

Exploring Blackness and the Weight of Womanhood in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988)

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Abstract

The feminist debate is still rampant in contemporary literature in spite of perspectives shifts. Women from formerly colonized countries still suffer from a great deal of discriminations due to their femaleness and blackness. Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, which unveils the patriarchal and colonial yoke on the Zimbabwean woman is used in this article as an analysis text. This paper provides a postcolonial feminist reading of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, taking into account the concepts of gender, class, race and patriarchy. The article deals with the way blackness and womanhood entail oppression in post-colonial Zimbabwe and in Africa in general. The study concludes that gender and race impede women's self-assertiveness and this gives sense to Chandra Mohanty and Gayatri Spivak's postcolonial feminist perspectives.

Keywords : blackness, class, gender, patriarchy, race, womanhood.

Analyse de la condition de la femme noire et du poids de la féminité dans *Nervous Conditions* de Tsitsi Dangarembga

Résumé

Le débat féministe est toujours persistant dans la littérature contemporaine malgré les changements de perspectives. Les femmes des pays anciennement colonisés ne cessent de souffrir de nombreuses discriminations en raison de leur féminité et du fait d'être noires. L'œuvre romanesque *Nervous Conditions* de Tsitsi Dangarembga qui dénonce le joug patriarcal et colonial sur la femme zimbabwéenne, est l'objet de notre étude. Cette étude propose une lecture féministe postcoloniale de Tsitsi Dangarembga basée sur les concepts de genre, classe, race et de patriarcat. L'article aborde la manière dont le fait

d'être noir et d'être femme conduit à l'oppression dans la société post-coloniale Zimbabwéenne et en Afrique en général. L'étude conclut que le genre et la race entravent l'affirmation de soi des femmes et cela donne un sens aux perspectives féministes postcoloniales de Chandra Mohanty et Gayatri Spivak.

Mots-clés : Classe, fait d'être noir, féminité, genre, patriarcat, race.

Introduction

Woman's condition in post-colonial Africa is unbearable. The issue is addressed by many feminist writers among them Tsitsi Dangarembga in her trilogy *Nervous Conditions* (1988), *The Book of Not* (2006), and *The Mournable Body* (2020). The first one deals with female victimization in the British colony of Rhodesia (now known as Zimbabwe). One of the female victims in the novel, Maynini (the female protagonist's mother) forcefully contends that African woman at that time suffers from "the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other" (NC, p. 16). This statement clearly expresses and summarises the way colonial norms and patriarchal traditions jointly reduce the African woman to an inferior citizen. Indeed, according to the *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, 2nd edition, "Blackness is first a descriptive category that refers to people of African descent and the degree to which they look like the African stereotype before and after their biological mixture with other groups in the Atlantic world" (A. D. William, p. 328). Thus, blackness raises the issue of race which is a real cause of oppression when and where people of different skin colours meet. Black people in general and black women in particular undergo a wide range of discriminations due to their blackness, which strongly affect their womanhood.

In fact, womanhood implies victimhood if one agrees with Simone de Beauvoir that a "woman is defined as differentiated with reference to man but he with reference to her, she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential, he is the subject, he is the absolute, she is other" (D. B. Simone, 1953, p. 16). The woman is hence presented as Other and undergoes multiple burdens. Thus, "the weight of womanhood" in this paper, refers to all sorts of oppression post-colonial African women experience simply because they are women.

As in this case black women's condition is our concern, we'll outline the way race, gender, class and patriarchy victimize women. "Exploring" meaning examining and highlighting, in this article, we'll point out and analyse how colonial system and patriarchal tradition oppress black women in *Nervous Conditions*. The novel tells the bewitching story of Tambudzai (Tambu) the female protagonist who is denied some fundamental rights particularly the right to school education, just because she is a female. Tsitsi Dangarembga's female characters in the novel all strive to emancipate themselves from the yoke of their oppression not only as women but also as black people. This article examines the way blackness and womanhood engender oppression in post-colonial Africa. The study rests on Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's postcolonial feminism with particular focus on the concepts of "third-world" and "subaltern" which unveil women's representation as inferior in formerly colonized societies. The first part of the study deals with African woman's double victimization and the second one analyses these women's resistance to patriarchal and colonial oppression.

1. Woman as Victim of "double colonization" in Post-colonial Africa

Woman in post-colonial Africa is victim of two kinds of oppression. According to Ritu Tyagi (2014, p. 45),

postcolonial feminist theory is primarily concerned with the representation of women in once colonized countries and in Western locations. While postcolonial theorist struggles against the maiden colonial discourse that aims at misrepresenting him as inferior, the task of a postcolonial feminist is far more complicated. She suffers from "double colonization" as she simultaneously expresses the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy.

The Indian feminist scholar hence upholds the concept of "double colonization" alluding to the "double enslavement" of Black women (...), confronted by a woman question and a race question" (K. Debra, 1988, p. 42). Woman from formerly colonized countries is therefore victim of two types of yokes, patriarchy and colonialism. That woman "has to resist the control of colonial power not only as a colonized subject, but also as a woman. In this oppression, her colonized brother

is no longer her accomplice, but her oppressor” (T. Ritu, 2014, p.45). In the Zimbabwean society described by Tsitsi Dangarembga in her novel *Nervous Conditions*, women experience “double colonization”, double oppression, double victimization, by “a woman question and a race question”.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty also denounces women’s “double colonization” with her concepts of “third world women” the critic claims that “women in the third world countries (...) have “needs” and “problems”” (T. M. Chandra, 2003, p. 30). She explains: “What I wish to analyse is specifically the production of the “third world women” as a singular, monolithic subject in some (Western) feminist texts” (T. M. Chandra, 2003, p. 30). In fact, in addition to patriarchal traditions affecting both Western woman and third world one, the latter singularly experiences the effect of colonialism, hence a specific feminism equally upheld by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, through her concept of “subaltern”. As a concept-metaphor, “subaltern” refers to all people from third-world countries who for Spivak are voiceless, cannot speak and are oppressed. The critic explains :

I think the word “subaltern” is looking its definitive power because it has become a kind of buzzword for any group that wants something that it does not have. People no longer say “third world” easily: they know that every time they say “third world” they have to say “the so-called third world”. There has been very strong critical debate about whether “postcolonial is okay anymore (C. S. Gayatri, 1993, p. 289).

Mohanty’s concept of “third world” and Spivak’s concept of “subaltern” therefore refer both to the concept of postcolonial. The two scholars share “the common context of political struggle against class, race, gender and imperialist hierarchies” (T. M. Chandra, 2003, p. 25). This situation can be seen through the discrimination in schooling. School brought by colonialism appears as a source of discrimination. Colonial administration favours male children in many fields, particularly in schooling. Colonizers once in Africa prioritize boys’ schooling and refuse girls’ on the simple ground that they are female. In *Nervous Conditions* Babamukuru, the decision-maker and the intellectual of the family, the one who is himself the product of western school and perfectly embodies colonial values in the novel, doubly colonizes the female characters in the novel. This clearly “illustrates the

construction of “third world women” as a homogenous “powerless” group often located as implicit victims of particular socio-economic systems” (T. M. Chandra, 1995, p. 338). The postcolonial feminist critic here denounces the oppression of “third world women” in other words, women from formerly colonized countries, who are simultaneously oppressed by their male counterparts and the norms inherited from colonialism. Gender is therefore a source of oppression and womanhood is victimhood in postcolonial area.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Babamukuru favours boys' schooling to the detriment of that of girls. Babamukuru, a teacher at the mission, chooses to send his nephew to school (Nhamo) rather than his niece (Tambu) or both of them. Tambu, herself the narrator of the book puts: “It had been my uncle's idea that Nhamo should go to school at the mission. Nhamo, if given the chance, my uncle said, would distinguish himself academically, at least sufficiently to enter a decent profession” (*NC*, p.4). This gender discrimination is openly advocated by Tambu's own father, Babamukuru's brother, Jeremiah. The latter, the epitome of patriarchal tradition in the novel, does not see the importance of school for girls. So, Nhamo is taken to the mission by Babamukuru and Tambu is left in the village school in nervous conditions and clearly understands that “the needs and sensibilities of the women in [her] family were not considered a priority or even legitimate” (*NC*, p.12). Tambu as a woman, a subaltern cannot speak, and this shows how gender affects womanhood in patriarchal societies. This gives sense to the following statement by Gayatri Spivak (1996, p. 54): “My own definition of woman is very simple: it rests on the word “man””. This means that man is the centre of interest and woman depends on man. Accordingly, very soon Tambu's father pretending that “there was not enough money for [her] fees” (*NC*, p. 17) retires her from school against her will. She recounts :

My father thought I should not mind. “Is that anything to worry about? (...) It's nothing he reassured me with his usual ability to jump whichever way was easiest. Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables (*NC*, p. 15).

From this statement Tambu's father advocates the patriarchal view that a girl is not made to go to school but “must learn to be a good wife”

(NC, p.16). Patriarchy is “the power men use to dominate women (...). Men in patriarchy automatically have higher status than women” (H. Bill, 1992, p. 87-88). This is unfair from a feminist point of view. For Tambu her “father was not sensible” (NC, p.16) as “Maiguru was educated, and did[not] serve Babamukuru books for dinner” (NC, p.16). Moreover, Tambu believes that Maiguru “is a better wife than” (NC, p. 16) her own mother who is uneducated. Indeed, Tambu’s view is that education cannot be an impediment to wifedom. It may rather be beneficial not only to the wife but also to the husband if we consider Maiguru’s following confidence to Tambu: “Your uncle wouldn’t be able to do half the things he does if I didn’t work as well” (NC, p.16). An educated woman is rather useful to the society. So excluding girls from school and sending only boys to school leads to a great loss and a void for the whole society. Thus, patriarchy victimizes women in third world societies. As Lois Tyson (2006, p. 102) explains “patriarchy is a man’s world, men invent the rules of the game, they play it only with one another, and women are merely to be found among the prizes”. This idea is clearly expressed in other words by Obinze’s mother in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* as follows: “Nature is unfair to women” (C. N. Adichie, 2013, p.72). This denouncement is also all the more apparent in *Nervous Conditions* as Ghania Ouahmiche and Lemya Boughouas (2016, p. 107) put :

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 a given period.

Boys and girls are educated to believe that males are superior and have the priority over females. Nhamo, Tambu’s brother who has internalized constructed patriarchal norms scornfully tells his sister: “Don’t you know I am the one who has to go to school? (...) It’s the same everywhere. Because you are a girl (...) that’s what Baba said” (NC, p. 21). Nhamo seems to know what he talks about as somewhere in the Nigerian community described by Buchi Emecheta in *The Joys of Motherhood*, this idea prevails. Adaku a resigned victim of patriarchy tells her co- wife: “It’s a man’s world this. Still, Senior wife, these girls when they grow up will be great helpers to you in looking after boys.

Their bride prices will be used in paying school fees as well" (E. Buchi, 1979, p. 125). So, if, as Adaku points out, schooling is the field of gender discrimination, the atmosphere prevailing in family realm is not to be overlooked.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Babamukuru's relationship with female characters shows how black females from post-colonial Africa undergo pressure and oppression. With Nyasha his own daughter, the atmosphere is quite tense. He wants Nyasha to live according to both Western (white) ways and African ones. This is not easy for Nyasha, taking for granted that the two cultures are opposed at many levels. Whiteness significantly affects blackness as white culture impacts black culture. Tsitsi Dangarembga hence shows how race is a source of victimization. One understands why Chandra Mohanty (2003, p. 2) puts: "I see myself as an antiracist feminist". Indeed, postcolonial feminists fight against racism which is one of the burden on the back of the African woman.

Furthermore, how can one simultaneously live according to the standards of one culture and those of the opposed culture? As a Zimbabwean girl with an anglicised education, Nyasha's freedom is denied by the dos and don'ts imposed to her by her authoritarian father. Nyasha complains: "I was comfortable in England but now I'm a whore with dirty habits" (*NC*, p. 119). Nyasha is affected by the white race through her English education in England. Once back home she has to live differently. Blackness hence becomes a problem to Nyasha in her own country. Nyasha feels no longer at ease and is at a loss how to behave in light of her following statement: "When you've seen different things, you want to be sure you're adjusting to the right thing. You can't go on all the time being whatever's necessary. You've got to have some convictions and I'm convinced I don't want to be anyone's underdog" (*NC*, p. 119). Nyasha is fed up with restrictions. Babamukuru upholds decency from the standards of his patriarchal and colonial education while Nyasha claims liberty according to the norms of her westernized education. Babamukuru warns his daughter: "No decent girl would stay out alone, with a boy, at that time of the night. (...) What will people say when they see Sigauke's daughter carrying on like that?" (*NC*, p.115).

Indeed, womanhood or femaleness in African context is submitted to some rules of which modern and emancipated women like Nyasha and her mother Maiguru disapprove. Maiguru for instance tells Babamukuru :

Don't you remember, when we went to South Africa everybody was saying that, we, the women, were loose (...). People were prejudiced against educated women. Prejudiced: That's why they said we weren't decent. I don't know what people mean by a loose woman. Sometimes she is someone who walks the streets, sometimes she is an educated woman, sometimes she is a successful man's daughter or she is simply beautiful. Loose or descent, I don't know (NC, p. 184).

From Maiguru's statement we learn that womanhood implies prejudices and stereotypes all constructed to victimize women. Babamukuru's traumatising attitude entails all sorts of crises. Nyasha for example once falls into a serious moral crisis which leads her to a psychiatrist. In her delirium she accuses white people of being racist against black people. "They've trapped us. They've trapped us.... I don't hate you. Daddy (...) they want me to, but I won't... Mummy will you hold me? Look what they've done to us...I'm not one of them but I'm not one of you" (NC, p. 205). Truly, Nyasha wants to create her own world, deprived of oppression based on blackness and womanhood, on race and gender. She hence agrees with postcolonial feminists in so far as "they imagine a world where differences are not detested instead, entertained and enjoyed, and moreover make space to thrive being immune to hierarchical structures of class, space, race, sexual and gender power" (K. M. Raj, 2013, p. 133).

In addition, the conflicts Tsitsi Dangarembga points out in the novel shows the delicateness of girls' education in post-colonial African societies. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1960, p. 28) in her famous critical work *Can the Subaltern Speak?* puts that: "if, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as a female is even more deeply in shadow".

Maiguru, Babamukuru's wife is also victim of her femaleness and "is even more deeply in shadow". Their relationship looks much more acceptable but indeed this is because Maiguru accepts more or less the voiceless and submissive role imposed to women in patriarchal societies. Whenever she refuses to play that role a clash occurs.

Maiguru, at times voices her disagreement as far as Babamukuru's pressure on their daughter Nyasha and even on Tambu, his niece is concerned. She once tells Babamukuru, "When I keep quiet you think I am enjoying it. So today I am telling you I am not happy. I am not happy any more in this house" (*NC*, p. 175). This raises the issue of woman's plight in marriage. Indeed as Tambu's mother explains, "this business of womanhood is a heavy burden. And these days it is worse with the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other" (*NC*, p.16). As it comes out, women in postcolonial societies are victim of their blackness and womanhood.

Babamukuru's colonial and patriarchal pressures on women can also be noticed on Mainini, Tambu's mother, Babamukuru's brother's wife. First, he decides everything for his brother (Jeremiah) who on his part imposes the received decisions on his wife, Mainini. This is quite noticeable when Babamukuru imposes his brother a church wedding. Despite Mainini's opposition to the marriage, a colonial heritage, it does take place. Babamukuru's social class engenders female oppression. According to *A Glossary of Political Theory* by John Hoffman (2007, p. 26) "Class is a political as well as economic term. It denotes not simply a person's economic power, but what kind of political influence they can exert". Babamukuru, "the only African living in a white house" (*NC*, p. 63), with his economic power is the decision-maker and so manipulates all his family members. He holds the power and perpetuates domination over all his brothers who impose all his decisions on their women. So, the whole extended family is dominated by the upper class that Babamukuru represents. Mainini's voice is not heard because she is a woman and is poor. She once complains to Bababumukuru: "I'm just poor and ignorant, so you want me to keep quiet, you say I mustn't talk. (...) but I have a mouth and it will keep on talking, it won't keep quiet" (*NC*, p. 142). This is a feminist concern also upheld by Chadrán Mohanty (1995, p. 341) who explains that third world "women are constituted as victims of the effects of western colonization". The critic's view clearly underscores Mainini's "double colonization" both by patriarchy and colonial (western) norms. This situation is all the more unbearable as Nyasha points out that: "It's bad enough (...) when a country gets colonized, but when the people

do as well! That's the end, really, that's the end" (*NC*, p. 150). This critical view of Nyasha gives sense to postcolonial feminist writers' portrayal of female characters who are not resigned victims but strive to resist patriarchy and western ways.

2. The Subaltern's (Women's) Resistance to Patriarchal and Colonial Standards

Gayatri Spivak's concept of subaltern foregrounds the interest for third world women to stand up and fight for their rights. This stance appears in *Nervous Conditions* through the female characters' attitude. According to Lindsay Pentolfe Aegerter (1996, p. 231) "the African women of *Nervous Conditions* do not merely react, they act. And their very action -in their refusal to live their lives only in response to oppression- lies their resistance". All the women in the novel react in one way or another to oppression and

negotiate the roles constructed for them within traditional and Western custom (...) Mainini, Maiguru, Lucia, Nyasha, Tambudzai, and Tambudzai's "Mbuya" -her grandmother- redefine their roles as "women" and "Africans" with a womanist epistemology that recognizes allegiance to traditional heritage and to women's emancipation (P. A. Lindsay, 1996, p. 231).

As far as Tambudzai is concerned, her resistance to patriarchal and colonial oppression appears in her effort to go to school. The patriarchal and colonial norms in full force in Tambudzai's community do not prioritize girls' schooling. Nevertheless, when Tambu is retired from school by her father who pretends being short of money, she does not remain passive. Tambu strives to change her female lot. She tells her father: "I will clear my own field and grow my own maize. Not much for the fees" (*NC*, p. 17). When there is a will, there is always a way and as a "wilful and headstrong" (*NC*, p. 17) girl, Tambu succeeds in growing maize and really pays her school fees despite her father's opposition. Tambu is projected as an independent woman who breaks patriarchal norms presenting woman as failure. But Tambu from her activism shows that a woman can also be successful. Tambu hence defeats patriarchal norms confining girls to household. Through Tambu the writer projects a new type of woman who does not feel sorry for herself, who does not rely on men, but strives to improve her condition.

Moreover, Tambu's physical fight against her brother Nhamo reveals women's determination to annihilate patriarchy. In fact, Nhamo (patriarchy) delights in keeping Tambu (woman) in illiteracy and oppression. When Tambu discovers that Nhamo steals her maize, she violently attacks him as it can be noticed in her following statement: "I sat on top of him, hanged his head into the ground, screamed and spat and cursed" (NC, p. 23). This shows her anger, her hatred for, not only her brother (Nhamo) but the whole patriarchal system of which Nhamo is nothing but sheer microcosm (a small element). "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" (O. Ghania, and B. Lemya, 2016, p. 105). Even when Nhamo later dies, Tambu is as indifferent (not to say as happy) as Kambili when her father dies in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*.

Furthermore, Tambu challenges patriarchy through her disobedience to her uncle Babamukuru, her benefactors, the one who takes her to the mission (after the death of Nhamo) to help her pursue her studies in better conditions. Tambu categorically refuses to attend the church wedding Babamukuru organises for her parents. She forcefully tells Babamukuru: "do not take me at all. I don't want to be in your stupid wedding" (NC, p. 166). Tambu hence challenges patriarchy and colonial ways through that refusal which is pretentious in the family, though it is a "ridiculous wedding" (NC, p. 174) from Maiguru's and Tambu's point of view. Despite Baba's "volcanic temper" (NC, p. 166), Tambu persists and did not attend the church wedding. Jeremiah accepts the wedding for maintaining his favours from his brother (Baba) but his wife is victim of male oppression. First of all, church wedding is not part of the Zimbabwean tradition Tambu and her mother uphold. This is a Western or colonial practice Babamukuru uses to oppress them. Besides, a woman has the right to give her opinion on her own life, on her own wedding. This is a postcolonial feminist standpoint Tambu uses to challenge Babamukuru. She demonstrates that the subaltern should speak, decide for themselves and resist male oppression. So, "It is, rather, that, both as object of colonist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male

dominant” (C. S. Gayatri, 1995, p. 28). The critic pleads for a post-colonial society deprived of discriminations based on gender, class and race. This postcolonial feminist project is in accordance with Tsitsi Dangarembga’s perspective in *Nervous Conditions*.

Similarly, Nyasha, Babamukuru’s own daughter strongly challenges him but this time physically, in a battle. Overwhelmed and fed up with Babamukuru’s oppressive and dictatorial ways, Nyasha disobeys him and fights against him as it appears in the following passage: “I told you not to hit me. Said Nyasha punching him in the eye (...). They went down on to the floor, Babamukuru alternately punching Nyasha’s head and banging it against the floor” (*NC*, p. 117). Thus male violence brings about female violence. Tsitsi Dangarembga shows that men do not have the monopoly of violence and women can also react to violence. “*Nervous Conditions* may offer us a way into researching the implication for girls’ education of some of complexities of benevolent patriarchy” (S. Ann, 2000, p. 246). Fighting against one’s father in African society absolutely means beating him, and is seen as a sacrilege. Nyasha is chased away by Babamukuru whose up to then authority is broken. As he tells her: “We cannot have two men in this house” (*NC*, p. 117) while for Nyasha “he ought to look at things from [her] point of view and be considerate and patient with [her]” (*NC*, p. 193). Maiguru, Nyasha’s mother believes in the end that Babamukuru is too authoritarian and oppressive in the household. In fact, “while a great many changes in women’s positions and ways of living have occurred in Africa (...), violence against woman has continued to be widespread” (M. Amina, 1997, p. 58).

Also fed up, Maiguru will challenge Babakumuru as it can be observed in the following statement: “What I object to is the way everybody expects me to spend all my time cooking for them when you provide so much food, then I end up slaving for everybody” (*NC*, p. 174). The rebellious tone used by Maiguru shows her determination, and desire for drastic change. She even goes further by leaving the home. “She did not slink away in the dark, but quite openly packed a suitcase, put on her travelling clothes, had her breakfast and left. Babamukuru was still feeling injured” (*NC*, p. 175). The fact of leaving

openly her household is a way of challenging and defeating patriarchy in a society where marriage is viewed as indispensable for woman.

However, Nyasha [Maiguru's daughter] was unhappy that Maiguru had gone to her brother. "A man! She always turns to men". She despaired. There is no hope (...). Really, there isn't" (*NC*, p. 177). For Nyasha, patriarchal oppression is not annihilated whenever a woman leaves a man for another. She finds the initiative useless because any man is patriarchal whether he is a husband or a brother. This is a feminist perspective Tsitsi Dangarembga expresses through Nyasha. From all accounts, for Maiguru, her attitude is a strong message which is more or less caught by Babamukuru who then on asks her views on important issues in their household. Maiguru hence moves from voicelessness to self-assertiveness. Such a shift is desired also by Mainini (Babamukuru's brother's wife) in her family. Babamukuru, the decision-maker of the extended family is a threat to her self-assertiveness. When he takes Nhamo (Mainini's only son) to the mission, Mainini is compelled to keep silent though she disagrees. But when Nhamo unexpectedly dies and Babamukuru decides to take Tambu to replace him, Mainini does not mince her words to express her disagreement. Thus, she publicly disavows Babamukuru and debunks patriarchy. Indeed, she contests the fact that "women are constituted as a group via dependency relationships vis-à-vis men, who are implicitly held responsible for these relationship" (T. M. Chandra, 1995, p. 340). The critic hence agrees with her counterpart that women are victim of male oppression in third world countries due to their blackness and womanhood.

In addition, Lucia in the novel also challenges patriarchy. Though she is uneducated, she owns her freedom of speech and is mostly spared by male oppression. Babamukuru always listens to her and tries to satisfy her concerns. "Babamukuru applauded Lucia in her absence. "That one" he chuckled to Maiguru "She is like a man herself" (*NC*, p. 174). Patriarchal gender roles presents woman as voiceless and passive and men as active. Lucia deconstructs such a gender-based differentiation. Lucia is projected as an independent woman in the mind and as a woman who knows what she wants. This is all the more true as she opts for self-schooling during adulthood. "Contentedly folding her

arms over her six month pregnancy, she told us that she was going to school to grade one classes in the evenings. She was so proud. She showed us her books, declared that she could already feel her mind beginning to think more efficiently” (NC, p. 162). Through her self-schooling Lucia overcomes patriarchal and colonial norms upholding women’s oppression and maintenance in ignorance.

Conclusion

Resting on postcolonial feminist concepts of “third world women” and “subaltern” which encompass the concepts of gender, race and patriarchy, the paper has attempted to unveil how African women and the Zimbabwean ones in particular are victim of multiple types of oppressions, among many others, the denial of their right to education and their freedom of opinion. Blackness and womanhood in that society is therefore a source of victimization. Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* portrays women who are entrapped by patriarchal and colonial standards from which they constantly strive to escape. Interestingly, Tsitsi’s women are not projected as resigned victims of patriarchal and colonial norms. From the youngest to the oldest, from Tambu to her grand-mother via Mainini her mother, each woman is reactive to male oppression. They all exhibit self-assertiveness and strive to resist all sorts of discriminations based on gender, class and race. Such a portrayal of women shows Dangarembga’s postcolonial feminist perspective which aims at liberating the whole female folk from patriarchal and colonial oppression.

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