

# Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions: A Quest into the Time-honoured Mindsets About Feminineness Scuffle in the Context of Colonization and African Patriarchy

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to cast light on the ideology expressed within the lines of Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous conditions. The author in her trial to reflect upon the Zimbabwean community tends implicitly to invite the reader to consider the social status and by virtue the social sufferings accorded to the African woman in a society that decides to minimize the womanist presence to a mere asset exploited by men. Some of Dangarembga's concerns in the novel touch upon gender, the African social dogmata, the roles stipulated to women by their macho counterparts and the taken for granted responsibilities of men, and their identities and personal ambitions apart from their stated roles. The paper launches a claim on gender and its upshot on marginalizing women and strengthening the knot of racism. Then, it tackles gender roles and the respective sociocultural dictations of rights and duties of African men and women. Under the same heading, gender identities and the internal and external conflicts of the characters throughout the way of self-realization are attached due heed. The paper tends to confer a virtual view to the intentions of the novel in making explicit the harrowing effect of the chauvinist community on squashing the feminine identity. Considerations of the colonial influence on the original African identity are also thought through. The paper aspires in the meantime to consider interdisciplinary issues by incorporating the field and theoretical views vis-à-vis the points mulled over in the work.

**Keywords:** African Culture, Ideology, Gender, Identity, Social Role, Feminism

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## 1. Introduction

Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* is based on portraying the very tissue of the African community between 1960's up till 1970's; amid the social problems being scrutinized in the novel are prejudice and inequity in a presupposed macho culture. The context of the novel is a simple small Zimbabwean village; however, the intentions of the story transcends the ink and paper context to the larger African and universal milieu. It is an acknowledged fact that matters of discrimination and undervaluing the other are not of late claims; unfair treatment of women had shaped literary debates since early times. Arndt [4]; for instance, discusses the sufferings encountered by African women in Nigeria and the paradoxes of women's unconscious awareness about

these realities. She exemplified these feminine internal inclinations by the patriarchal fears from recalcitrant, unruly and insubordinate women. This fact uncovers the hidden truth of women's potentials and aptitudes; women who are ready at any time to shake men's plinths. The novel pictures the opaque facets of patriarchal rule under which women become regarded as the secondary gender group whose oppressions do good to male groups. By virtue of their dominance, men are naturally the commanders and appropriators of women's life; it is for men to dictate both gender roles. The result of this state of affairs is the arousal of conflicts between both sides and the women's trials to find a private spot for themselves away from this subservience. Indeed, they are rummaging their mental liberation.

Reading the novel, one can feel that it is a lived through

experience. Dangarembga does not only reflect upon the characters' fictional context, but makes it clear to the reader that she was fully absorbed by the scenes of the story. Relying on her pertinent reflections upon her community, she: "endows its women characters with the gift and spirit to resist the impulse of men in her society, Zimbabwe, to dominate and treat women as second class citizens" [24]:309. The title, *Nervous Conditions*, owes its genesis to Frantz Fanon's preamble in the *Wretched of the Earth* [14] in which he affirms that the status of native people is much more a nervous condition preserved and retained by the colonizer. The title of the novel stands as a shortcut to what yet to come in the novel. Though Dangarembga seems aware of the colonial ideology presence and its influence on the indigenous inhabitants, she chooses another layer of confrontation, the one that fuels gender struggle and characterizes the Zimbabwean society not totally to the detriment of mentioning the effect of external interventionism.

Away from colonial opposition, the novel defies the unacknowledged borders of women's and men's roles that are brought about by their flaws and struggles.

## 2. Nervous Conditions and Its Portrayal of Feminism, Femininity and Femaleness

The content of the novel does not only hint to gender skirmishes throughout the way of challenging the current set of circumstances in view of change, but it also appeals to sociological as well as biological considerations fueling this struggle. The overall theme of the work makes it clear cut that it is a multi-edged scuffle; women characters are torn by the endless social manacles at one fell swoop are full of energy and aware of these shackles. Only secondary to women's torments that comes men's anguish situation expressed in the characters of *Jeremiah* and *Takesure* who paradoxically represent the fittest gender but fail to enjoy a full control over their vulnerable state. This example typifies the conflict-ridden helpless ground of the society in question and the side effects when the plot reaches its climax. Now returning to the disparities between the different terms related to women and their rejoinders for an altered status, it can be argued that the feminist connotation emerges in reaction to feminine and female implications coupled with respective cultural prejudices.

From a sociological perspective, identity theories stand as a replication of the previous gender role assumptions. The premise here is that people are socialized with an array of meanings that later on will be used as indices to guide their comportment when the aspects of learnt identity are initiated. Kimmel and Aronson [17] maintain that the concept of femininity has rushed forward the concept of masculinity, and that the meanings of femininity exhibit fluctuating elucidations relatively to the differing contexts. In the African context, Hussein observes that the current state of women as

being entrapped is mapped out in the social system of African beliefs. On the subject, he proffers the following remark:

Women have been victims of gender ideology [.....] a systematic set of cultural beliefs through which a society constructs and wields its gender relations and practices. Gender ideology contains legends, narratives and myths about what it means to be a man or a woman and suggests how each should behave in the society. [16]:59

These social constructs provide a justification for the rights, duties and compensations for its individuals. Every society invents and reinforces this array of systems to supervise and organize the feminine and masculine comportments.

The women characters in Dangarembga's work are firmly being discriminated against by factors of ethnicity, region and nationality. This further invites the reader to scrutinize the way Dangarembga describes the daily chores of her female characters simply because they need to toe the line with the *Sigauke* tribe's expectations that are deeply rooted before colonialism. So, partly speaking feminine considerations are weaved within the fabric of the novel solely to provide evidence for women's latent antiphons. *Tambudzai*, being the protagonist of the novel and the narrator of its events, describes an instance of the hardships encountered by her and her female counterparts during a Christmas gathering and all the lethargy accompanied with. The scene is framed as follow:

I had a special task. I had to carry the water-dish in which people would wash their hands. I did not like doing this because you had to be very sure of the relative status of everybody present or else it was easy to make mistakes, especially when there were so many people [.....] I knelt and rose and knelt and rose in front of my male relatives in descending order of seniority, and lastly in front of my grandmothers and aunts. [9]:40

The passage pictures one of the routine tasks that *Sigauke* women undergo and that are naturally expected due to their gender. Elsewhere in the novel *Tambu*, the spokesperson of the narrative, elucidates one of the unuttered social biases against feminine freedom. In *Tambu's* community women are not allowed to pay a visit to certain spaces that are normally and culturally speaking reserved for men. *Tambu's* uncle *Babamukuru*, who stands for a solid representation of the successful side of masculinity, honoured the family with his inevitable presence during the Christmas gathering. For this occasion, he is supposed to be welcomed at the airport; however, only men are predicted for this official airport welcome. *Tambudzai* makes explicit her resentment for not being able to owe a visit to the airport only because she is a girl. Hence, this passage from the novel uttered out the feelings of antipathy contained within *Tambu's* spirit for had she been able to welcome her uncle she would be allowed to reach her educational intentions.

Yes, I was very irritable on that occasion, the occasion of my uncle's return, which should have been for me, as it

was for everyone else, a sublime occasion. It was spoiled for me because I could not help thinking that had I been allowed, had I been able to welcome Babamukuru at the airport, I would have been there too, with Nhamo and my cousins.

[9]:38

Brooks et. al [7] suggest that gender regulation is one tool that is used by societies to set clear conventional gender norms and limits. One of the constraints of women in the novel is their femaleness; their being females dictates certain social measures that oblige them to abide to. Moreover, maleness and femaleness are not totally biological off products, but are rather cherished and construed in different ways in lines with the needs of given periods. Femaleness is attached much more to the biological predispositions of women; that is:

In matrilineal societies femaleness was interpreted as the social paradigm of all productivity, as the main active principle in the production of life. All women are defined as mothers [.....] Under capitalist conditions all women are socially defined as housewives (all men as breadwinners), and motherhood has become part and parcel of this housewife syndrome.

[21]:53

Unfortunately, the novel portrays how women are victimized by their femaleness. *Tambu* and her cousin *Nyasha* were invited to a Christmas party, then after the party *Nyasha* spent some time with her boy colleagues. Since she was reared within an English culture she considers it a conventional deed, but her father *Babamukuru* considers this a challenge to his male authority. *Tambu* recounts this incident from her own perspective:

I feeling bad for her and thinking how dreadfully familiar that scene had been, with Babamukuru condemning Nyasha to whoredom, making her a victim of her femaleness, just as I had felt victimized at home in the days when Nhamo went to school [.....]. The victimisation, I saw, was universal [.....]. But what I didn't like was the way all the conflicts came back to this question of femaleness. Femaleness as opposed and inferior to maleness.

[9]:115-116

Questions of femininity and femaleness are recurrent issues in *Nervous Conditions* but the initial author's intentions are aligned with the feminist claims, and the conflict being reflected in the characters person insures this view. The feminist tradition is a long established paradigm that meets much more political inclinations. The period of the sixties witnessed a new type of struggle that transcends the ink and paper tradition; feminist criticism denotes an internal political struggle against sexism and patriarchal dominance. Eagleton states that what begins as a personal concern grows to be a universal concern, "*the personal is political*" [12]:159. This movement opens up a free response space where the psychological repercussions of female socialization are brought into question. Conceived differently by scholars, feminist movements aim at jettisoning male

dominance and patriarchal imperatives; "*feminist movements have aimed primarily to end men's systematic domination of women and eliminate the inequality between the two genders*" [20]:79.

This worldwide feminist declaration is not linked to one specific context; it rather grapples women's torments that are caused by men on a universal scale. Initially, feminist groups intend to question patriarchy on different scales. Politically, they were in a quest to interpret feelings of subordination, and they wind up transmuted feelings of revolution into political activity. On a theoretical scale, feminism aspires to question reasons of women's subordination to men and the various shapes it takes [6]. Patriarchy; then, appears as a technical term used by feminist writers to describe women's oppressions in a predominantly masculine context. In the African continent particularly, the emergence of feminist tradition was the result of a multiplicity of factors that are internally engendered and externally introduced [25]. Both the indigenous sociocultural impositions and foreign pressures like colonialism and religious activities helped in energizing women's thought in a step to reflect upon their status. Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* seems to follow the path of radical feminism in its portrayal of the oppressed conditions of the female fictional characters. Due to patriarchal considerations, the women in the novel are classified as the other gender together they try to surmount their common male enemy. They are indeed victims of an uneasy constant state of physical and moral stress that in the end brings them to find ways to flee this deteriorating position. The time setting of the novel coincides with the first seed of radical feminist allegations; the period from 1960's to 1970's witnessed structured reactions to the lack of gender explorations within written discourses that were built upon liberal feminist deficiencies. It concerns itself with addressing the patriarchal monopoly of the native cultures; and focuses on the optimal upshots of gender inequality and macho social dominance [11]. From the aforementioned claims, it can be said that Dangarembga's work falls within the radical feminist boundaries; by setting the novel recounted from a feminine perspective she means the insertion of some changing ideology vis-à-vis the African woman condition. She is in line with Mutua that:

Radical feminism is a movement intent on social change of rather revolutionary proportion. It questions why women must adopt certain roles based on their biology, just as it questions why men adopt certain other roles based on theirs. It attempts to draw lines between biologically determined behaviour and culturally determined behaviour in order to free both men and women as much as possible from their previous narrow gender roles.

[23]:73

The content of the quotation stands as a justification for Dangarembga's claims for writing *Nervous Conditions*; indeed, it summarizes the whole thematic border of the novel. With the author's notable intelligence and her training in medicine and psychology, the novel offers an encyclopedic

image of the characters' inner and outer worlds that concertizes the feminist brass tacks [28]. The novel is full of instances that the author uses to acquaint the reader with the perfect image of the African community. For instance, and in line with the feminist orientations, the following passage reflects the normal state of play expected by *Sigauke* men when a girl submits to the normal course of matters:

Beside Nyasha I was a paragon of feminine decorum, principally because I hardly ever talked unless spoken to, and then only to answer with the utmost respect whatever question had been asked [.....]. As a result of all these things that I did not think or do, Babamukuru thought I was the sort of young woman a daughter ought to be and lost no opportunity to impress this point of view upon Nyasha.  
[9]:155

Hence, feminist calls stand against the shortcutting of the female identity simply due to indigenous structures that do not accept modification. At the outset of the novel, *Tambudzai* corresponds to the stereotype obedient African woman that in the course of events her educational career alters her deferential character. But also, her revolutionary cousin *Nyasha* resembles the hybrid identity that is torn between the dream of change and the colonial influence.

### 3. The Journey Towards Bringing to Fruition a Culture of Equality

The implicit philosophy intertwined within the lines of the novel displays the different devices that are used by the macho society in order to achieve a natural, ordered and unquestionable social structure. Amid these instruments are unjust moral integrity, asymmetrical gender status that is forcibly dictated and which is incontestable by the weaker feminine element, indubitable religious orientations that are imposed by virtue of social status and a hybrid culture that loses its sense of belonging.

#### 3.1. Traumatized Victims in a Cultural Turmoil

It is inevitable that for any social grouping to persist and actually flourish it must equip its members with a sense of belonging, and self-estimation as a result of fluid concomitance. Eliot [13] signals the interdependency between the culture of the society and the culture of the individual, that is an individual's self-worth is derived from the cultural assumptions of the society to which he belongs and vice versa. In actual fact, social and moral considerations either help individuals to be confident in realizing themselves or compress their identity and their status quo to remain the same. In DeWalt's terms: "*people strive to attain culturally valued occupations, roles, titles, group identifications, and achievements, and in so doing secure their place as valuable contributors to a meaningful, immortality procuring, cultural worldview*" [10]:289. Hence, the cultural ideology is critical in introducing individuals to aspects of purposeful change. Conversely, the fictional characters in *Nervous Conditions* do

not all enjoy an equal access to progress or self-actualization. At the same time, they are all experiencing a kind of moral breakdown. Men; for instance, even if they are considered the socially privileged category are uncertain, and women who are the real casualties of this shaky community are meant to bear these tortures. Partly speaking, this hybrid biased culture attaches no considerations to the feminine existence. Throughout the whole story, women are considered as men's assets whose responsibility entails serving men, accomplishing chores work and in some cases working outside the household without getting any benefit in return. The Rhodesian community accords no import to women and so they are deprived from the simplest rights including those of accessing education [26]. Besides other types of struggles, Raftopolous and Mlambo explain that in Rhodesia:

Women also had to deal with patriarchy within their own societies and handled that struggle in many subtle ways that defy easy classification and labelling. Clearly, there were unresolved tensions between the women's determination to assert their independence and the men's desire to control women's activities.  
[26]:105

Dangarembga's female characters aspire to enjoy some freedom and to choose their own path. They want to be educated despite the fact of inhibitions and so they are in a continuous quest to spell out their distress. Paradoxically, even male characters, who are supposed to introduce a positive change through their education, stick to the principles of the Rhodesian society of shackling women's hands not to deviate from the norm. *Babamukuru*, the representative of the masculine claims in the story, stands as a typical example of male dominance whose education did not alter his views towards the other gender. *Babamukuru's* temperament, comportment, and way of addressing the female characters indicate implicitly the ranking of women as compared with men. On her move from her poor house to *Babamukuru's* one, *Tambudzai* was transported with awe and at that moment she realized what it means to be educated and to be marginalized due to ignorance. What matters in this scene is the way *Tambudzai*, the powerless anxious female, describes the person of her uncle: "*Babamukuru was God, therefore I had arrived in Heaven. I was in danger of becoming an angel, or at the very least a saint, and forgetting how ordinary humans existed*" [9]:70. This meticulous description of her uncle which incorporates religious foundations uncovers the taken-for-granted connotations attached to men.

*Tambudzai* narrates directly these miserable conditions to the reader for the sole goal of showing the worth of her struggle and the other women's as well. She only seeks justification and legitimacy to the feminist quest. *Jeremiah* and *Babamukuru* represent a rigid version of masculine control over women. Though educated and intellectually so refined, *Babamukuru* still lacks a flexible way to deal with the feminine gender. He is undergoing a kind of conflict himself; he is a byproduct of a hybrid culture and quests for

an adjustment. *Jeremiah*, *Tambudzai's* father, pictures another type of stiff masculinity. Besides his ignorance and his economic deprivation, he takes control over his wife and daughters. His trauma takes another shape that is expressed in his personality and behaviour. Partly, *Jeremiah* cannot be blamed for this because he is socially trained in accordance with the tenets of his culture. A culture that favours a boy over a girl, and a culture that permits education only for boys. *Jeremiah* transmits his traumatic situation to his daughter, *Tambu*, who aspires for a better future knowing that the only way for is through education. Her father, no different from all the tribe's men, believes that a woman was born to fulfill certain duties, to get married, to procreate children and to look after her husband and his family. In the following extract, *Tambudzai* tells about the day events when she wanted to take part in her brother and father's plans, but her father deemed her to be inclining to the unnatural in her:

My yearning to go must have shown, probably on my face as I listened to them make their plans and undo them and make them again, because my father called me aside to implore me to curb my unnatural inclinations, it was natural for me to stay at home and prepare for the homecoming.

[9]:33

Inclining to the natural means, for *Jeremiah*, following the path of the previous tribe's women, and what is natural is leaning to the aspirations of her cultural contour which in itself is dictated by men. Within these boundaries there is no room for *Tambudzai* to think about self-enhancement. She confesses -my father-: "became very agitated after he had found me several times reading the sheet of newspaper in which the bread from magrosa had been wrapped" [9]: 33. This state of affairs raises *Tambudzai's* spur to challenge her brother, she admits: "the things I read would fill my mind with impractical ideas, making me quite useless for the real tasks of feminine living" [9]:34. One of the aims of feminine living is marriage, a fuzzy subject in *Tambu's* mind "it was irritating the way it always cropped up in one form or another" she admits "I had even begun to think about it seriously, threatening to disrupt my life before I could even call it my own" [9]:180. For *Babamukuru*, education for women serves only to enable them assume their future roles as mothers and wives because men grow aware of the import of their wives' intellectual level. And so, women's life is being carefully oriented by the macho culture. Paradoxical to all these claims, there are some girls who could enroll to pursue their study in the mission school. In justifying this permission to *Tambudzai*, *Babamukuru* clarifies that educated girls could better guarantee a good husband if they are themselves intellectually refined. *Babamukuru's* person represents the type of tough patriarchy that is further solidified by its good grounding in education; a girl who wants to push its dreams to the end must be considered rebellious. In the novel, the characters that are most defying his patriarchy are all feminine, and they are all in a quest to realize their ambitions other than being housewives. *Nyasha*, *Babamukuru* daughter, *Lucia*, *Tambudzai's* aunt and

*Tambudzai* all rebel against the current state of affairs each in her own way. However, to the end of the novel it is difficult to judge whether they had met or not their aspirations because their resilience had been shaken.

*Tambudzai* was lucky enough to be allowed to pursue her educational career only because of her brother's death. Had not *Babamukuru* felt it necessary that *Tambudzai* attends school, she would be a replication of her mother. He was regretting the fact that: "there is no male child to take [.....] this job of raising the family from hunger and need" that's why "*Tambudzai must be given the opportunity to do what she can for the family before she goes into her husband's home*" [9]:56. For *Jeremiah*, spending one's money on a girl's education is a lost case for in the end a girl is supposed to be the property of others. And it coincides with the first accord in opinion between the two brothers. *Jeremiah* observes that his daughter's: "sharpness with her books is no use because in the end it will benefit strangers" [9]:56; to this observation *Babamukuru* reacts with a full agreement with his brother. *Jeremiah's* resentment divulges when her teacher, *Mr. Matimba*, finds an alternative to funding her education via selling the mealies. One of the nebulous forms of egoism reveals itself; her father seems no more able to hide his impatience blaming the teacher for exploiting his money yelling: "that money belongs to me. *Tambudzai is my daughter, is she not? So isn't it my money?*" [9]:30. *Jeremiah* goes on voicing his malaise towards the teacher's plans for his daughter's life and at once resenting the nature's law that deems a girl to be another man's proprietorship querying: "have you ever heard of a woman who remains in her father's house?" admitting the verity that: "she will meet a young man" and that her father: "will have lost everything" [9]:30.

The way women were treated throughout the story lines turns off the candle of hope that enlightens their paths. This situation insures that there will be no hopefulness to be expected from a woman especially after her marriage. The character of *Nyasha* exemplifies the radical version of feminine scuffle. She is the type of stubborn girl who is totally au fait with the masculine dominance that suffocates her existence. She overtly proclaims an open hostility towards her gender roles "*Nyasha, far-minded and isolated, my uncle's daughter, whose rebellion may not in the end have been successful*" [9]:1. *Tambudzai*, though amazed with *Babamukuru's* refined intellect, transmits an implicit message about the infernal daily conflicts that *Nyasha* and *Maiguru*, his wife, undergo simply because *Babamukuru* is the off product of a predominantly macho culture. *Nyasha* in her quest for emancipation relies on liberating her mind via reading; she symbolizes one way of fleeing the masculine dominance. *Nyasha* and her mother's characters share the same advantage in that both are educated; nevertheless, her mother is submissive because she is shackled by marriage and so by her husband. *Nyasha*, conversely; seeks a way out from her father's imprisonment and with her revolutionary spirit she permits herself to challenge her father's authority. On one hand, it is universally acknowledged that the word of

parents should be respected. On the other hand and particularly within the boundaries of the African culture, it is considered ill-mannered that a girl defies her father. *Nyasha* considers this challenge as an implicit message that she cognizes the effects of the patriarchal dominance over women's lives. She even reaches the point where she does not differentiate between members of her family treating them all in the same frigid manner. *Nyasha* grows to show no respect for her mother and by this she meant that her mother should stop accepting every order so blindly; she wants *Maiguru* to assume her real personality, she keeps insisting: "I'd expected, really, I'd expected" she is not in a position to expect anything because *Babamukuru* answers back: "I expect you to do as I say. Now sit down and eat your food" [9]:83.

This traumatic situation was passed down from one generation to the other so by means of logic women are presumed to obey the natural order of things that is they are expected to accept their position only second to that of men. *Tambudzai* was made right from the beginning to stay on the path of her mother and grandmother; *Jeremiah* wants her instead: "to learn to be a good wife" [9]:16. Hence, the perseverance of this culture is promising only when women's freedom is under perfect scrutiny. Moghadam notes that: "this tribal structure is patriarchal. A patriarchal society for the most part does not acknowledge a role for women except within socially accepted conditions and within the limits of certain confines that they should not violate" [22]:49. It is a tradition that fully considers fatherly inclinations by suppressing feminine desires and obliging women to accept these social arrangements.

### 3.2. The Influence of Religious Echoes in Perpetuating Patriarchy

It is beyond the bounds of possibility for humans to continue existing without having a reference to guide their daily comportments. Though there are differences in terms of what people do believe in, the concept of religion exists universally to reflect the bidding cord that unifies societies. According to Swatos and Kivisto: "religion is manifest wherever one sees a closing of the gap between fact and hope, or a leap of faith that allows a person to believe that suffering and evil will someday be defeated" [31]:565. And so it offers shelter to the most needy, but it also proffers justifications for the privileged.

In *Nervous Conditions*, one cannot feel which religious affiliation is being depicted in *Tambudzai's* social contour. At the same time, there is no mentioning from her retrospective narrative of the role of religion in settling the questionable status of women or reflecting upon men's privileged position. It is generally accepted that an individual's social position is initially linked to the status that religion accords him in its rituals and ceremonies. For instance, the Neolithic societies ascribed an equal status to both genders. Women and men equally participate in agricultural activities, in producing food and caring about children [1]. In opposition to this fact, *Tambudzai* gives an account of the strenuous time she passed

with her grandmother working on the land. From her description she hints to the absence of men's participation in these activities. "I used to spend many productive hours working with my grandmother on the plot of land she called her garden. We hoed side by side strips of land defined by the row of maize plants" [9]:17. *Nhamo*, *Tambudzai's* brother, was totally left out from laborious endeavour by virtue of his education.

In Muslim communities women are supposed to be governed by men, "the Qur'an openly states that men are superior to women and grants men the right to rule over them. On the other hand, the Qur'an also accorded women many protections from male abuse-Far more than in pre-Islamic Arab society" [2]:222. A comprehensive sketch for the roles stipulated to both genders is well described and "the rights of the individual are subordinated to the welfare of the society" [3]:197. Except for biological differences that decide about gender's capabilities and responsibilities that are well dictated in the Qur'an, religious established practices sketch out an outline for men's and women's duties on both public and private layers. In the Jewish Talmud, however; critical judgments are ascribed to the image of the woman, a daughter is considered: "a treasure that keeps her father awake, and worry over her drives away his sleep" (Jesus ben Sira cited in [18]:44, 42:9-11. On account of this: "a man's wickedness is better than a woman's goodness" [18]44, 26-12. In Christianity, the Timothy text provides justification as to why God had accorded headship to men rather than women. The woman was created second to man and she was betrayed by devilish intentions in Eden garden; whence comes the unchangeable epitome that gratifies God's choice [15].

In *Nervous Conditions*, the appeal to religion to reinforce or weaken masculine dominance was introduced in the final chapters. Reference to Christianity is mentioned overtly only when *Babamukuru* proclaims a Christian marriage for his brother *Jeremiah* and *Mainini*, *Tambudzai's* mother, and his intention was to atone for the sin. Addressing *Jeremiah*, *Babamukuru* declares: "so many years after our mother passed away, you are still living in sin. You have not been married in church before God. This is a serious matter." [9]:147. *Babamukuru* makes sure that his daughter and her cousin attend Sunday sermons where both of them realize the danger of trespassing the limits put forward by the sociocultural standards, they were taught that: "sin was something to be avoided" they must keep away from "because it was deadly"; yet, it is not the case with *Nyasha*, who thought from *Tambudzai's* angle, "pluck out the heart of the problem with her multi directional mind and present it [.....] in ways that made sense" [9]:151. It is upon this idea that her father deems her to indecency and crudeness.

The misfortune of the female characters throughout the novel has been partly attributed to God's will. At the beginning of the novel, *Tambudzai* did not give the reader any allusion to church matters, but it is implicitly stated that the feminine quest is doomed to failure because their fate is written by God. All they can do is to accept their destiny

without questioning it. The implied trick is that the creature cannot stand against the authority of the creator.

Apart from the Christian marriage setting in which the term sin was attributed to the masculine character of *Jeremiah*, the connotation of sin appears again when *Nyasha* went to a party then was late to be back home. Her father exclaims: “no decent girl would stay out alone, with a boy, at that time of the night” and with a tiff tone he insists: “you did it. I saw you. Do you think I am lying, that these eyes of mine lie?” [9]:113. It is not a decent behaviour that a girl stays out late; she will not be pure if she enters into manly gatherings. *Babamukuru* defies his daughter that his eyes do not lie with a provocative tone that further fuels his daughter’s resentment. Although *Nyasha* does not exhibit any malicious intentions, the way her father addresses her can fuel negative ideas in her mind. According to Shefer et. al: “women are more likely than men to be victimized within intimate relationships” [30]:139.

The character of *Lucia*, another outcast, pictures the feminine revolution, however; with a different version. She is not educated of course this cannot be expected from a woman, and besides her gender she is descended from a poor background. The type of women like *Lucia* knows very well that for them to persist in the macho community, they need to find a man. She does not confine herself to religious values; in the sense that she permits herself to become involved with polyandry throwing herself into unconventional relationships with the sole excuse that : “a woman has to live with something [.....] even if it is a cockroach” [9]:153. *Lucia*’s shrewdness is translated in turning the manipulative manipulated; her character apprehends the macho game and decisively arrives to control all the masculine gender in the story in her own way. Ironically with her conscious recognition of the necessity of having a man by her side, she does not even use the term man instead she alludes to that by using the term *something*. Despite of her shaky comportment, *Lucia* is not considered sinful in the novel but she is serious in her own manner. “those men!” thought *Tambudzai*, “they never realised that Lucia was a serious person” [9]:153.

*Tambudzai* also tries during the course of the story to stand back and create links between things she learnt in the mission with the characters’ behaviour including hers. The feeling of regret that results from outraging others is recurrent in *Tambudzai*’s mind though she begins her narrative with a sense of heartlessness. These thoughts might be attributed to Sunday’s sermons and to her humble background. She was afraid that the more she gets higher in her educational career, the more she will grow challenging as her cousin *Nyasha*. Out of this internal conflict, she concludes that *Babamukuru* does not deserve to be hated by his own daughter, “I felt secure at the mission under *Babamukuru*’s shadow and I could not understand why *Nyasha* found it threatening” [9]:116.

These inconsistencies in *Nyasha*’s person and her rude reactions towards her father drive her to question the extent to which her conduct was correct. In doing so she confesses her thought to *Tambudzai* as a way out to find relief. It might

be thought that *Nyasha* grows impatient with her sins and that instead of professing them to the church fathers, she chose her cousin. It feels liberating to unveil one’s inner impressions, and it feels pleasing to be heard by somebody else [5]. Part of socializing with others entails voicing one’s thoughts to the closest ones. *Nyasha* loses her line of thought after her cousin , *Tambudzai*, had left the mission “I am missing you badly” confessed *Nyasha*, “in many ways you are very essential to me in bridging some of the gaps in my life, and now that you are away, I feel them again” [9]:196. This feeling of emptiness in *Nyasha*’s soul might be attributed to spiritual desolation, or it can be traced back to her continuous quest to free herself from the masculine dominance that besieges her. Working out a strong identity in this type of communities is disputable. Where girls are pushed for making their homes rather, boys are assisted to move higher in the social ladder [19].

#### 4. Searching Out an Egress Through Disillusionment and Mental Despair

*Tambudzai* warns the reader right from the beginning that what is yet to come in her retrospective narrative will be an in depth articulation of the daily torments women go through in this byzantine society. Her account is told from a feminine point of view, hence; it falls within the category of female writing. Sertel vindicates that: “within this female experience, female writers give voice to the definition of femininity as well as the problems, constrictions, limitations or the liberations felt and experienced by them” [29]:87. These types of experiences are universally shared; Simone de Beauvoir; for instance, exploits her own person as a woman to ingeniously jot down the challenges of the female gender in the search for the concept of the self [27]. In the same line with Beauvoir, Virginia Woolf’s writings reflect this notion of rejection and remonstrates against the devoid position of women throughout history. In her female writing style, Woolf: “points out that woman is not taught to develop her individuality, nor is she actually trained to challenge the prevailing patriarchal system” [8]:5. It might be said that in *Nervous Conditions*, the trauma of female characters is reflected; however, they are not being trained to find a way out from it.

*Tambudzai* summarizes the argument directly in the opening of the novel:

I was not sorry when my brother died. Nor am I apologizing for my callousness, as you may define it, my lack of feeling [.....] 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, far-minded and isolated, my uncle’s daughter, whose rebellion may not in the end be successful [9]:1

Within these lines feelings of revolutionary spirit are marvelously depicted, but *Tambu* also gives the reader a hint that some scuffles end in an unexpected way. *Tambu* tells her

educational journey from a poor African district to a well-to-do milieu of intellectually qualified elite. A journey that was not supposed to be hers, but that fated events had paved her the way for. This worthy crossing was meant for her elder brother *Nhamo* who thanks to his gender enjoys every bit of opportunity. Though *Tambu* possesses a refined critical intellect even before accessing higher schooling levels, there was no possibility for her to realize her dreams and her family's. The duty of raising *Tambu's* family from these deprived conditions was shed upon *Nhamo's* shoulders, but his unexpected death changes the course of events. The character of *Tambu* in the novel is not opposed to the idea of emancipation, but rather to the idea of getting emancipated by the family's man, *Nhamo*. She grows suffering from feelings of misanthropy unfortunately she starts by the closest persons to her, her father and her sibling. Talking to her father, *Babamukuru* considers it "unfortunate" because "there is no male child to take this duty, to take this job of raising the family from hunger and need" [9]:56. The demise of *Nhamo* led her directly to her fortune; she is then transmuted from a deprived crofter girl to an intellectually wealthy schoolgirl in her uncle's mission school. Thanks to her perseverance, she further moves to a multiracial convent that helps her amplify her capacities. In the course of events, *Tambu's* personality moves back and forth between her obsequious father and her oppressive knowledgeable uncle. She is indeed enduring a double conflict in which she is a casualty of colonial and aboriginal patriarchy. In her blind pursuit, *Tambu* becomes indifferent towards people around her forgetting even her dearest cousin *Nyasha*. The latter was sinking in seclusion that later shoves her to grow anorexic. *Tambu* addresses the reader with a secure tone: "you will say again that I was callous but I was not, only overwhelmed" but "I was sure I was on the path of progress" [9]:195. *Tambu* refers to the term callous and callousness at the beginning then at the end of her account in such a way as to show the reader the clash encircled within her psyche. It is upon this callousness; in truth, that she builds her new self.

As far as *Nyasha* is concerned, her overt battle against her father causes her a severe anorexia nervosa. She grows impatient with *Babamukuru* who: "liked to address, to expound, to impress points upon people" and this means that: "they had not been required to say anything" [9]:86. *Nyasha* undergoes a tough experience with her presumably intellectual father who once reaches the point of accusing her with whoredom, exclaiming that: "he cannot have a daughter who behaves like a whore" [9]:114.

The tyranny of *Babamukuru* reaches the farthest points; he interferes even in the amount and type of food that *Nyasha* should eat. She decides to challenge the trivial regulations of her father at the expense of her health, winding up with grave eating disorders. *Nyasha's* character pictures an identity that is shattered between two diverse cultures, and in her search for emancipation she resorts to incessant nights of study without caring about food. Eating rituals for her represent terrifying episodes of her life, metaphorically speaking eating time is linked to Pavlovian conditioning. The more her father

resorts to negative stimuli, the more she responds in a firm way facing up to his authority. In one occasion he was talking to *Maiguru* about the eating disorders of *Nyasha*, but instead of expressing worry he expresses fury. *Nyasha* "must eat her food, all of it. She is always doing this, challenging me." [9]:189. Her challenge ends up with a dramatic failure; she finishes locked up in a clinic of psychiatry totally svelte and pale.

The succession of events in the story culminates with *Maiguru's* depression and her fleeing from her household to her brother's. She collected all her courage to confront *Babamukuru* with the bitterness she is feeling in a house which is metaphorically a hotel for his family, and she confessed her exhaustion. She speaks up her fury in a language that says: "I am tired of being nothing in a home I am working sick to support" [9]:172. *Maiguru* with her sophisticated intellect does not know how to endure the masculine tyranny, and decides to depart.

*Tambu's* mother, *Mainini*, pictures the type of ignorant domestic whose opinions are not taken into consideration; she: "suffered from being female and poor and uneducated and black" [9]:89. Apart from daily chores, her character shows only internal shielded anger that is sometimes expressed in intentional hunger. *Mainini* understands from the outset that there is something wrong with education and thirst for knowledge. She seems modest but fully cognizant of the side effects of the Englishness that: "will kill them all if they aren't careful" [9]:202. She reaches the end of the story without an obvious solution for her worries but she is still convinced that the white are not there to provide relief.

*Lucia's* sense of disillusionment is expressed in her incapacity of engaging officially in an act of marriage. Amid all the characters, she is the one: "who had grown shrewd in her years of dealing with men" [9]:126. Her struggle proffers her feasible benefits; besides being educated she could guarantee a job in a girls' hostel. Though *Tambu* pictures her as an unconcerned person, the character of *Lucia* shows concern with these nervous conditions in her own way.

## 5. Conclusion

In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga tries to elicit the insurmountable colonial, post-colonial and patriarchal social make up. Even the official educational institutions seem to rally in internalizing the macho ideology in women's minds. Within this derogatory society, most of women wind up consenting with their casualty role. However, the author tries in her depiction to shed light on the female minority that shows willingness to speak out its mind. For those women whose character does not relinquish to masculine abjection, divergence from the norm and scuffle are the only shelters. The story portrays a culture that incarcerates the potentialities of an important segment of its structure which by all dimensions leads to a situation of permanent internal conflict. When a society presses the ambitions of a certain group, the situation will amplify to blow up in the end by breaking all the laws. This double-edged conflict affects two elements.

First, it shakes the undervalued individuals themselves, then; when the situation worsens it touches upon the whole social structure. This is what happened with Dangarembga's female characters that all had undergone situations of internal conflict that later transformed into conflicts with the external environment.

When all the circumstances join forces against them, these female characters opt for two alternatives. Either they concede and accept their victimized position as fated by destiny or they revolutionize to usher in change and adjustment. The concept of change has been attached due heed throughout the story, however, it was not made clear till the end of the novel. It can be said that *Nervous Conditions* is indeed all about the struggle for positive transformation that cannot end with what has been planned for. It is an impeccable tentative to underline one of the eternal issues of humanity that of the need to bring about change; that all the voices need to be heard to get the most of any social combination. If some of Dangarembga's female characters had failed to reach this objective, they could at least uncover some intricacies of the African women sufferings. Above all they succeeded to implicitly allude to the end products of positive change in cultures that share the same ideology; they thrived as well to urge for spreading justice by allowing individuals assume their roles. In the end, it is all about sticking to one's tenets within what is socially feasible; concepts of change and equality had always been latent social features.

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