, Nervous Conditions, implies that individuals cannot escape the categorisations that have been formulated to identify them. Once something has been named, it cannot be erased from consciousness; therefore, Dangarembga embraces the term 'nervous conditions' as having a positive meaning, a meaning of hybridity which defines the identities of her people rather than one which suggests her people are lacking wholeness. Furthermore, as with Sartre's claim that the colonized can only discover him or herself 'by thrusting out the settler through force of arms' Dangarembga's narrative calls on the colonized to make a statement about the 'consent' they are providing, asking them, as she did, to use the re-defined idea to speak against a defined state of being and a defined history. The varying factors which make up her identity are now a nervous condition that she can grasp and define in her own terms through her own writing. The native must first duel with the issue of being colonized in order to embrace it, thus discovering that the self is a solitary space that is in fact a composite of multiple spaces. In this sense, Nervous
Conditions functions as a mirror for other young African women, as well as the changing global culture. It serves as a political piece of writing which can affect ideologies about postcolonial politics.

Colonialism was the precursor to the emergence of multinational societies where Western ideology dominated culture and identity. As Tambu transitions from the homestead, mission, and convent, she enters the metropolitan transnational sphere as a woman of color who cannot escape her hybrid identity. Although Tambu is telling her story about how to mediate between tradition and modernity, her adolescent stage and coming-of-age story is universal as a theory. Before concluding this thesis, what follows is a brief discussion of the conditions of women in Zimbabwe long after the end of colonial rule in 1980.

Armstrong (1992) demonstrates that the history of African women in general has been characterized with an uphill struggle for emancipation, gender equity and bondage of oppression. Since time immemorial, the history of oppression of the African women has been well documented from pre-colonial to colonial period, during wars of liberation and post-independence era. African feminist jurisprudence is a clear testimony of gender imbalances in the history of humankind. It is therefore not disputed that African women have been oppressed even in most of the democratic states in Africa.

According to WLSA (2007) women were treated as perpetual minors during the pre-colonial and colonial period in Zimbabwe. Through marriage, women lost their identity as adults. They were treated as objects of sexual satisfaction, were socialized to please their husbands, and could therefore not refuse to have sexual intercourse with their spouses. The law supported such socialization. A woman could not say no to sexual intercourse with her husband.
Marital rape was not recognized in Zimbabwe. The assumption was that as married subjects they signaled perpetual consent to sexual intercourse. Women therefore became vulnerable objects exposed to sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.

Armstrong (1992) argues that as perpetual minors, women were handicapped with respect to ownership of property. Consequently, women were denied the capacity to own valuable or immovable structures. They could not even administer such properties irrespective of their mature age. Furthermore, they could not enter contracts or even borrow money from banks without the assistance and consent of their male parents or husbands as their legal guardians. Customary law, which in many African societies was a creation of colonialists, introduced bad cultural practices and a patriarchal society that was oppressed women.

As a result, during the colonial period, African women in Zimbabwe were deemed inferior than their white counterparts. Race was of the essence as white supremacy and racial segregation were well pronounced. According to WLSA (2000), the system was race specific. The African women unlike their white Rhodesian counterparts were oppressed to the extent where their roles in society were not recognized as human beings with rights and dignity to protect. African women were perceived as minors at every stage of their lives despite the significant roles they played as mothers and in the mobilization of resources for the family. The women were subjected to oppressive cultural practices until death. At birth girls and women were put under the control of their male guardian be it fathers, uncles, or brothers. Upon marriage the control shifted to the husband who in other cultural control, inflicted punishment through chastisement or any other forms of physical and emotional abuse that were acceptable by
society. Upon the death of the husband guardianship reverted to the woman’s biological parents or male heirs.

Furthermore Armstrong (1992) points out that it was very difficult during the colonial period for women to get opportunities in male dominated professions such as medicine and engineering. In most cases the furthest careers open to women were nursing, caregivers, house cleaners or primary school teachers. The rest of women were objects of sexual utility, child bearers and as cheap sources of farm labour.

At independence in 1980, women called for legislative reforms in Zimbabwe. Because of such activism, the legal age of majority became 18 years for both women and men. In passing the Legal Age of majority Act 1982 (now section 15 of the General Law Amendment Act (Chapter 8:07) the legislative intended to emancipate women by removing some barriers when they reached the age of eighteen and deemed to be adults by giving them the Cocus standi and competencies in all matters generally, especially under common law. The case of Magaya v Magaya 1999(1) ZLR 100 (5), however, dealt a huge blow to the rights of African women in Zimbabwe. The full Supreme Court bench pointed out that the Legal Age of Majority Act never contemplated that courts would interpret it so widely it would give women new or additional positive rights, which interfered with or distorted aspects of customary law. The judges’ interpretation was that the Act was intended to ensure that the majority status of women would co-exist with customary law and not replace it. The essence of the judgement, which has withstood the test of time and has not been set aside to date, is that under the applicable customary law relating to succession, males are preferred to females as heirs. The implication is that African women are discriminated under the laws of the country (WLSA, 2000).
Cases of gender imbalances have been on the increase despite some legislative reforms. A number of African women are still marginalized in all spheres despite being the majority there are still few women in politics and outstanding professions. This imbalance stems from the attitude of men towards women in a patriarchal society to the leadership structures. Because of major barriers and outright discrimination, few women excel and are exposed in respect to gender violence and discrimination. Women are mostly the victims of domestic violence and are exposed to HIV and AIDS, which is gendered in that more women than men are infected in society (Chirau et al., 2007). The ongoing gender oppression and violence against women in Zimbabwe is rooted in colonialism and its “invention” of traditions” in the form of customary law (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1984; Ranger, 1984), which set in motion gender oppression and the marginalization African women in society. This study has shown that the colonial impositions in Zimbabwe were so far reaching that almost 40 years since the country became independent in 1980, women continue to struggle for equality and dignity through decolonization to undo some of the traumatic and oppressive excesses of colonialism.

Conclusion

Colonialism propagates for the divide and rule principle. It disregarded the locals and favoured the foreigners and settlers. The fruits of colonialism benefitted the colonizers and their home countries. The analysis demonstrates that while contact with colonial and capitalist authorities transformed the local communities, colonial [and post-colonial] government policies and laws reinforced practices that excluded and marginalized. The next chapter presents the discussions and the main thesis conclusions.
Chapter Five: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the conclusions and discussions from the thesis. From that instance, I gather that Dangarembga unequivocally states that the story is not about men, but about the escape of women in the story from the clutches of a patriarchal society. In Nervous Condition, Dangarembga provides a perceptive study not only of sexual oppression, but also of the complexities of colonization, culture and class. The narrative depicts black women’s agonies brought about by a myriad of oppressions. Deliberately, all the female characters, with the exception of Tete (Babamukuru and Jeremiah’s sister) have had their poignant experiences brought out into the open by one of them, Tambu.

The oppressive nature of traditional African culture on womenfolk indicates that it is utilized as an excuse to explain away violations of women’s rights. Surprisingly only those aspects of culture which serve to oppress women are considered as immutably cultural. Traditions should undergo alteration to suit the changed economic, political and social circumstances. In Nervous Conditions, one noticeable breakaway from male supremacy is the constitution of the ‘dare’. Tete is a woman who sits in the ‘dare’, by virtue of being a blood relative to the patriarch. Even her duties at the Sigauke homestead are minimal, compared to other women. At her in-laws, according to her culture, she is ‘voiceless and rightless’, as she is married. The unequal power relations in the marriage compel one to consider marriage as an oppressive institution. In African societies male supremacy is venerated unquestioningly since tradition and cultural practices reinforce their power. A woman should conform to her husband’s control and rejection is interpreted as a deviation from the expected role. For instance, in Nervous Conditions Maiguru returned to her husband after she had walked out on him, because she desired to conform to her expected role of a dutiful wife, rather than be a deviant and face
rejection in her society. Maiguru weighed the prospects of freedom against that of bondage as a voiceless wife, still the latter was victorious. Even though she had seen countless episodes by her daughter, Nyasha, trying to break out of this yoke of being a woman in a traditional society, Maiguru opted for the security which was brought by this bondage.

The study has noted the power of indigenous cultural knowledge that African women have. The role and the relevance of indigenous African cultures and value systems to progress and development are fundamental. This is evident in the period in which intellectual energies were geared towards finding workable models and strategies for reconstruction and development of the formerly colonized African countries as well as for ending of the legacy of colonial subjugation and exploitation. As Kwame Gyeke (1997) pointed out, the post-colonial era not only signified an end to “…the period of dictation, forcible imposition of a variety of alien values and institutions, … (but also) a period of autonomous self-expressions on the part of the formerly colonized people, as well as of self-assertion, sober reflection on values and goals, and the gradual weaning away from the self-flagellating aspects of colonial mentality acquired through decades of coloniality” (p. 25).

Representations of women in the novel is very vivid. Dangarembga on the whole defines women based on their shared oppression while on the other hand also illustrating their diversity and so gating the notion that African women’s voices constitute a homogenous third world voice. Central to the novel is its preoccupation with the complementary and contradictory aspects of African women’s experience and psychology. This focus on the emotional and psychological being of the colonized African woman is influenced in no small measure by the novel’s title and epigraph, which it takes from Frantz Fanon’s The Wretched of the Earth.
and Nyasha are the split subject characterized by Frantz Fanon as alienated from themselves and from their society due to multiple oppressions.

**Practical Lessons for Understanding African Women, Culture and Education**

It is clear from *Nervous Conditions* that education is bound up with the imperatives of decolonizing nationalism, and, though one of the promises of decolonizing nationalism makes is to create the New (and educated) Woman and education itself is seen as the provenance of men. The women are thus expected to learn but somehow not know. The accomplishment of an education is undermined by tradition and is expressed, particularly in *Nervous Conditions*, symbolically through food. Food is usually considered the domain of women, and it is often used symbolically, as when Tambu sells mealies for school fees. Her efforts are thwarted by her brother, who steals her crops, and her father, who claims that her eventual profits should belong to him.

Seeing how education has materially improved the lives of Maiguru and Nyasha and even the effect it has on Lucia, she finds herself becoming increasingly judgmental of her mother whose lack of education has ensured that she remains oppressed. This is because illiteracy and lack of training virtually ensure servitude for a woman in postcolonial times. The squalid conditions under which Tambu’s mother lives testify to this. Her mother’s despondency and wretchedness inspire Tambu to be more successful in her educational pursuits, so that she can become a successful educated woman like Maiguru, rather than a failure like her mother.

However, as the novel progresses, Tambu comes to realize that education is not always the key to liberation. Maiguru has the same level of education as Babamukuru and is the most educated woman in Tambu’s inner-circle, but is not credited with her contributions to the family and the reader is not made aware of any additional achievements outside the domestic sphere.
The money she earns is not hers to use, but goes towards supporting Babamukuru’s family who are under the impression that he is their sole benefactor. Similarly, Nyasha’s level of education places her in constant and sometimes violent conflict with her father who reacts to her assertiveness by striving to remove her agency. Nyasha was raised in England and exposed to changing value systems which gave women greater civil liberties and this complicates her adjustments back into Rhodesian society with its pervasive and dominant structure of patriarchy.

The discussion of Nervous Conditions focuses primarily on the dual female protagonists and how Dangarembga’s narrative uses the characters of Tambu and Nyasha to highlight the complexity in, and potential of, the African female subject. The girls in the novels struggle to understand, create, and accept their identities and the forces that shape their views. I argue that, taken together, the narratives of Tambu and Nyasha represent both complementary and contradictory aspects of African women's experience and psychology during UDI - the period of pre-independent Zimbabwe. Separately, the girls epitomize the "nervous conditions" of the novel's title: they are the "split subject" characterized by Frantz Fanon in The Wretched of the Earth, alienated from themselves and from their traditional culture by the oppressions of their own culture as it intersects and collides with colonial patriarchy.

**Discussions**

The study’s aims sought to examine how the narrative in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* with respect to the use of space mirrors the entanglement of hierarchies of class, race and gender oppression in colonial society in Zimbabwe in particular and Africa in general. The effect of colonialism on the lives of the African women in Nervous Conditions was studied. Secondly, it also examined current language policies in East African countries discourage liberation of African black women’s minds. These aims proved relevant as they aided
me in understanding how colonialism is intricately linked to human rights and ultimately how that affects the lives of the African women. Colonialism led to infantilisation of African women and this with the help of patriarchy and religion created suitable conditions for the ill-treatment of the African woman.

As discussed in the previous chapters of this study, the British Empire colonized Zimbabwe in the late nineteenth century. The purpose behind colonization was economic and political advancement. The justification given for colonization was the notorious claim that natives needed to be released from barbarism. Britain believed that it carried the burden of civilizing the barbarous Zimbabwe. Britain planned to obliterate the indigenous cultures and impose a new identity, which was both appreciative and imitative of the West, on natives. Likewise, the natives were brainwashed into thinking that the Western colonizers were genuinely motivated by wanting to civilize them.

The story recounted in *Nervous Conditions* takes place in Southern Rhodesia, a former settler colony of the British Empire. Tambudzai, the female protagonist of *Nervous Conditions*, narrates the story of a group of females who are doubly colonized in Rhodesia. Tambudzai, Nyasha, Maiguru, Ma’Shingayi, and Lucia represent the wretched women of Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, who suffered both racial and gender discrimination. They have no right to receive an education, because they are inferior to men. Moreover, they must work at home and in the fields, so there is no time for them to attend school. They are also victims of racial inequality, which is practiced by the white colonizers who consider them as inferior black creatures. Consequently, not even education can release those who manage to receive it from their misery. That is why Maiguru is entrapped in spite of getting a master degree, and Tambudzai is treated as an “other” in Sacred Heart College.
Consequently, in *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga provides a perceptive study not only of sexual oppression but also of the complexities of colonization, culture and class. In fact, she depicts African women’s agonies brought about by a myriad of oppressions. In *Nervous Conditions*, all the female characters, with the exception of Tete (Babamukuru’s and Jeremiah’s sister) have had their poignant experiences brought out into the open by one of them, Tambu. The latter has managed to break out of the cycle of silence by putting everything on paper. Although Maiguru was able to write about her experiences, her duty to her husband would have prevented her from doing so. Her loyalty to her husband outweighs her frustrations with the clan. Consequently, to write about her husband and his over-bearingness would be tantamount to betrayal. Maiguru’s determination to remain a perfect wife makes her avoid confrontations and violations of cultural practices. When she is invited to contribute to the agitation that is brewing up in the kitchen, she excuses herself. Even when the *dare* (meeting of the elders) invites her to participate in the deliberations, she still declines. This humility can be contrasted with Lucia’s bravado at the *dare*. Lucia thinks it best to grab the bull by its horns and face the consequences.

The oppressive nature of traditional African culture on womenfolk indicates that it is utilized as an excuse to explain away violations of women’s rights. Surprisingly, only those aspects of culture which serve to oppress women are considered as immutably cultural. Traditions need to undergo alteration to suit the changed economic, political and social circumstances. In *Nervous Conditions*, one noticeable break from male supremacy is the constitution of the *dare*. Tete is a woman who sits in the *dare* by virtue of being a blood relative of the patriarch. Even her duties at the Sigauke homestead are minimal, compared to those of other women. At her in-laws, according to her culture, she is “voiceless and rightless” as she is married. Many women are still trapped in traditional roles of domestic servitude. Even those who
work outside their homes are still responsible for the domestic work of the household and thus bear a double burden of work, which is an obstacle to social and political participation.

Partnership in household responsibilities will result in women’s increasing involvement in society and greater decision-making power in the home. Maiguru, as alluded to above, teaches at the mission school and still finds time for domestic work, after hours. Even when visiting the rural homestead, she has no qualms about cooking for the menfolk - buying the food with money out of her own pocket. Compared with Jeremiah, who is indolent, she serves as a provider for her in-laws. Her escape from material wants is transformed into servitude to her extended family of in-laws. It is a bondage she cannot easily escape, even when she dares to walk out on her husband. The unequal power relations in the marriage compel one to consider marriage as an oppressive institution. The colonial penetration of the African continent was colossal and arbitrary. It was the direct and economic domination of the African continent to establish long lasting political, social and economic structures, as well as ideological or cultural institutions that continue to have detrimental effects on the colonized subjects. Colonization was deeply rooted in an arrogant European ethnocentrism which regarded Africans as being culturally and therefore intellectually inferior. In this case, the inferior race remains numerically and culturally prevalent in its own geographical location, while the colonizer justifies its control through denigration of their culture and through the ideological insistence that the colonized are an inferior race. Colonization was maintained through physical, emotional and spiritual violence. This spurious identification relegated the history of African people in which appreciation of the historical and cultural facts was bound to be warped.
In this thesis, I have reflected deeply on colonial histories as they relate to the present. The centrality of African history and the colonial experience manifest itself in the changes of indigenous culture, values and traditions. Therefore, understanding the past helps us to know what was lost in translation during the colonial encounter. Yet we continue to participate consciously and unconsciously into the very systems that continuously negate our cultures, history, values and beliefs central to learning. Thus, colonialism is visible in the ways in which we continue to normalize and embrace, without questioning ideological forms of domination and of certain types of imaginary stories, assumptions, and structures of subjection, ‘them’ and ‘us.’

Taking into account the context of the power of educational institutions to colonize, it is possible to understand that the very system that has shaped us through the process of domination is a space, where, as a collective need to question the status quo.

From a pedagogical perspective, it requires the collective to re-examine the internalized hegemonic values perpetuated by the violent education system. In this light, education is a space to reclaim what was lost in the translation. It is our responsibility as a collective to make efforts to reclaim that which was lost, distorted, fragmented ruptured, falsified, and erased. Thus, education as an approach to stimulate change of ideological hegemony has important formative influences. Therefore we have to bring to light the importance of education as a space to enact change and speak on our own behalf.

Culturally and politically, however, the legacy of European dominance remains evident in the national borders, political infrastructures, educational systems, national languages,
economies, and trade networks of each nation. Ultimately, decolonization produces moments of inspiration and promise to transform African educational structures to bring about positive change in our African education system. Decolonization involves memory and associated processes of storytelling enshrined as privileged ways of knowing. It is a way of building the future by interrogating the past to generate a new representation of the past to a new history which could accommodate a multiplicity of experiences of our history.

More importantly, we can introduce discussions that speak through lived experiences like how Tsitsi Dangarembga did with Nervous Conditions and how we can re-learn our culture. Education is a space of contestation where as a collective we can deal with the destructive component of our spiritual, mental and physical damage. We have to carry on our shoulders the honorable responsibility of decolonizing spaces of education, in the process re-writing our histories, and creating new ways of reclaiming our cultures. It is in these spaces that we can re-write our stories and transmit knowledge from one generation to the other, and reflect back to what was working for us before the colonial encounter. Above all, intellectuals need to collectively work together to achieve this destiny. In African societies, male supremacy is accepted unquestioningly since tradition and cultural practices reinforce male power. A woman must accept her husband’s control, and rejection is interpreted as a deviation from her expected role. As women, we share experiences of sexism and domestic responsibility and while we may differ in ethnic origin, class or culture, what unites most of us is our consciousness that it is other people who set the agenda. Thus, what serves to link powerless social groups are their experiences of ‘otherness’ and exclusion from the sites of power and meaning making.

My contribution to the study and analysis of Dangarembga’s (1988) novel, Nervous
Conditions, which is different from the literature surveyed in this thesis is that I am an insider. Thus, when analyzing Dangarembga’s novel, the debate about outsider-insider comes into consideration. I am an insider because I am Shona like Tsitsi Dangarembga the author, and the women and Babamukuru whose experiences are highlighted. I must therefore recognize that textual analysis and in some cases, interpretation of the literature remains incomplete, as there are numerous possible ways of reading and understanding the text depending on the researcher’s social and political positions. For example, when reading the narrative in Nervous Condition and academic sources about the novel and about gender violence in African society, I was careful of my positionality under the Outsider-Insider debate because neutrality alone is not sufficient in the research process (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). We are all positioned in one form or another with respect to the social, political and economic context.

Furthermore, important aspects of identity, for example, our gender, our race, our lived experience or experience with patriarchy, violence, our age, and our class are markers of relational positions rather than essential qualities (Banks, 1993). As a Shona woman myself, I share ethnic background with the five Zimbabwean women: Maiguru, Mainini, Nyasha, Lucia and Tambudzai, and also Babamukuru. I can sympathize and relate to their perspectives much better than some of the authors of the literature discussed in this thesis. It is also possible I may share class background with some of the women. Nevertheless, shared ethnic or gender marginality may not be sufficient to ensure rapport between the researcher and the researched. However, I believe that my political awareness and commitment towards the achievement of
equity and social justice within the Shona and African community makes me an outsider within and therefore with some responsibility as a community member. As an African woman, I am interested in the lives and equitable treatment of women.

For this thesis, the following observations stand out in Nervous Condition. Colonial education initially formulated to serve the colonial bureaucracy was gendered (Nakanyike-Musisi, 2007). Post-colonial conditions of intellectuals have been masculinized in fiction and also in reality. The categorical tone of the first person by narrator-Tambudzai-signals a critical self-examination; quite conscious about rejecting the guilt associated with ‘unnatural’ sisterhood, inhuman lack of feeling about her brother’s death. In declining indifference as a cause, Tambudzai demonstrates her agency and deliberation in her refusal to mourn her brother’s untimely death. Tambudzai, 13 years old in 1968 when the brother dies, defies the family unit to challenge the rhetoric of harmonious domesticity by identifying her brother as an antagonist and rival over her desire to attend school, which is why Tambu was neither sorry nor sad when the brother died (Dangarembga, 1988, p.1). Tambu’s father is adamant in his refusal to invest in his daughter’s education because he claims she will have no use for it in her domestic future. Even if she does, the benefits will go to her husband’s family, not hers. This is due to the inequality in status. The father admonishes Tambudzai thus, “can you cook books and feed them to your husband”. Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean, grow vegetables” (Dangarembga, 1988, p.15).

Throughout the narrative the message is that being a woman carries different burdens according to Tambu’s mother, requiring a learning process that involves patience and sacrifice
without the same dividends-money, status and power reserved for a son, an educated husband, father and provider. This is in line with the division of labour in Shona traditions. Tambu desired to gain an education. But submitting to an alien system-of education also meant a transformation of traditional cultures and a threat to existing structures of power within the family, clan and community. By doing so, Tambudzai was “selling out”. In reality she was determined to transform the homestead. Another themes that emerges revolves around women’s role in the private sphere where they are expected to stay in smoky kitchens that cause watery eyes and wood fires that either burn ferociously or indifferently, undertaking long trips to the river far away from home, carrying water drums which press into their spines.

There is also rebellion by Nyasha, Tambudzai’s cousin. It is the core of the women around Tambudzai who influence her decision and help her identity what she finally regards as the main threat, not education, but patriarchy itself (Dangarembga, 1988, p.164). This was the case because the missionary education taught domesticity (Nakanyike-Musisi, 2007). Therefore, “modernity” was considered a threat to traditional symbols of power in society—Shona—where gender inequality rooted in ‘traditional’, legal and social structures favored men. In such an environment, women were expected to serve their husbands and their families without asking any questions. Tambudzai’s decision to leave for the mission and Babamukuru’s ensuing ‘nervous condition’ should be read in that context. Tambudzai offers optimism to Nyasha’s pessimism and the need to guard against alienation. For example, Tambudzai is told not to forget her identity in the mission school. To which Tambudzai responds “if I forgot then, my cousin, my mother, my friends, I might as well forget myself. And that of course could not happen. So
why was everybody so particular to urge me to remember”? (Dangarembga, 1988, p.188).

Throughout the narrative, Tambudzai’s assertion of agency and struggle come through. Nyasha is also disgusted with the status of women in the family. However, Tambudzai senses their strength in their particular methods of resistance and learning from each one while forming her own distinct identity, a reflection of her growing consciousness. The Shona patriarchal system of domination—for Shona women is a parallel system of repressive authority to the colonial English—within their terms. The narrative highlights operations of hysterical resistance towards domination.

The findings in this thesis support, but also, refute some of the literature on the lived experience of African women. Contrary to some of the claims in the literature, African women have agency. More importantly, in many African communities, gender oppression is not the leading marker of oppression, but rather age (Oyeronke, 1997). Therefore, this study problematizes some of the writings on how women in Africa are represented and interpreted in Western scholarship. Until recently and that is apparent in some of the literature on Dangarembga’s (1988) Nervous Condition, African historiography was written as if women never made any meaningful contributions worthy of study. Oyewumi Oyeronke (1997) links such marginalization and confusion regarding women to Eurocentric radicalization of knowledge. In the process, local interpretations and African experiences were sidelined in favour of Western forms of interpretation and that may be the case with some of the literature on Nervous Condition. Due to such social construction of Africa, women’s true contributions to African historiography were minimized and limited. This is however, changing with more gender sensitive interpretations of African historiography, which also pays attention to oral
narrative methodology and African indigenous knowledge (Nkiru Nzegwu, 2004; Wane, 2005). I associate myself with Oyeronke’s critique of the modes of conceptualization/theorization of gender in Africa. Critics of Western interpretations recognize that issues of gender and even sexuality be approached from a historical point of view that recognizes African women’s lives as fertile sites of self-expression and cultural creativity. Oyeronke (1997) demonstrates that Yoruba society was non-gendered and kinships roles and categories are not gender differentiated. Rather in Yoruba society, the organizing principle is relative to age and not gender. To some extent that is also the case among the Shona of Zimbabwe where the youth irrespective of class or gender respect their seniors in terms of age. I could sense some of that in Babamukuru’s anxieties when he felt that he was not being given the proper respect in accordance with Shona age linked communal standards. The literature by western scholars simply looked at the narrative through gender lenses, which may not necessarily be the case. Oyeronke demonstrates that social relations in Yoruba and other African traditions were dynamic and fluid and not fixed as is the case with European interpretations.

Likewise, Amadiume (1987) challenges western feminist’s representation of gender in African society. She argues that in pre-colonial society, sex and gender did not necessarily coincide. It was economic changes during colonial times which undermined women's status and reduced their political roles. In other words, Eurocentric representation of gender in African society ‘invented’ labels to explain social, roles, statues, processes and the logic of various practices in Eurocentric lens (Amadiume, 1987; Sear, 2003). Such misrepresentation and
confusion about gender and women roles is rooted in failure to pay attention to historicity. The criticism reveals the need to reconsider western epistemology regarding gender in African historiography. Accordingly, Oyeronke (1997) cautions that interpreting African realities based on Western claims often produce distortions in social relations and ultimately the marginalization of women.

Oyeronke (1997), Amaduime (1987), Nakanyike-Musisi (2007), Nkiru-Nzegwu (2004) and other African feminist historians illustrate that historicity involves confronting historical events, historicizing interpretations and using appropriate yardstick. It emerges that the history of gender constructions in Africa is deeply intertwined with the history of other social, cultural, economic and political realities rooted in colonialism. This is the case throughout the narrative in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s Nervous Condition. As noted elsewhere in this study, colonialism-imposed transformations that had a negative impact on women because those changes or ‘inventions’ altered existing traditions that had been egalitarian, inclusive and respectful towards women. Thus, the changes ushered in by colonialism affected the identity and roles of women since the upset the balance of power in pre-existing relationships. That changed under Western epistemology as “women are defined in opposition to men” (Nkiru-Nzegwu, 2004, p.560).

Therefore, this study suggests that when examining African, women and history, it is important to historicize events and changes. Colonialism and its Eurocentric bias in knowledge production marginalized the contributions of women in African historiography. Indeed, such
changes were so substantial that women voices were silenced as colonialists ‘invented’ traditions that favored men over women and interpreted African relations from Eurocentric lens. To correct such misrepresentation, Oyeronke’s (1997) position that in undertaking the historiography of Africa we should reflect specific cultural and local contexts, not imported colonial ideas and concepts about African society is educative. In short, there is need to privilege African indigenous knowledge (Wane, 2005).

One of the contributions from Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* about the social, political and economic conditions in Africa is that they have been gendered, and therefore perpetuate the ideology of public sphere for men and private sphere for women. This study has argued that in many parts of Africa, these policies and ideology were introduced and imposed by colonialism. Those changes have worked to perpetuate the marginalization and oppression of women in post-colonial Africa by misrepresenting their identity as captured by the narrative about the main characters in the text.

*Nervous Condition* as the title signifies upon the absent bodies in Fanon’s (1968) *Wretched of the Earth* analysis of colonized natives. The epigraph –*Nervous Condition of the Native*-quotes a line from Sartre’s’ preface to the Wretched of the Earth “the status of the native is a nervous condition” (1968, p.17). The novel raises several questions about colonial, gender and education in Zimbabwe. It also highlights the consequences of Shona familial ideology on the five women: Maiguru, Mainini, Nyasha, Lucia and Tambudzai. In addition, the narrative
demonstrates that the colonial condition associated with the specific history of colonialism in Zimbabwe (I am Shona from Zimbabwe) became the ambivalently privilege condition associated with the male subject. Accordingly, the neuroses of five female subjects are not just devalued, but unrecognized, either because pathological behaviours are seen as a natural condition of their unstable psyches or because they are refused agency and critical consciousness necessary to react to their psycho-social environment which is prevalent throughout the narrative in *Nervous Conditions*.

*Conditions*. The feminization of the geographical territory in colonial and post-colonial discourse then provides a space upon, which the neurosis of the male subject, Babamukuru, plays itself out, often having concrete effects on the material conditions of the unindividuated women. It is that context that Babamukuru’s behavior captures Sartre’s observation of “Nervous condition of the Native”. Babamukuru, which literally translates as elder father in accordance with African family traditions where we refer to our father’s brothers as fathers too and not uncle. Similarly, our mother’s sisters are called mothers and not aunt as is the case in Western society. Therefore, an alternative title for *Nervous Condition* would be: The consequences of Shona familial ideology on women.

This study has demonstrated that the narrative in *Nervous Condition* brings to the fore issues of hybridity and how they come into effect to marginalize women. Many African women are caught between modernity and tradition, to the extent where women like Tambu are criticized if they seek Western education as trying to be westernized, and on the other hand they are oppressed by certain traditions. The tension between modern and tradition accounts for the negative representation of women and oppression and importantly neurosis and anxieties.
captured by the narrative in the text. In addition, the thesis has shown that in the process, the neuroses of female subjects-the five women—are not just devalued but unrecognized, either because pathological behaviours are seen as a natural condition of their unstable psyches or because they are refused agency and critical consciousness necessary to react to their psycho-social environment which is prevalent throughout the narrative in *Nervous Conditions*.

In this thesis, I have also documented that matters related to identity in post-colonial Africa are sometimes portrayed as settled and homogenous, when in reality they are contested based on gender, class, race and sexuality in colonial societies, as illustrated in the subordination of women. Dangarembga’s (1988) *Nervous Conditions* demonstrates that the social, political and economic conditions in Africa are gendered, and perpetuate the ideology of public sphere for men and private sphere for women. The study has argued that it was such patriarchal organization of space rooted in an ideology that has worked to perpetuate the marginalization and oppression of women in post-colonial Africa by misrepresenting their identity as captured by the narratives about the main characters in the texts reviewed here. The thesis has demonstrated that issues of hybridity came into effect to marginalize women. African women are caught between the tensions rooted in tradition and modernity, to the extent where women are criticized if they seek Western education as trying to be westernized and on the other hand, if the women try to respect and value their cultural teachings, they are oppressed.
The thesis has shown that the tension between modern and tradition (hybridity) accounts for the negative representation of women and oppression captured in Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*. The narrative in Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* reveals that in post-colonial Africa, issues of identity, sexuality and difference are still viewed in traditional lenses, which works to further marginalize and oppress women, long after most African countries achieved independence. That is unfortunate because many African societies have redeeming egalitarian values where age rather than gender or class defines one’s standing in society.

The narrative in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* reveals the lasting impact of the colonial state and its capacity to transform for the worst social relations in colonized countries such as Zimbabwe (Curtin, Feierman, Thompson, & Vansina, 1995). This study demonstrates that because social institutions and the broader economy and society were closely interlinked, the destructive influences of colonialism such as the “invention of traditions” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1984; Ranger, 1984) remain in Zimbabwean society. Gender oppression highlighted in the narratives in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* is testament to the lingering and gendered effects of colonial policy. Today in many independent African countries, politicians and policy makers invoke African cultural traditions, most of which as Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1984), illustrate were actually “colonial inventions” to justify the unequal and oppressive treatment of African girls and women.

Therefore, this study unravels some of the ongoing contestations by scholars such as Achille Mbembe (2001) and Crawford Young (2004) as whether post independent colonial states became post-colonial states simply by becoming attaining political independence from colonial rule or African leaders merely embraced the actions of the colonial state (Young, 2004). Young
(2004) argues that African independent states eventually became post-colonial because they imported practices and mentalities of the African colonial state into the post-colonial successor (p.24). For Young the incorporation of many defining attributes of the colonial state in post-independence successor states for decades validates the post-colonial characterization by scholars like Achille Mbembe. Granted, Young (2004) recognizes that beyond the post-colonial state most African states ceased to resemble the colonial state due to the divergent forms taken and new historical experiences (p.48). Nevertheless, colonial legacies survive and are apparent in the continent, as some countries (if not all) did not fully erase the colonial state nor post-colonial experiences (p.49). I concur because as argued in this study and illustrated by Nervous Conditions, there are more similarities or continuities than differences or discontinuities in the treatment of Zimbabwe girls and women during the colonial and post-independence era.

Consequently, this study reveals that the much-anticipated colonial moment that would promote equity and social justice for all irrespective of age, class, disability or gender is yet to take shape as African women continue to wait and advocate for equality and fairness long after independence from colonial rule. It may sound harsh but for women and girls in Africa, they are yet to experience the postcolonial state since their treatment under the post-colonial state is not much different from the colonial state it replaced. Thus, at a broader level, the narrative in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s Nervous Conditions, complicates and challenges the anti-colonial narratives including anti-colonial theoretical perspectives with respect to the gender question in Africa. That is the case because I have argued and demonstrated in this study that the changes introduced in Zimbabwean society during colonialism in the social, economic and family institutions are responsible for the marginalized and wretched conditions women and girls endure today.
The thesis has demonstrated that for women and girls the colonial era status quo remains in place even in the independence era because post independent African leaders have continued to implement, reinforce and rely on the oppressive roots rooted in the colonial “invention of traditions” to justify the unequal and oppressive treatment of girls and women in African society. The thesis has shown that such “invention of traditions” were so entrenched that gender roles in once egalitarian African societies where age not gender was the yardstick that governed social relations in African communities was inverted upside down against women. In many African societies, young people irrespective of age, gender or class respected their elderly of all gender.

Colonialism undermined such egalitarian African values and instead introduced patriarchy, which undermined egalitarian gender relations which ushered in gender oppression through customary law, what has become one of its most enduring ‘inventions of traditions”, which was later anchored in legal statues and national laws as part of African legal regimes and continues to be relied on and interpreted by courts of law. This study’s core argument and contribution is that colonialism and colonial era customary laws, which are ‘invention of traditions” continue to dominate and govern the social, economic and political arenas and to undermine gender equality and social justice for all in many African countries, and not just Zimbabwe. This was not the case prior to colonial contact, as African women were not passive actors in society, but rather respected members of society with voice and agency in their communities. In many pre-colonial era communities in Africa, women were independent and undertook their activities and managed their households without interference from their husbands. However, colonialism problematized such values through the introduction of
introducing hierarchical roles. That is how the balance between men and women was upset in the decision-making process and persists to this day.

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