

PERSPECTIVES ON PATRIARCHY IN AFRICA:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NERVOUS CONDITIONS,
SO LONG A LETTER AND THE JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD

MA (LITERATURE) THESIS

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CHANCELLOR COLLEGE

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**PERSPECTIVES ON PATRIARCHY IN AFRICA: A COMPARATIVE
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JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD***

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HONOURS DEGREE IN EDUCATION (UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI)

THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN
LITERATURE.



CHANCELLOR COLLEGE
SEPTEMBER 2005

DECLARATIONS

I certify that the work contained in this thesis is my own and has never been presented for any award at this university or elsewhere. Acknowledgement has been given wherever other people's work has been used.

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We certify that this thesis has been submitted to the University of Malawi with our approval, as a fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Literature.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my husband Charles, for the unconditional and perennial love and support. I could not have done this without you. Even when I had given up, you never gave up on me. You are my pillar of strength and I love you.

This thesis is also dedicated to my sister Sindisiwe, who taught me to count my blessings and showed such strength of character. I admire you for it Sindi and believe tomorrow will be a better day.

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The 'Resenters corner', a club of free speech that meets during lunch at Chancellor College, helped me relax and the debates we had there were a good sounding board.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines and compares the portrayal of patriarchy in *Nervous Conditions*, *So Long A Letter* and *The Joys of Motherhood*. It argues that compared to the other two novels, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* portrays patriarchy in a more vivid and authentic manner that captures the colonial condition of the female characters in these novels. Dangarembga's portrayal reveals the universality of patriarchy and its double form.

In a close textual comparison, the thesis analyses how the female characters in the three novels perceive patriarchy and then looks at how they react to it. An examination of how these novels handle the portrayals and the issues raised is followed by an account of my preference for the portrayal of *Nervous Conditions*.

In order to investigate patriarchy fully and tease out the different ways in which it has been portrayed, I have employed radical libertarian feminism. This theory not only focuses on patriarchy in explaining female oppression but also portrays it as a social construct that either sex can unlearn, thereby giving room for collaboration of both sexes in the struggle against patriarchy. Furthermore, in an attempt to examine the colonial context of the novels, I have used the postcolonial theories of Frantz Fanon and Homi Bhabha. These critics argue that the colonial experience can affect the psyche of the colonial subject very negatively and cause physical illness.

The thesis tackles questions such as: What is patriarchy? What is its form and nature? What are the roots of patriarchy? What is the relationship between colonialism and patriarchy? How do women react to patriarchy? Finally, the degree of diversity of perception and reaction of the characters of *Nervous Conditions* is linked to the novel's ability to be representative and not prescriptive. This is further strengthened by the open-ended conclusion, which captures the colonial condition of the female characters.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF PATRIARCHY IN A COLONIAL CONTEXT

The presence of female oppression in post-colonial Africa is an enigma that ignites a lot of debate amongst African writers. African writers have shown that female oppression is alive and well, long after independence (qtd. in Zeleza "Imagining And Inventing," 1). In her address to the Second African Writer's Conference in Stockholm (1986), Ama Ata Aidoo commented on the present predicament of African women:

On our continent, millions of women and girls have been, and are being, prevented from realising their full potential as human beings, whether it be the possibility of being a writer and artist, doctor and other professions, athletes or anything else outside the traditional roles assigned to women (qtd. in Azodo 201).

Indeed, a look at the past and present of the situation of women in Africa shows a group of people whose needs have not been addressed. The reasons for this predicament of African women are another cause of speculation but patriarchy takes centre stage.

Patriarchy has several definitions. Shulamith Firestone defines it as the oldest and most basic form of oppression in most societies while Hartmann calls it the system of male oppression of women (qtd. in McKay 347). Caroline Ramazanoglu claims that it is the mechanism, ideology and social structures that have enabled men throughout much of human history to gain and maintain domination in African and many other societies (97). In this thesis, I define patriarchy as an ideological and hegemonic force that advocates the creation and maintenance of male dominance in society, the power that men of any age, race, class or religion use to dominate women.

Many feminist novels present patriarchy as a colonial disease that will be cured by and after independence. Black patriarchy is depicted as the result of the victimisation of black men who were emasculated and effeminised by colonialism. Patriarchal problems are often presented as an issue that confronts the heroine at a certain point of her life and she fights it reactively, usually in her adulthood and mostly as a disgruntled wife. There is usually a strong willed heroine who overcomes many obstacles to achieve her goal for example, in Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story* (1991) and Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* (1960).

Portraying patriarchy in the manner described above creates problems in the authenticity and representation of the patriarchal experience of women in a colonial condition. Blaming black female oppression mainly on colonialism leaves several questions unanswered. In *Barrel of a Pen* (1983) Ngugi Wa Thiong'o states clearly that female oppression in Africa precedes colonisation (39). Colonisation exacerbated black female oppression, but it did not author it. bell hooks rightly stresses that black patriarchy is an angle that is underplayed by black writers as dwelling on it is seen as betraying the African cause and dividing the African front in the war against white racism (*Ain't I Woman*, 87). Before and during colonisation, black men maintained an ideology of supremacy over black women and this needs to be reflected in the portrayal of patriarchy. Black patriarchy should be fully exposed to avoid trivialising its impact on the black woman.

The featuring of strong willed heroines creates utopian and prescriptive feminist novels that appeal to certain groups of women, alienating many female readers. They lack in representation, a very important aspect to an African female readership that is increasingly complex and dynamically diverse, due to many experiences including colonialism. Feminist novels engaging patriarchy in a colonial setting need to maximise on diversity and representation, to credibly characterize the female characters. The several brands of feminism make it more important for a feminist novel to appeal to a spectrum of women, for the readers of today's Africa to further interrogate and explore female empowerment within a context that is familiar and applicable to them, namely that of post-colonisation.

Ramazanoglu (1989) captures this diversity and representation challenge, which faces the African female writer today, when trying to communicate with and to women who are so different that they fight for female self-determination in often unique and even contradictory ways. She says women are united in their hatred for the oppression generated by patriarchy, but experience, understand and fight it differently (31). To credibly portray female characters that fight patriarchy and struggle for empowerment,

the hybridism¹ of the colonised woman needs to be understood and both black and white patriarchy needs to be exposed. Amanda Sebestyen (1984) puts it well when she tells women, "It will be hard for us to win, *different as we are*" (98, my emphasis). This illustrates the importance of portraying patriarchy in totality, showing its form, longevity, behaviour and effects. The fact that women encounter it from birth through to adulthood needs to be reflected. It should be shown as a process, not an episode in one's life.

The main objective of this thesis is to examine how patriarchy has been portrayed in *Nervous Conditions*², *So Long A Letter*³ and *The Joys of Motherhood*⁴ and the importance of portraying it fully, capturing the context of female characters living in colonial conditions. *Nervous Conditions* is weighed against the other two, to assess its mastery in portraying patriarchy. In order to do this, I will examine how the female characters of the three novels perceive patriarchy and react to it. I will then marry the two in discussing and comparing the portrayals and account for the one which excels.

In this thesis I argue that in *Nervous Conditions*, patriarchy is portrayed adequately in its indigenous and colonial forms and exposed to be the main source of female oppression. Although much of the female oppression has colonial manifestations such as economic disempowerment, it is the ideology of male supremacy that underlies and fuels the perpetuation of female oppression. In contrast to other novels like *So Long A Letter* and *The Joys of Motherhood*, *Nervous Conditions* fully exposes black patriarchy as an oppressive force that a black woman experiences from birth to womanhood. Its protagonist understands patriarchy fully and can fight it re/proactively. She sees it perpetuated by black men such as her father, brother and uncle. *Nervous Conditions* portrays patriarchy universally, proving that any woman, black or white, dislikes being judged or oppressed for being female, as Tambudzai reiterates in several instances. Tambudzai's ideal world is an androgynous⁵ one where people do not judge each other

¹ A term that is associated with Bhabha. It is used to explain the mutuality of cultures in the colonial and post-colonial process. Refers to cross-cultural exchange (Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* [London: Routledge, 2000] 119).

² Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, Great Britain: The Women's Press, 1988. All pages references refer to this edition.

³ Mariama Ba, *So Long A Letter*, Oxford: Heinemann, 1986. All pages refer to this edition.

⁴ Buchi Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood*, New York: George Braziller Inc. 1979. All pages refer to this edition.

⁵ Androgyny is a term that refers the blending of male and female gender characteristics. Extensively used in gay and lesbian debate but here it is used to refer to having both male and female qualities, to the

by gender or race. It is a world where the treatment of the next person is not based on their being male, female, black or white but just as a fellow human being.

I argue that, as opposed to *So Long A Letter* and *The Joys of Motherhood*, *Nervous Conditions* captures the diversity of women in a colonial patriarchal society and the different ways of reacting to it. This diversity exposes the individuality of colonized subjects, the interrelationship of patriarchy and colonialism and its impact on the colonial woman. Through the protagonist, secondary characters are more vividly featured and their views and experiences are made clear in a more explicit way, leading to a fuller character development. Female oppression is consistently rooted in patriarchy from both indigenous and colonial angles. The end of the novel makes the novel nonprescriptive. I will show that Dangarembga's portrayal of patriarchy in *Nervous Conditions* gives the novel a level of representation and credibility that is unique in novels dealing with female oppression in a colonial context.

In order to fully investigate the face of the patriarchy in the novels under study, I have read them from a radical feminist perspective. Even though other feminist theories also blame patriarchy for female oppression, it is radical feminism that emphasizes on it most. This theory blames the exploitation of women on men because they benefit from female oppression. Society is patriarchal and the family is the key institution of female oppression. Radical feminists believe that women have always been exploited and that only radical change can set them free. However, most radical feminists are separatists and reject collaborating with men. The Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group argues that only lesbians can be true feminists (qtd. in Haralambos 137). Other radicals say separatism should be in activist work whilst others place it in the economic sector. I am using the Radical libertarians, because they emphasise patriarchy whilst leaving room for collaboration with men. Tong argues that:

They believe it is both possible and desirable for gender differences to be eradicated or at least greatly reduced. They aim for a state of androgyny in which men and women are not significantly different. The ideal state is one in which women and men take on the more desirable characteristics of one another. They believe that differences between man and

point of dispensing with the gender construct (Fredrick Cooper and Ann Stoler, (eds) *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987] 53).

woman are socially constructed. If they are removed, equality between men and women can follow (qtd. in Haralambos 137).

This is an apt guide in reading *Nervous Conditions* because it focuses on patriarchy and defines it as a social construct thereby giving room for change. In *Nervous Conditions* men are the subjects and women are objects. The focal point of female oppression is in marriage and the home.

Colonialism is an important feature of the novels under study. The views of Fanon and Bhabha on this issue will be made use of. Fanon contends that every colonized person has been afflicted with “an arsenal of complexes” (Fanon 23), because colonialism is based on racial supremacy, which is illogical and therefore plays upon the nerves of the entire society. Bhabha (qtd. in Schatterman 207) emphasises that for Fanon, all forms of social and psychic alienation are not linked to the soul of the individual but rather are always explained as “alien presences, occlusions of historical progress, and ultimate misrecognition of Man” (208). In fact the epigraph to *Nervous Conditions* is from Sartre’s introduction to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963). Dangarembga clearly uses Fanon’s politicized understanding of the native to investigate the situation of the female subject.

It is important that the scope and limitation of this study are clarified. Even though patriarchy is global and a prevalent problem in all Africa, this study will focus on the areas that are delimited by the novels that are being discussed. Other novels will be discussed but I will focus on the geographical and socio-political setting of Zimbabwe, Senegal and Nigeria, as defined by *Nervous Conditions*, *So Long A Letter* and *The Joys of Motherhood*. The male and western perspectives would have enriched this analysis of patriarchy. However, this thesis cannot address all aspects of patriarchy. I will concentrate on African female writers, as I believe they are better placed to articulate issues of their self-determination. Women writers experience patriarchy and colonialism just like the women readers they are trying to reach. Patriarchy did not start in post-colonial Africa; it was there during pre-colonial times. To avoid stretching the scope of research, this thesis will be primarily concerned with the colonial and postcolonial periods as defined by the novels. Matriarchy is an issue that would illuminate perspectives on patriarchy but for purposes of focus and scope, I will refer to it in

argument, not focus on it per se. The value of this study is that it analyses the effectiveness of Dangarembga in portraying patriarchy in post-colonial Africa. This is relevant and topical to today's post-colonial readership. This study compares Dangarembga with Bâ and Emecheta on the portrayal of patriarchy. It adds to the centring of the authentic voice of the female character. This is important in literary criticism and helps in the credibility of novels that voice the concerns of African women in their societies. It will increase the information known on the significance of post-colonial, neo-colonial and feminist issues. It will show the importance of authentically portraying patriarchy especially the black one, when trying to empower black women. The interrelatedness of patriarchy and colonialism will be explored. This adds to the debate on colonial and post-colonial issues. This study showcases the mastery of an African woman writer in reaching the women readership.

Thesis Outline

The first chapter has given the background of this paper. In Chapter two, I examine how the female characters perceive patriarchy. In Chapter three, I investigate how they react to what they have perceived. In Chapter four, the perceptions are linked with the reactions and there is an assessment of which novel portrays patriarchy better. The last chapter summarises the thesis.

Synopses

As I get into the discussion, brief synopses of the novels will help. *Nervous Conditions* is set in Rhodesia of the 1960s. Tambudzai, sometimes referred to as Tambu, is a young girl from the rural areas. She is the daughter of Jeremiah and Mainini. Nyasha is her cousin. The story is Tambudzai's chronicling of the patriarchal experiences of five women. *The Joy's of Motherhood* is set in Nigeria. It is about Nnu Ego's marital and motherhood trials and tribulations. It shows a woman who sacrifices a lot to take care of her sons and be a good wife. *So Long A Letter* chronicles the letter Ramatoulaye writes to her best friend Aissatou, lamenting her bad marriage to Modou. It is set in a Muslim

society in Senegal. In Chapter 4, I briefly refer to *Parched Earth* and *The Still Born*.⁶ These novels highlight young girls who grow up battling rural and urban patriarchy.

⁶ Alkali Zaynab, *The Stillborn*, Essex: Longman, 1988 and Elieshi Lema, *Parched Earth*, Dar Er Salam: Tanzani Printers Ltd, 2001. All pages of these novels refer to these editions.

CHAPTER 2

THE FACES OF PATRIARCHY

This chapter intends to explore the way the female characters in the novels under study perceive and experience patriarchy. It considers the views of different types of women, young, elderly, married, single, in rural and urban settings. To fully appreciate the portrayal of patriarchy in *Nervous Conditions*, a brief summary of the social setting of the Sigauke family is helpful. As a Shona family, they follow patrilineal kinship system and practice patrilocality. The lines of decent and authority are traced through the father, that is, a man, his brothers and sons. There is a male head that is owed respect and obedience, as the immediate representative of the clan, often defined by a totem. At the time of marriage, a woman exchanges the authority of her father for that of her husband (Broughton. 162). The communities of *So Long A Letter* and *The Joys of Motherhood* are also living in a patriarchal setting, different in geographical setting of course. An analysis of the novels shows that the women perceive patriarchy in similar and also different ways.

A young girl's view

Nervous Conditions opens with Tambu saying,

I was not sorry when my brother died. Nor am I apologising for my callousness, as you may define it, my lack of feeling (1).

Right from the start, it is clear that Tambudzai's problems are from within her own family and from the male part of it. She hates her brother and the extent of her hatred is shocking when read for the first time, as she says not even death can erase it. Through personal experiences and observing what the other women in her family go through, Tambu sees that in her family, men determine what women shall or shall not do and the female is everywhere subsumed by the male. Tambudzai's introduction and narration of the novel testifies that her bitter experiences at the hands of patriarchy, spearheaded by her father, brother and uncle, leave a lasting and largely negative impression on her memory. She internalizes a lot of pain and anger.

The main reason for Tambu's bitterness is that she is denied the opportunity to go to school purely because she is female. Tambu has a brilliant academic record but her father

prefers to educate her brother because Jeremiah believes education is futile for Tambudzai. What she needs are skills to be a good wife and mother. He asks Tambu:

Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother.

Learn how to cook and clean, grow vegetables (15).

Her father deals her the first patriarchal blow, using the institution of marriage to legitimize it. To him being a wife should be the prime of her objectives in life. Academic pursuits are beyond her. The Shona patriarchal culture enables and encourages Jeremiah to educate Nhamo because when Tambudzai gets married, she will go away from her father's control and be under that of her husband's. This is why Jeremiah says, "Tambudzai's sharpness with her books is no use because it will benefit strangers" (56). According to Sally McWilliams, Jeremiah's attitude is typical of patriarchal societies "forcing women to concentrate their activities exclusively in the domestic sphere fosters male supremacy culturally" (qtd. in Sizemore 26). In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Taiwo suffers the same predicament. When she complains about Oshia and Adim being privileged in education, the mother tells her to stop moaning about it, she knows she is a girl (176). The girls have to sell things to ascertain that boys go to school and get good positions in life. Both Babamukuru and Jeremiah are very aware of the close link between education and a child's success. However, to them, success is male and therefore resides in Nhamo. He is given the opportunity to stay with Babamukuru to further his studies. Babamukuru actually says education will enable Nhamo to "distinguish himself academically, at least sufficiently to enter a decent profession" (4).

The adult Sigauke men privilege Nhamo and Chido. As a result, the fathers and sons bond and become members of one club. This is an example of patriarchy not only working at an ideological level, but also as a hegemonic force. This male privileging enables men to become a dominant force in society by amassing educational privileges that translate to economic authority. This allows them to control societal power structures.

From a young age Tambu is shown that femaleness means disqualification from some activities in her family. To the men of this family, "anatomy is destiny," (Belsey 1) male is better than female; her brother is better than her. It actually takes death to persuade the decision makers in this family (who are the men) to let Tambu go to school. This is

indicative of the importance placed on men in this family. The birth of a male child, Dambudzo, nearly robs Tambu of a chance to advance her studies. Babamukuru tells her that he has started saving for him to go to school. Dambudzo is only nine months but his gender makes him a priority over Tambu. The following words emphasise her bitterness:

The needs and sensibilities of the women...were not considered a priority, or even legitimate. That is why I was in Standard Three, instead of in Standard Five, as I should have been by that age. In those days, I felt injustice of my situation every time I thought about it ... thinking about it, feeling the injustice of it, this is how I came to dislike my brother, and not only my brother, but my father, my mother in fact everybody (12).

Evidently this injustice fuels hatred and rivalry amongst the males and females as the women can see that they are being discriminated against. This intense feeling of victimization justifies Tambu's seemingly callous introduction to the novel.

Tambudzai experiences male chauvinism not only from adult males but from young boys too. At Nhamo's young age, he already has internalized the practice of looking down on women and expecting them to serve man's interests in society (Katenje, 4). Dangaremdga says one the reasons Nhamo loathed traveling by bus is because, "women smelt of unhealthy reproductive odours... and the men gave off strong aromas of productive labour" (1). After being denied the chance to go to school, Tambu seeks solace from Nhamo who scornfully says: "I go to school, you go nowhere, ...because you are a girl" (12). Nhamo's views betray a gender bias of seeing women as unclean and negative people. To him, women are tools of reproduction whilst men are the positive hardworking pillars of the society. To paraphrase Katenje, it also shows the rigidity of the sex-roles that denote women's inferior status in this society. This is also seen in the fact that whenever Nhamo returns from school, he leaves his luggage at the trading centre for Netsai to go and carry home, even though the luggage is "not too cumbersome to carry" (9). Tambudzai says he actually prefers that Netsai should strap Rambanai to her back when going to fetch the luggage because "minding children was not a man's duty" (9). Clearly, Nhamo is a young apprentice who is ardently learning the tools of his father and uncle in the patriarchal trade. What Tambudzai sees in her own brother is laziness, cruelty, conceit and self-centeredness. Tambu points out that sending the girls to "fetch the luggage is to demonstrate ... that Nhamo had the power and authority to make [them] do things for him" (10). Tambu sees a young patriarch who is dictatorial and insensitive.

She hates this and wishes Netsai would stand up to Nhamo's bullying. Tambu describes Netsai as "the type that will make a sweet, sad wife" (10). She wants Netsai to assert herself and not be a puppet or an underdog for a man. Tambu makes it clear that there should be a fair division of labour between the siblings.

Nhamo is aware of an ideology that says men are superior to women and able to do something primarily because of their sex. He uses it to justify his sexist attitude that disadvantages his sister. Tambu is face to face with the cruel and oppressive face of patriarchy. Her own brother is telling her that spaces of ambition and achievement are privileged to men. As if this is not enough, when Tambu grows maize to sell to raise money for her school fees, Nhamo steals it to ensure that her aspirations are completely blocked (Katenje, 3). It is important to note that Nhamo benefits from both of his sexist acts, goes to school and gets the maize. Tambu points out that Nhamo's behaviour is culturally correct and sanctioned; he had behaved "extremely as expected" (15). Nhamo's behaviour clearly shows her that the practice of looking down on women and expecting them to serve man's interests is deeply entrenched in her family; her father and brother have shown her that. He wants Tambudzai to understand that being female translates to being second best. When Tambu expresses her fear of failing to raise fees, as a result of her maize going missing Nhamo asks her, "What did you expect? ... Did you really think *you* could send *yourself* to school?" (21, my emphasis). He is not only insensitive to Tambu, he wants her to know that her gender makes her a weak person. She cannot overturn what a man, their father, has decided. She should never expect this to change. Here we see the familial institutionalisation of patriarchy as a historical fact and common sense. Tambu is so furious with Nhamo's maize sabotage that she confronts him. A fight ensues and it is poignant to note that his friends tell him to, "Just hit [her]. That's is what they hear" (23). To start with, the boys show that in this society, there is a dichotomy of the sexes, a polarisation of us (men) versus them (women). At this young age, they have internalized and are conditioned to gender based violence. They think beating women is correct, that is the only language women understand and they need to be disciplined. The boys have been socialized into seeing men as legitimate disciplinarians of women. Easthope asserts that socialization plays a key role in social roles and how they are enacted in society:

Every society assigns new arrivals [i.e. new borns] particular roles, including gender roles, which they have to learn. The little animal born into human society becomes a socialized individual in a remarkably short time... This process of internalizing is both conscious and unconscious... (qtd. in Moyana 27).

When Tambudzai manages to raise school fees and pays them to the headmaster, Jeremiah says this is his money and he demands it. To start with, Tambu worked for it and without his blessing. To him Tambu does not have her own identity. One might argue that he is arguing from a parental point of view but when you consider his views on women and their rights, it is more likely that he is convinced that the money is his mainly because it is raised by a daughter. He actually says he would rather spend the money on beer drinking than sending his daughter to school. He asks:

Have you ever heard of a woman who remains in her father's house? ...She will meet a young man and I will have lost everything (30).

To Jeremiah daughters are a useless and lost cause, as they will go away and carry another man's name. Whenever Babamukuru sends money for fees Jeremiah pays for Nhamo only.

The societal order of greeting reinforces the position of women in this society. When Tambu goes to greet Babamukuru and his family on their return from England, she has to kneel and greet the men first. It is only after greeting the lowest man in status that she greets the women. Tambudzai kneels for Chido who is a teenager because he is male but not for Nyasha because she is female. When food comes, men are served first and when the women's turn comes, the meat is finished and they have only gravy and vegetables. Clearly in this community, women know that they are the 'other' (Katenje, 4) and men are the 'self,' the gender inequalities are obvious.

The view of a colonised girl

In one way or another, colonialism affects the lives of the women in all the novels under study, but it is Nyasha of *Nervous Conditions*, who epitomizes the effect of colonialism on the African woman. Even Tambudzai, the narrator says with hindsight she can see that Nyasha is not only a victim of her femaleness but also of her 'Englishness'.

In Nyasha, we see double patriarchy⁷ at play. She is a victim as a woman and black person. Having been brought up in England and then repatriated home, she is a hybrid of the colonial culture and her indigenous one. She finds it difficult to reconcile the Shona background with the English ways. Nyasha is an ambivalent colonial product. She is critical of that which she has become but has no knowledge of her mother culture to fall back on. Her problems mainly come from her father, who is an epitome of patriarchy from cultural and colonial angles. We see Nyasha through the eyes of Tambudzai.

The rural Tambudzai does not approve of Nyasha. This is because the latter's dress code, eating habits, language and social conduct have changed, as a result of staying in England. When Babamukuru comes from abroad, Tambu is looking forward to a joyful reunion with her cousins, especially Nyasha, whom she has been friends with. Tambu is disappointed to meet a Nyasha who is wearing a short dress that hardly covers her thighs. Clearly, her English background has conditioned her to find such dressing acceptable. Her Shona sense of dressing has been abolished and replaced with an English one. In Fannonian terms, she has internalised the inferiority and resentment of her own blackness, in this case, her Shona dress code. Nyasha's English type of dressing exposes her to alienation from her family. Tambu says she could not condone Nyasha's lack of decorum. She is disgusted; she turns away because Nyasha has 'behaved badly indeed' (52). Unlike the expected Shona child, Nyasha is disrespectful to her father. When Tambu asks Nyasha about her mother, she says, "Don't worry about my mother...She doesn't need to be respected" (78-79). Language compounds the rift between the cousins. When Tambu tries to talk to her cousins, they cannot understand her. Maiguru explains the problem:

They don't understand Shona very well anymore. They have been speaking nothing but English for so long that most of their Shona has gone (42).

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o emphasizes the importance of language to a colonial subject when he argues that English in Africa is a cultural bomb that continues a process of erasing

⁷ A term that was coined by Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka. She argues that colonialism imported the patriarchy that characterized the Europe and America of 19th Century, into the colonized African communities. This colonial patriarchy perpetuated the indigenous patriarchy. This validates the presence of patriarchy before colonialism and that it is not monolithic, there are types of patriarchy. (Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka, Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism. Volume VIII, Number 2, [Kansas: The University of Kansas, 1993] 162).

memories of pre-colonial cultures and history and as a way of installing the dominance of new forms of colonialism:

Written literature and orature are the main means by which a particular language transmits the images of the world contained in the culture it carries. Language as communication and as culture are then products of each other... Language carries culture, and culture carries the entire body of values by which we perceive ourselves and our place in the world. Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history a specific relationship to the world (16).

Nyasha's forgetting of her language is tantamount to her forgetting her culture. She is robbed of a major weapon with which to describe her world and understand herself too. It makes her extended family members feel she has forgotten them. Tambu underscores the importance of remembering one's language when she says, "If I forgot them, my cousin, my mother, my friends, I might as well forget myself" (188). However, whilst Dangarembga's portrayal of Nyasha compliments Wa Thiong'o stand about language being a reservoir of one's culture, it is important to note that it also caricatures Nyasha's character, as language is not the only source of cultural preservation. One questions the credibility of someone losing every word in Shona when they are living with parents who speak Shona. She now dresses, speaks and even eats differently from her people, all because of growing up in England. This makes Nyasha a flat character that is put there especially to further Dangarembga's anticolonial agenda. It makes her more a weapon of political rhetoric than reality.

When Tambu goes to live with Babamukuru, she sees that her uncle is guilty of sexual bigotry just like her father. She notices that Babamukuru treats Nyasha as an appendage of Chido. When Nyasha comes home late, Babamukuru gets very angry and threatens to kill Nyasha, labeling her a whore: 'I cannot have a daughter who behaves like a whore' (99) but says nothing when Chido does the same. This makes Tambu feel just like she felt when she was at her own home:

Just as I had felt victimized at home when Nhamo went to school and I grew maize. *The victimization, I saw was universal.* It didn't depend on *poverty*, on lack of education or on tradition. Even heroes like Babamukuru did it and that was the problem. You had to admit that Nyasha had no tact, you had to admit she was altogether too volatile and strong willed. You couldn't ignore that fact that she had no respect for Babamukuru when

she ought to have lots of it. But what I didn't like was the way *all the conflicts came back to this question of femaleness*. Femaleness as opposed to inferior to maleness (115 – 116, my italics).

Tambu hates the preferential treatment Chido gets, just like Nhamo got over her. She says even though Nyasha is stubborn and unduly disrespectful, that does not legitimise victimising her on the basis of her being female. On several instances, Tambudzai reiterates her hatred of women being oppressed because of their gender. Tambu explains how she reacted to Babamukuru's behaviour:

Exclusion held dreadful horrors for me at that time because it suggested superfluity. Exclusion whispered that my existence was not necessary, making me no more than an unfortunate product of some inexorable natural process. Or else it mocked that the process had gone wrong and produced me instead of another Nhamo, another Chido, another Babamukuru-to-be... (40).

These words show that Tambudzai was convinced that she and the other women in her family were being treated as mistakes in creation. True to his Shona patriarchal upbringing, Nyasha's father expects his daughter to obey, not to question his deeds and words. But Nyasha has grown up in an environment that allows a child to ask a parent questions. To Babamukuru and Tambudzai, Nyasha is not behaving like a proper girl and Shona person. To Nyasha, her father is not behaving like a man and father, who is educated and exposed to the British way of life. She cannot understand how the father who took her to England cannot understand her 'English behaviour' (dressing, eating habits and thinking that she learned in England and is acceptable by English standards) and this breeds rage within her. The mutual suspicion that Wa Thiong'o says colonialism brought to colonial subjects is evident here, father and daughter are mutually antagonistic towards the other (16). Nyasha's patriarchal woes are worsened because of her having been more educated and exposed to world events than the other women. Tambudzai acknowledges that Nyasha's British background has given her some world and political knowledge. She says Nyasha has

an egalitarian nature and had taken seriously the lessons about oppression and discrimination that she had learnt first-hand in England (63).

Tambudzai looks up and admires her cousin who asks her questions she labours to answer and is aware of more than her on several issues. However, it is her being knowledgeable that compounds Nyasha's problems. She is aware of Babamukuru's

subservience to the white missionaries, who made him what he is and hold the reins to his/family economic and social well-being. She knows her father strives to please them. Nyasha can see how her father is powerless to the colonial system. Nyasha blames colonialism for her father's patriarchal attitude. She blames the oppressive nature of colonialism that has trickled down to the colonial subjects oppressing each other. Nyasha expresses her dislike for oppression:

I'm convinced I don't want to-be anyone's underdog. It's not right for anyone to be that. But once you get used to it, well, it just seems natural and you just carry on. And that's the end of you. You are trapped. They control everything you do (117).

Nyasha has a psychoanalytical explanation for her father's tyrannical attitude. The whites oppressed her father and he is in turn oppressing his family. Her father's tyrannical behaviour is white colonial oppression diffused to the blacks. Nyasha can see that her father is a crownless king; he is the king of his home and village but a slave of the colonialists. She cannot marry this with the man who 'bosses' around his family. He is a mixture of oppressor and oppressed. This is exactly what Fanon laments in *Black Skin White Masks*, Babamukuru is 'overdetermined from without' (82). Nyasha can see the circle of abuse, whites abuse the black man so badly and in turn he abuses his wife and daughters. She cannot understand why the father cowers after whites but wants to be superior to his family, especially to the female members of the home.

Nyasha's view is supported by critics like Azodo (1997), who insist that colonialism is to blame because it emasculated the black African man:

There existed a complementarity of male and female roles in pre-colonial African societies and it is during and after colonisation that the downfall of the African woman from a position of power and self-sovereignty to becoming man's helper occurred (202).

However, in *Barrel of A Pen* (1983), Wa Thiong'o shows that while it is true that colonization worsened the status of women in Africa, it is a fact that they were oppressed well before colonization. He says a character in his *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, Gicaamba, clarifies this:

Even before colonialism, we oppressed women giving ourselves justifications: women and property are not friends, two women are two pots of poison, women and the heavens are unpredictable, women cannot keep secrets, a woman's word is believed only after the event (40).

bell hooks in *Ain't I Woman* (1981) argues that during colonialism, oppression was not limited to black men, therefore the fact that they were made to feel small is not an excuse for them to belittle women. I agree with her and if anything, having experienced oppression first hand, black men should be very sensitive and supportive of their women, and avoid propagating oppression. Instead, Mbuya's account of the gender roles, document a history of male dominance. I concur with Ure Mezu's assertions:

African women were traditionally subordinated to sexist cultural mores. ...Colonial rule merely aggravated the situation by introducing a lopsided system in which African men received a well-rounded education, like their European counterparts before the mid-nineteenth century, African women received utilitarian, cosmetic skills in Domestic Science Centers—the kinds of skills that only could prepare them to be useful helpmates of educated and professional men ("Women In", 2).

Colonialism should not be used as a scapegoat. After all as an individual, Babamukuru can decide to be or not to be prejudiced against women. And indeed at the end, we see him starting to change his sexual bigotry and incorporating his wife in the decision making process. Blaming Babamukuru's patriarchal attitude on colonialism takes historical facts as an end, not a means to an end. It reduces black men to victims. Tambu sees all these adverse effects of colonialism.

In *So Long A Letter* there is also double patriarchy. France is the colonizing power. According to Idris Makward (1986) the French colonial policy of assimilation favoured men:

The assimilation policy of the French colonial administration gives the colonial subject, especially the male an exclusive education in French citizenship (273).

* This explains the professional training of the male characters, as opposed to the female. Modou's going to France gives him economic leverage that he converts to high communal status and authority. This enables him to flout the rules of the community governing polygamy, to the extent of marrying a minor. The colonial laws of the land enable him to sell a house without consulting his wife. Ramatoulaye would not have been able to do the same; this would have been opposed on religious, cultural and colonial laws. This view is collaborated by Makward (1986):

Even the adopted French civil code that aims to protect the wife from the culturally and religiously sanctioned extended family's claim to a couple's property grants the husband the ultimate guardianship to their joint property (273).

In *The Joys of Motherhood* the British are the colonizing forces and they, too, privileged men. Tanure Ojaide (2002) says British colonizers were predominantly male and in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, they encouraged male black children to go to school (84). This resulted in creating people like Babamukuru of *Nervous Conditions*, a male class of educated men, advantaged over their women economically. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, only the men hold substantial positions in the railway workshop and the various places run by the colonialists. The women do petty jobs like chopping wood for sale apart from being fulltime mothers and wives. Indeed, the combination of colonialism, Christianity and traditional African customs was lethal for the African woman. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnaife is looked down upon by his wife partly because of the job that he did. African men often found themselves doing menial jobs like being a house servant or a washer, in the case of Nnaife. Women did these duties and doing them emasculates the African men, who are seen by their women to be male-women, as Nnu Ego calls Nnaife. She thinks Nnaife is lazy because he works in the home, unlike Amatokwu who has beautiful biceps from tilling the land. Nnu Ego respects Nnaife more when he gets a job as slasher and also when he is a soldier in Burma, under the British government. Nnu Ego even says Nnaife would have been justified to beat her then, because he could afford it. When she goes to stay with Nnaife, the economy brought about by colonialism, dictates what she does in her marriage and she sees that things are different from the way she would have dealt with them back in Iboza. To paraphrase Makward, the abduction of Nnaife to join the army shows how patriarchal colonialism was. They did not bother to get the consent of the wives in the decision to make their husbands join the British army. Their actions show that they come from a background where a man does not need the permission of his spouse, to do something. The wives are totally sidelined and only appear as beneficiaries to the money the men make, not as any power of authority.

The view of women in polygamy

Polygamy features in all the three texts. However, it is in *The Joys of Motherhood* and *So Long A Letter* that it is extensively discussed. In Nnu Ego's rural and urban community men enjoy privileges that women are denied. A man can marry several wives

but a woman has to accept to share whichever husband is chosen for her. Women are reduced to competing for men as prized possessions. When Agbadi brought his mistress home, his wives are said to have 'pined and bit their nails for a word from him.' (36) The women are played against each other as they compete for who will produce a male child first. This issue of women accepting to share is also present in *So Long A Letter*. Ramatoulaye explains that she accepted to share Modou when she remembered that sharing is one of the teachings encouraged by Islam. This is an example of religion legitimising patriarchy. She actually cites an example of Jacqueline, the Ivorian, who ended up having mental problems because of refusing to share a husband. Most of the women in these polygamous marriages register unhappiness with the status quo. Their men are often insensitive. For example, Agbadi makes love to his lover Ona, when Agunwa and his other wives are within earshot. It is ironic that Nnu Ego, who is a product of such a callous deed, is irate when Adaku loudly enjoys the lovemaking of Nnaife, within her earshot. A wife can be asked to prepare a bed for her husband to make love with another wife. Nnu Ego is aware that her problems are mainly due to societal pressure for women to be married and have sons. Her first marriage collapses mainly because she cannot give birth and she suffers a lot of gender based violence. Her husband beats and taunts her for being childless. She is equated to farm help. Amatokuwu tells her, 'if you can't produce sons, at least you can help with the yams' (33). She is moved to other huts reserved for older wives, so that younger wives can occupy hers. Nnu Ego blames herself for the failure and feels she has let her people down. She is so depressed that she loses a lot of weight. When she tries to get the attention of her husband, he tells her:

I am a busy man, I have no time to waste my precious male seed on a woman who is infertile. I have to raise children for my line. If you really want to know, you don't appeal to me any more. You are so dry and jumpy. When a man comes to a woman he wants to be cooled, not scratched by a nervy female who is all bones (32).

It is clear to Nnu Ego that she is only important when she gives birth and it is her responsibility to be a source of beauty, pleasure and comfort to her husband.

In her second marriage what is abundantly clear is that in her society, a woman has no choice who she marries, that is the prerogative of her father. The fact that she finds the sight of her husband repulsive is immaterial, she knows she is expected to accept and

sleep with him. Ubani clarifies their cultural stand on this issue and gender roles in general:

How can a woman hate a husband chosen for her by her people? You are to give her children and food, she is to cook and bear the children and look after you and them. So what is there to hate? A woman may be ugly and grow old, but a man is never ugly and never old. He matures with age and is dignified (71).

In these marriages, the number of children one has is not an issue a couple discusses. In Nnu Ego's case, she gives birth to nine but only seven survive. The actual childbirth is a mark of womanhood and the less attention one attracts when having the child, the better. Nnu Ego nearly dies trying to be brave during a complicated childbirth. Nnu Ego has to share a room with another wife to her husband. There is congestion in the room and the meagre salary of their husband does not help the situation. There is a lot of fighting as the wives compete for the resources. Led by Adaku, the women try to mount a strike but it is unsuccessful as Nnaife just says he will not give them anything. He knows they cannot let their children starve. The failure of this strike exposes two weaknesses of the women's struggle against patriarchy. Their maternal attachment to their children weakens their resolve and makes the women relent. Nnu Ego also blames patriarchal oppression on biological differences. She dislikes the fact that women's bodies change due to motherhood whilst those of men do not. Ramatoulaye shares this opinion as she feels ugly and unattractive after twelve deliveries and cites this as one of the reasons for putting up with her marriage. Nnu Ego laments that motherhood causes changes to female bodies whilst fatherhood leaves their husbands in "masculine slumber" and says "The whole arrangement is so unjust"(119). In all three novels, the relatives of the husband have a lot of control over the wives.

The view of an educated woman

As an educated woman, wife and mother, Maiguru shows Tambudzai that patriarchy has an educated face. She is highly educated but so subservient to her husband that in her marriage, she commands less authority than her daughter. Maiguru's character shows Dangarembga's mastery in capturing the real predicament of women in patriarchal societies today (Katenje, 6). There are the educated Maigurus who are pitifully

subservient whilst there are also the liberated Lucias who are illiterate, but able to set their own parameters in life and invade male space.

Maiguru holds an MA degree but this fact is muted whilst her husband's educational qualifications that are similar to hers are trumpeted. She works but her husband controls her salary. The reason for this is given: she has been prevented by marriage from doing things she wanted to do (102). Once again, marriage legitimises and perpetuates patriarchy. Maiguru puts up with a lot of unfair practices like cooking and looking after unending streams of in-law visitors. She is not consulted when decisions are made. She is expected to spend every Christmas with her in-laws. Katenje argues that it is such abuse that enables Babamukuru to look after the family of his lazy brother and play the role of the benevolent patriarch (10). She never drives any of their two cars.

In *So Long A Letter*, Ramatoulaye is a trained teacher. Her letter shows that her husband Modou and her in-laws are oppressive, ungrateful and abusive people. The letter reveals a wife who has been mistreated for over 30 years. When this narrative opens, Ramatoulaye has lost her husband Madou Fall and she writes a letter to her long time friend Aissatou. She says the letter is also a diary that she is using 'to prop my distress.' (1) Her source of distress is the *mirasse* because of memories of her life with Modou. Ramatoulaye writes of a cruel husband who uses his patriarchal culture to further his promiscuous and selfish agenda. The traditional practices facilitate and perpetuate female oppression. Ramatoulaye has waited patiently for Modou to return from France. On his return, he disregards the needs of his wife and children. Driven by lust and selfishness, Modou marries a second wife who is not only too young for him but the best friend of his daughter. Ramatoulaye is not consulted so he is wrong legally and culturally. Ramatoulaye is pained and pities her young co-wife so much that she describes Binetou as "a lamb slaughtered on the altar of affluence" (39). He even mortgages the house that his wife helped to pay for behind her back.

Maiguru and Ramatoulaye's putting up with their situations, shows that having access to intellectual resources like a masters degree does not necessarily translate to ability to control material ones and deciding one's destiny. One can be educated and be in gender chains whilst others can be uneducated and free. We need to go beyond the intellectual acquisition to find the source of revolutionary action like that of Tambudzai and Lucia.

By investigating the ideology which fuels the power relations, we can understand and appreciate why female characters like Maiguru are oppressed, even when they are in adequate or even abundant supply of educational and material resources. This can explain why, even when a woman is the one bringing in the bulk of the material resources, she can continue to uphold male supremacy. Lucia is a direct opposite of these educated women. She is assertive and shows that it does not take going to school for an MA to hate female oppression. The power to resist oppression is natural for some women.

A source of 'providence'

In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambudzai registers her gratitude for Babamukuru's kindness in providing for his and her family. It is clear his generosity inspires Tambu to be successful and emulate him in future. Tambudzai tells us that Babamukuru provided for them out of a sense of duty and her description of the economic assistance testifies to its relevance. It is therefore very easy for one to say patriarchy has advantages, especially considering Tambudzai's economically challenged background. Schatterman (1999) argues that Babamukuru's behaviour shows that he has not become a black bourgeois, colonialism has not taken away his sense of responsibility (209). Esther Smith (1986) asserts that it is poignant that Babamukuru takes it upon himself to help his less fortunate relatives financially and educate the children of his brother (40). I agree that Babamukuru's help is very helpful. However, this 'providence' is also a major source and base of his patriarchal power. His economic power allows and legitimizes him to be the sole decision maker. It ascribes him a male hegemony by educating men mainly and concentrating power on them. The fact that Babamukuru is the source of food, clothes, shelter and their dreams causes Tambu and his nuclear family members to depend on him. It is not surprising that whatever he says is regarded to be law. We see that the *dare*⁸ ratifies whatever he says. Being male and the sole educated person, he makes education and success look male.

⁸ Dare is a decision making body occupied by men. The few women who go there represent men and are expected to uphold patriarchal views. (Jane Wilkinson, (ed) *Talking with African Writers*. [London: James Currey, 1990] 21).

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the female characters share a lot in the way they perceive and experience patriarchy. It is clear that its arm is very long, touching the lives of women of all walks of life, young Tambu and Nyasha, the old Mbuya, polygamous Nnu Ego and Ramatoulaye, educated Maiguru, illiterate Mainini and the rural Lucia. They all lament its oppressive nature and the way it polarizes the genders. They all feel inferior to men and are voiceless. It is clear that it is operating at ideological and hegemonic levels; its source is their own black men. Christine Sizemore (1997) buttresses this view when she says Tambu's home and society is rife with

endemic sexism and patriarchal attitudes. The force of blinding tradition bond *African* men, in a hegemonic system that nourishes and protects their interests (70, my emphasis)

They predominantly experience it in marital, rural and home settings. Some of the women battle it in educational issues and urban settings. However, after patriarchy strikes the female characters, it is the space between the perception of being a patriarchal victim and the decision to take steps to empowerment and self-determination, which decides the longevity of patriarchy in the life of the female character. In the next chapter, I look at how the women of these characters react to their subjugation.

CHAPTER 3

NEGOTIATING THE SPACE BETWEEN SILENCE AND VOICE

The trick with these silent words [broad, dog, bag, bitch]

Is to walk in the spaces between them. Margaret Atwood, *Cat's Eye*.

Neither, Tambudzai, Mainini, Maiguru nor Nnu Ego and Ramatoulaye, glorifies being oppressed. Whether they remain silent or manage to rise against patriarchy depends on many factors. Some of them can even remain in the space between. Jill Taylor (1997) argues that many girls ...[often] live in a territory between voice and silence. (qtd. in Sizemore 109). The problem is not really that they do not know what to do but to do what is against the society. This is seen as a radical thing and can get the girls labeled social misfits. She says research has established that it is not the core gender identity itself that is problematic when establishing a feminine identity, it is the identification with a negatively valued gender category (110-111). The challenge is in doing what is frowned upon by society and seen as the wrong thing to do.

This Chapter examines how the female characters react to patriarchy and we see them reacting diversely. The reactions will be traced from silence to different forms of fighting it. The first page of *Nervous Conditions* registers this diversity. Tambudzai summarises her narrative by saying:

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

Silence

Tambu's grandmother Mbuya, advises Tambu that the best thing to do is to accept the second-class societal position of women, 'endure and obey men, for there is no other way.' (19) To her, patriarchy is invincible, an age-old rock that cannot be moved. Trying to fight it is insane and futile. However, Mbuya contributes to Tambu's defiant stand against patriarchy, despite her apparent resignation. She grounds Tambu culturally and this cushions her critique of the colonial culture, she has something to fall back on, unlike Nyasha. Tambu learns the history, value and beauty of their land, which is being eroded

by urbanization that has come with colonization. Tambu knows the heroes and legends of her people, how to grow food and Mbuya gives her land that enables her to grow the maize she uses to fight her patriarchal father.

This thesis places Nnu Ego's reaction to patriarchy in the "silent" category because she largely complies with the status quo and works tirelessly to fit into its moulds. After her first oppressive marriage, she starts another one primarily in her search of becoming the mother of sons, as prescribed by her society. After Ubani's speech stating the principle of male supremacy of their culture, she accepts her predicament. She knows that not even her father, who loves her very much, will entertain her protests not to marry Nnaife because she finds him repulsive. She decides to focus on the fact that this man fathers sons. Like Mainini, Nnu Ego works very hard to educate her sons, especially Oshia because that is what society dictates and she expects these boys to look after her in old age. Throughout the text, Nnu Ego takes motherhood to be a long time sacrifice as one suffers for her children. She says she realized that:

Part of the pride of motherhood was to look a little unfashionable and be able to drawl with joy: "I can't afford another outfit, because I am nursing him, so you see I can't go anywhere to sell anything." One usually received the answer, "Never mind, he will grow soon and clothe you and farm for, so that your old age will be sweet (80).

Nnu Ego's sons get educated and go abroad. Oshia is not happy that his parents keep having children when they evidently cannot afford them and laments that the salaries of jobs open to Africans are very meagre. When he starts to work, he does not even help out with Adim's fees even though he could have afforded it. Of course Adim, Nnu Ego and Nnaife are very hurt by this, especially when Oshia opts for further studies when he is expected to take over family responsibilities. This proves to be a double-edged sword for Nnu Ego as she fast discovers that the sons are hers when they disobey their father, they are only their father's when they obey him. The unbecoming behaviour of the sons is blamed on the way she brought them up not only by Nnaife but by his relatives and also the Ibuza community in Lagos. Nnu Ego's sons neither send her money nor maintain any contact. Her end is miserable and lonely:

She used to go to the sandy square called Otinkpu, near where she lived, and tell people there that her son was in "Emelika," and that she had another one also in the land of the white men—she could never manage the name Canada. After such wandering on one

night, Nnu Ego lay down by the roadside, thinking that she had arrived home. She died quietly there, with no child to hold her hand and no friend to talk to her. She had never really made many friends, so busy had she been building up her joys as a mother (224).

Her husband and the male children she worked so hard to send to school have abandoned her. She is failed as a wife, mother and human being.

Ramatoulaye of *So Long A Letter* also fits the category of silent woman. She dutifully accepted all that Modou sent her way in this marriage. Ramatoulaye is said to have been resourceful, inspiring, devoted, full of dignity and *silent*. In her society, silence is a source of female dignity culturally and religiously. Like Maiguru, Ramotoulaye is patiently generous with the unending stream of in-laws that inundate her home. She gives birth to twelve children, has two miscarriages, in a space of twenty-five years. Just like Jeremiah who wants a second wife regardless of his wife's genuine efforts to have children, Modou desires a second wife and what he wants, he gets. Ramatoulaye accepts the polygamy because Islam allows it. She receives the news of the impending marriage with a smiling face, hiding the rage she is seething with inside. After the becoming polygamous, Modou abandons Ramatoulaye and her children and sets up home with Binetou. He provides for his second wife lavishly, buying vehicles for her and his mother at their beck and call. Ramatoulaye and her children are left to use public transport and practically fend for themselves. Ramatoulaye suffers the pain of being dumped for a younger woman and has to suffer with the children alone. When Modou dies, his will leaves her with nothing. There are no savings for her and her children instead he leaves debts. His house, one she had helped to save for, would go to Lady-Mother-in-Law, the furniture from France to the new wife and the local furniture would again go to Lady-Mother-in-Law. This was really adding, "insult upon injury" (10). However, she is faithful in behaving as he, religion and society expected, even though he is gone for good and has mistreated her. She actually makes it clear that

I hope to carry out my duties fully. My heart concurs with the demands of religion. Reared since childhood on their strict precepts, I expect not to fail" (8).

Ramatoulaye's obedience is so concrete that Ajayi-Soyinka describes it to be almost masochistic (qtd. in Ojaide 108). She obeys a tradition and religion that idly watched as Modou sold their house and left her with nothing. To her, it is a religious and cultural

duty, a responsibility she must fulfill. Ramatoulaye herself says this mourning period, "is a period dreaded by every Senegalese woman." (11). Because

beyond her possessions she gives up her personality, her dignity, becoming a thing in the service of the man who has married her (4).

After taking stock of all that she went through, Ramatoulaye decides to bring up her daughters in more assertive manners. In a gesture that shows she admires Aissatou's assertive stand to patriarchal situations, she names one of her daughters after her. Ramatoulaye works hard to educate her daughters and encourages them to be intimate with their husbands and marry men who are not oppressive.

Quiet resistance

The initial reaction one gets of Tambu's mother is that she is resigned to her fate and accepts patriarchy as a norm. Her daughter wants to work hard and improve her status in life by excelling at school but her mother prophesies doom, treating her ambition of success as foolhardy pomposity:

Do you think that you are so different, so much better than the rest of us? Accept your lot and enjoy what you can get for it. There is nothing else to be done' (20).

To Mainini, Tambu must count her blessings and be resigned to her fate. Tambudzai understands her mother's resignation. She knows her mother feels sorry for her and wants to prepare her for the disappointment she would meet in life. Mainini is very hardworking but her husband is extremely lazy. He perpetually begs from his brother. We are told he develops 'an aptitude' for it (31). Tambu's mother literally does everything, growing vegetables and doing several house chores. In fact the step-by-step account of the way Tambu and her mother work around the house round the clock whilst Jeremiah loafs around, leaves the reader with a pathetic insipid feeling. He decides to be polygamous, because Mainini is having difficult pregnancies and actually loses four children. Lucia has been brought to be a second child bearer and Mainini is not consulted. This move insinuates that her identity in this marriage is principally that of a child-bearer; failure to fulfil that role justifies the addition of reinforcement. This should have solicited some complaints and/or resistance from her. Mainini chooses to follow the dictates of marriage in her society and suffer in silence. It is easy to place her in the above category but as the narrative unfolds, she proves to be a fighter in her own subtle ways. Mainini facilitates

Tambu's growing of maize when she persuades her husband to let her fail on her own. She says "the girl must have a chance to do something for herself, to fail for herself... She is willful and headstrong" (24). This statement betrays a mother who resorts to subtle strategies to give her daughter a chance to achieve her dream in life. She convinces her husband to give Tambudzai a chance to succeed. In her own quiet way, she manages to fight patriarchy for the good of her daughter.

Defiance and fierce determination

When Tambudzai is told that she is not going to school and given reasons for that sexist decision, she decides it is unfair and resolves to go to school anyway. Her first reaction to patriarchy is defiance and initiative. This demonstrates how resolute she is to attain self-determination. When she complains to her mother about this issue, the mother replies by citing the history of female oppression, which has been worsened by colonialism:

This business of *womanhood is a heavy burden*. How could it not be? Aren't we the ones who bear children? When it is like that you can't just decide today I want to do this, tomorrow I want to do that, the next day *I want to be educated!* When there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one who has to make them. And these things are not easy; you have to start learning them early, from a very early age. The earlier the better so that it is easy later on. Easy! As if it is ever easy. And these days it is worse, with the *poverty of blackness* on one side and *the weight of womanhood* on the other. Aiwa! What will help you, my child, is to *learn to carry your burdens with strength* (16, my emphasis).

So, Tambudzai's experiences teach her that motherhood robs women of personal choice. Mainini stresses that for her own good, Tambudzai should accept this male rule of law very quickly. She also shows that she is aware of the effects of capitalism, which has made black people poorer. Women suffered twice as they have two weights to balance, the one of blackness and that of human dignity. Her speech ends with her calling on her daughter to master the courage to carry the female burden.

Tambudzai refuses to be of secondary importance to her brother. She is so defiant that Tambu's mother says:

She is willful and headstrong. She won't listen to me. I am tired of telling her things to which she pays no attention (24).

Dangarembga seems to be saying being strong-willed is the first step to defying male supremacy and fighting patriarchy. It helps 'to escape' it. Tambudzai's stand against sexist attitudes is clear, founded and not prescribed. Dangarembga also shows that fighting patriarchy not only takes persistence but initiative too. No one tells Tambu to raise money to go to school and how to do so. She does not give up until she succeeds. This shows that fighting patriarchy is a personal decision and works better when it is homegrown. This allows her to own, evaluate, and appraise her struggle and thereby sustaining it, to realize her dreams and ambitions.

In *So Long A Letter* and *The Joys of Motherhood*, there are also female characters that fight patriarchal oppression and decide to be independent. Aissatou, Ona and Adaku are some of the women who do not succumb to the patriarchal oppression that their societies dictate to them. The husband of Aissatou (Ramatoulaye's friend) decides to get a second wife too but she rejects it outrightly. Aissatou writes a short to the point letter to her husband, stating that polygamy is unacceptable to her: 'I say there can be no union of bodies without the heart's acceptance' (31). Her letter makes it clear that she sees polygamy as despicable and her husband has lost her respect. She concludes by saying:

I am stripping myself of your love, your name. Clothed in my dignity, the only worthy garment, I go my way (32).

It is crucial to note that Aissatou denounces the societal stand on marriage. She is resolute and does not look backward. She seeks inspiration and refuge in education: 'books saved you.' (32) After this Aissatou became professional and could provide for herself, 'her back turned on those who wanted light enjoyment and easy relationships' (33). She provided for her children and they were growing up well. She pioneers a new life.

In *The Joy's of Motherhood*, Ona is a very beautiful woman with whom Agbadi is passionately in love. She is a strong character in this novel. Ojaide (2002) says it is Ona's "self-pride, her assertiveness, and rather cocky nature that make her a strong woman" (83). Agbadi was attracted by her ability to combine stubbornness with arrogance (11). She knew the power she had over him and enjoyed administering it. Ona used her beauty as a bait to taunt and keep him in suspense. Even when the father died, she still did not marry Agbadi; she only moved to stay with him for the welfare of Nnu Ego. She was happy with the birth of her daughter and died having a son, as if she was not meant

to succumb to the dictum of yearning to produce sons. It is interesting to note that in *Agbadi*, we see the reversal of the gender roles. Even though he is patriarchal with his other wives, with Ona, he plays the traditional feminine role.

Adaku is Nnu Ego's co-wife and one of the characters that show that patriarchy can be challenged. From the beginning she shows traces of being an opinionated character. Her stay with Nnu Ego reveals that she is able to reprimand their husband. She instigates a strike against the husband because of the meager up-keep he supplies and refuses to apologise for it. When Nnu Ego rudely sends away her friend Nwakusor and this issue is handled in a manner that is biased towards Nnu Ego because she is the mother of sons, she retaliates decisively. She becomes a prostitute. This gives her financial independence. She is the envy of many women, including Nnu Ego who sees that she is free to be what she wants, dresses better and is happier. Nnu Ego's admiration for Adaku's life as a prostitute has led to Emecheta being accused of portraying prostitution as a liberation strategy for women. Acholonu argues that

For Emecheta, individual freedom is tantamount to sexual freedom and sexual freedom to promiscuity. Many of her female readers would argue against her generalizations on marriage, on promiscuity as a way of gaining emancipation for women (qtd. in Ure Mezu 5).

Brizee brings a contrary view:

Only Adaku in this novel, emerges from the cultural chaos in Lagos, as the hero-her children, as members of the new elite, free from the victim status under the British government and move towards a semi-autonomous status as citizens of a free Africa (qtd. in Ure Mezu 6).

At the heart of this debate is whether prostitution is a source of female liberation. I believe when compared to the type of marriages presented in this paper, prostitution has a certain degree of emancipation. Adaku gets paid for the sex she offers and is economically empowered unlike the wives who are physically and mentally abused, do not have an economic say in the family but are expected to have sex, whether they want to or not. However, I question the quality and sustenance of liberation of that kind. It is not the ideal because the woman is a slave of money and can be sexually abused by her clients. Her doing something that is regarded immoral puts her at the fringe of society and degrades her. True liberty should leave one with self-pride.

Just like in *Nervous Conditions*, the younger female characters in these two novels fight patriarchy more aggressively than the older ones. Even the younger Ramatoulaye is more vibrant than the older one. Like Mainini and Maiguru, the older Ramatoulaye shows her resignation when she advises her daughter, who is about to confront her brother's teacher over some injustice: "Life is an eternal compromise" (72). Her daughter Daba is more independent and her relationship seems more promising than her parents'. Upon discovering that her father has married her friend, she characterizes it as an insult to her mother and implores her to leave him:

Break with him, mother! Send this man away. He has respected neither you nor me. Do what Auntie Aissatou did; break with him. Tell me you'll break with him. I can't see you fighting over a girl my age (39).

Daba disapproves of her mother's acceptance of polygamy and predicts that her mother has 'not finished suffering' (46). She confronts and humiliates her father in public.

Aissatou has a boyfriend who is portrayed to be sensitive towards women and their relationship is said to be built on love and intimacy. They are so close that Ramatoulaye envies them.

Fluctuating responses to patriarchy

The discussion above shows that reactions to patriarchy do not only differ from person to person, even the same person can react differently. Tambudzai also exemplifies this because the rural Tambudzai fights patriarchy differently from the urban one.

Babamukuru orders a Christian marriage for Tambu's parents and this presents Tambu with a problem because she disagrees with it. Once again, Tambudzai asserts herself and - carves a niche, which enables her to grow a new identity for herself, but in a subtle and different way from the rural Tambudzai. On the morning of the wedding she is so opposed to the wedding, she gets into a paralysis and has an out-of-body experience and fails to get out of bed. She does not attend the wedding and says she is pleased that the decision is hers (165). What is crucial to note is that she does not confront her uncle directly like she did with her father. No reasons are given to account for this change in tactics. However, it shows that a person does not react in a uniform manner. Babamukuru punishes Tambu for defying him (166-167). Babamukuru probably hopes to make her realize she is wrong and not repeat it. However, Tambudzai reacts differently. She says

she is glad to serve the punishment and sees it as a price for her newly acquired identity (167). As a result, she happily serves the punishment and does not even want help in completing it. Instead of being deterrence, it becomes an incentive for future gains. This incident shows that resistance to patriarchy is sustainable if the woman rebelling finds the act rewarding.

Defiance to the point of illness

In all the three novels there are characters that defy patriarchy to the point of illness. However, the other characters are minor ones while Nyasha stands out. She mounts a fierce resistance against patriarchy, until colonial effects and her father's patriarchal attitude; take a heavy toll on her mental and physical health. She is outspoken but all she has is her voice, she lacks a cultural background. Taylor (1997) established that such a situation is dangerous:

Efforts to be strong, self-reliant, and outspoken can be...effective survival strategies in a hostile environment. These efforts can cease to be adaptive, however, when they move to a position that precipitates disconnections from others, covering over vulnerabilities and the desire for relatedness (qtd. in Sizemore 114).

Nyasha wants to criticize colonialism and the patriarchal attitude of her father but has no culture of her own to fall back on. Her exposure has given her intelligence and insight on how corrosive colonialism is. Tambu says Nyasha had the ability "to pluck out the heart of a problem and present it to me in ways that made sense" (151). She also says under Nyasha's tutelage she starts getting exposed to thoughts, which now "linger and chip away at my defenses" (151). However, her disconnection from the Shona culture and her extended family leaves her prone to psychological isolation. Even her nuclear family cannot understand her. This alienation makes Nyasha fail to connect with her people, making it harder for her to tackle the condescending, patriarchal attitude of her father. Even at school she is a social misfit, she is labeled 'white' and immoral. Tambu tells us that Nyasha did not have many friends there:

The girls did not like the way she spoke.... 'She thinks she is white... She is proud...loose' (94).

The language barrier also complicates her battle against her father. She needed her cultural memory for her mental health and to gain credibility from her father, family

members and community. This would have given her a base to argue from and justification for criticizing something. In an interview with Wilkinson, Dangarembga herself underscores Nyasha's predicament:

Nyasha doesn't have anything to forget, for she never knew, she was never taught her culture and origins and this forms some great big gap inside her. Tambudzai on the other hand, is quite valid in saying that she can't forget because she has that kind of experience. Nyasha is so worried about forgetting because it's not there for her to remember. Tambudzai is so sure of the framework of her very being there is no way that she would be able to forget it (qtd. in Wilkinson 11).

Indeed, Nyasha's failure to speak her mother tongue leaves her cultureless and this complicates her fight against patriarchy. She is like a tourist in her own home, an outsider who has no grounding to question that which she disagrees with. She cannot understand and define who she really is. Nyasha is in a worse predicament because she is split between her Shona black self and the white colonial mask⁹. Part of her wants to confirm her blackness, the other, her Englishness. Nyasha cannot understand her father's cultural background. She does not know how he has been socialized to behave as a father and husband. So she cannot follow why people grovel at him. Nyasha cannot fathom how a British-educated man can be so dictatorial and expect his daughter, whom he took to England against his mother's advice, to have values of a traditional Shona girl.

The way colonisation affects Nyasha, aggravates the battle between her and her father, who was born and bred in a patriarchal environment. Due to her English experiences, Nyasha hates having her whereabouts policed by her father especially when Chido's are not. She does not understand why her father has no qualms about calling her a rude word like 'whore'. Most daughters would resent such treatment from their fathers but Nyasha's colonial exposure intensifies her dislike. She sees it as not only unjust but also demeaning and wrong. Nyasha expects an adult to discuss issues in a level-headed manner, consultatively and with explanations. Instead, her father communicates aggressively, threateningly and by making unilateral decisions. She finds him hypocritical, unfair and has no respect for him. It is not surprising that she fights him back during one of their fierce quarrels.

⁹ The English (who are also colonizers) way of life Nyasha has been brought up in that is causing her alienation from her black identity, family and community.

This situation is especially unhealthy for her battles against patriarchy because it isolates her from her family womenfolk and most importantly, her mother. It is not surprising that Nyasha's mother actually says her daughter is confused; her head is full of loose ends. If the mother had identified and owned Nyasha's cause, the two women would have been able to bond and build an 'alliance' commonly known as sisterhood, that Ramazanoglu (1989) says is very effective in fighting patriarchy (192).

All the pressure with her father and family in general makes her want to rebel and not do what her father tells her to do. One of the things he wants her to do is to eat and finish her food, so she forces herself to throw up. She develops Anorexia Nervosa. The choice of disease is of significance. It is not associated with Africans and even doctors dispute that Nyasha is its victim. However, Nyasha's having this disease universalises it in the same way that this novel makes patriarchy universal. We have patriarchy in indigenous and colonial settings, proving that it is not a western preserve but is global. Just like English women, African women can use their bodies to fight a problem.

Nyasha lacks a sense of belonging and feels castigated by everyone. She fails to cope. She knows the white system is abusing her as a black person and her own father, a black man, who should understand the pain of oppression, is abusing her too. Nyasha is a victim of double patriarchy and certainly occupies Bhabha's 'space of splitting.' Schatterman (1999) quotes Bhabha who speaks of the dangers of being in a situation like Nyasha's where she identifies with the colonialists on the one hand, and her own people, on the other:

The compulsory identification with a persecutory 'They' is always an evacuation and emptying of the 'I' (142).

Nyasha feels an 'emptying' and is 'distabilised.' Her form of splitting is double because she is victimised as a person and as a woman. At the end, she loses her mind, after failing to reconcile the double alienation. Her mental breakdown culminates in her saying:

Do you see what they have done? They've taken us away... All of us. They've deprived you of you, him of him. Ourselves of each other (200).

Towards the end, Nyasha finds solace in making delicate pots that she labours not to crack. This symbolizes her will to rebuild her past, reconnect with her ancestors and have a base and somewhere to belong. She is searching for wholeness, but the clay shows that

this is a difficult and delicate task. Nyasha violates her own body in protest of her father and colonialism's tyranny. Siga Jayne says Nyasha:

uses her body to threaten her life and through this threat to try to shake her father's authoritarian hold, all the while doing nothing to confront him (qtd. in Webb 12).

I agree that she uses her body as a form of protest, but not that she never wanted to bring the issues into the open. Given the character of her father, I believe Nyasha brought the issues out as much as she could have. Babamukuru's words and conduct made it clear he did not entertain any dialogue on how he conducted his home affairs. The way he treated his wife and the silence he demanded in the house speak for itself (113).

Nyasha knows they cannot understand her, neither can she, them. Colonialism has introduced differences that heighten conflict and render the two sexes estranged. She then shreds her history books and smashes her belongings. She confirms her alienation when she says, "I'm not one of them but I'm not one of you" (199). She cannot fit into either of the camps. The only place she can survive is in the psychiatric unit, which is where she is when the novel ends.

Mainini also gets ill as a result of her battles against her brother-in-law and colonial effects. She blames Babamukuru and the 'Englishness' for the death of Nhamo. She then becomes very depressed, frail and mentally unstable for some time. She is quite traumatised and fears that Tambudzai will also die of the same disease. Babamukuru also complains of severe headaches and these get worse when he is fighting with Nyasha.

In *So Long A Letter* there are also instances of illness developed from patriarchal problems. Ramatoulaye talks of Jacqueline who had a nervous breakdown because of marital problems. She refused to convert to her husband's religion and to share him. He starts to have extra-marital affairs and she is so broken hearted, she loses a lot of weight, develops mental problems and becomes suicidal.

In *The Joy's of Motherhood*, the senior wife of Agbadi, Agunwa, is said to have died of a nervous breakdown, due to Agbadi having brought his mistress to sleep with him right in his courtyard in the presence of the wives. When Agbadi learns of this reason for her death, he callously dismisses the issue by saying: "Agunwa was too mature to mind that. Why, if she behaved like that what kind of example would that be to the younger wives" (22). Nnu Ego develops a nervous condition twice. Firstly, when her first son,

Ngozi, dies. She attempts suicide and Nwakusor rescues her. "Her eyes were unfocused and glazed, looking into vacancy". (7) When Nwakusor sees her, she is making a dance like that of a mad person and has so much power she floors two men who try to save her. She fights depression for some days. The second instance is when her sons let her down at the end of the novel. The reality of being neglected by the sons made her go "downhill very fast" (224). She was finally 'broken' by rumours that Oshia had married a white woman. Her "senses started to give way". She became vague and emotionally unstable (224). She wondered at night and moved about addressing people about her sons.

Fighting through domesticating the 'Englishness'

Unlike Nyasha, Tambu uses her ties with Shona tradition to fight the Shona patriarchal tradition. This enables her to survive and not be overwhelmed by the forces against her. She knows how to relate with the girls at the mission school. She is grateful to her uncle and aunt, as they are the ones who have accorded her an opportunity to realize her dream of education. She knows the expected behaviour of a female relative and a Shona girl in general. Tambu is proud of her extended family:

Chatting to aunts and cousins as we waited for the *sadza* to thicken, pouring in more mealie-meal when it had, I stopped feeling excluded . . . exclusion held dreadful horrors for me at that time because it suggested superfluity. Exclusion whispered that my existence was not necessary (39-40).

Unlike Nyasha, Tambu feels included and Taylor warns of the dangers of exclusion:

Psychological health and development . . . are grounded in one's relationship with self and others. Too great a loss of relationship poses a serious threat to healthy development (45).

Tambudzai's connection with her family and tradition connects her with her culture. This gives her a comfort zone, a base from which to counter and criticize any force that threatens her. This helps her not to lose herself in the colonial education she is 'imbibing'. Even before she leaves the village she is attracted to the 'white' type of education, she looks up to the British trained aunt and uncle. She has already started to experience the "Two facedness" of Lucy in Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* (1990). This is the "Double consciousness" of Du Bois:

the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity (qtd. in Gilman 3).

Tambu just like Nyasha is being made to internalize inferiority from two fronts, as a black person and as a woman. Katrak (1997) says such people are made to “despise blackness in every form...skin, speech patterns, food” (qtd. in Belsey 10). Tambudzai’s elaborate description of the beauty and comforts of Babamukuru’s house shows that she thinks it is a better place than the village. Her mother is afraid of losing Tambu to the British culture: ‘You couldn’t expect the ancestors to stomach so much Englishness’ (203). It is the solid ancestral grounding that insulates Tambu against an identity crisis even when she moves away and grows distant from her mother and the nuclear family. In the interview with Wilkinson, Dangarembga explains that:

Tambu knows exactly who she is, a Shona girl. Her battle against patriarchy is more focused because she is grounded on the cultural angle and therefore, in accordance with her identity as a ‘good Shona girl’, she escapes Nyasha’s destructive ‘English’ habits like smoking, lack of tact when talking to parents and flirting with boys (151).

Typical of a Shona girl, she is very obedient to Babamukuru. It is when Babamukuru himself violates the cultural facets, for example on her parents’ wedding that she gets into conflict with him. Even then, she is not abusive or physical in her rebellion; she does not fight or insult him. Tambu takes a stand that shows she respects her Shona traditions and is not buying into western influences wholesale. In so doing she avoids becoming what Fanon calls the ‘native bourgeoisie’.

MacWilliams (1997) argues that Tambudzai’s mesmerisation with town life shows that her main agenda in this novel is education and Nyasha is to blame for derailing her (qtd. in Sizemore 151). I disagree. Right from the start, what Tambudzai declares war against is gender inequality. Getting educated is her major weapon in her fight against patriarchy. Education is prized as a male privilege. She wants to appropriate it for that reason and to use it to empower herself, so as to be an independent person and help her family. The main reason she sells maize and goes to live with Babamukuru is not just to go to school. It is to get educated so that she can be a person who is complete in her own right and “escape female victimization” (203). Female self-determination is her main goal. She makes it clear at the beginning of the novel and throughout it, what she hates is discrimination based on femaleness. In fact, it is this characteristic of Tambu that enables Dangarembga to show that hatred of female oppression is not a colonial product or English importation. Tambudzai shows that it is natural and logical for a woman in a

colonial context to yearn self-determination from a young age, rural and familial setting and as a personal principle. Tambu hates being oppressed even before she understands the cancerous destructive habit of colonialism. As an African woman, she just does not want to be second best to a man. She wants to be valued and treated with respect like any human being.

Tambudzai's close cultural grounding shows that fighting patriarchy does not mean abandoning one's positive cultural morals. Values that promote human worth need to be upheld. For example, dressing in a culturally sensitive manner, respecting one's parents, and knowing one's cultural values and history.

Fighting through cultural grounding and collaborating with men

In *Nervous Conditions* men are mainly responsible for the suffering of women but some help them, though minimally. Mr Matimba is the only man who is portrayed to be free of patriarchal attitudes and helps Tambudzai on his own volition. Mr Matimba takes her to Umtali and shows her how to sell mealies to whites. Creamer (1997) argues that Matimba teaches her how to milk the colonialist's pity and the power of the whites and use it to advance herself (qtd. in Verba 12). He proves that there are men who can assist in the development of women. Matimba is a Shona man who is educated but chooses to support the education of girls in his society. Through him, Dangarembga shows that patriarchy is a social construct and some men, few they might be, can help fight female oppression. However, it is important to note that Mr Matimba comes in after Tambudzai has already taken an unshakable stand, shown initiative and fierce determination to plant the maize and vowed to take herself to school. Her mother and grandmother have helped her already. His help, though significant is supplementary because Tambu has demonstrated that even without his help, she would have battled and hunted for ways to take herself to school.

Towards the end of the novel, Babamukuru's treatment of women changes. This proves that patriarchs can reform. Dangarembga's handling of this conversion is commendable because it is not idealized. This happens after Maiguru finally tells her husband that she has suffered enough, and actually leaves him. Of course, her daughter is very happy about this. Although her departure is only temporary and only to another man,

her brother, it is clear that she is taking the first steps to claim her space and gain voice. Upon her return, she meets the issue of Tambudzai going to Sacred Heart. Naturally, the patriarch would rather send Tambudzai's brother. Maiguru uses this situation to confront her husband. She reminds him that the sexism that Nyasha and Tambu are going through is not new. She herself was called a prostitute for going further with her studies and doing what other women were not doing. She reminds him that both of them were victims of this problem before and it pained them then. This strikes a cord in Babamukuru's heart. He starts consulting and even giving her a hearing on important matters. She thereby enters the space of authority in her marriage, home and life. She has started the gender negotiation process. In this way, Maiguru uses the history of how their people treat women, to conscientise her husband on the need for change. This move is very effective as it is double-barreled. It fights Nyasha's battle of being called a whore earlier and opens the way for Tambu to go to school. Babamukuru is forced to appreciate these facts as they are founded and are homegrown. He is speechless and then turns to Tambu and for the first time, asks if she has anything to say. She does not answer then but tells the reader that *Nervous Conditions* is her reply.

Here, we see the liberal and social feminist concepts coming to play. Change comes through a process; education and economic factors play a role. However, the hub of change of attitude is still women confronting patriarchy. The men help but the women own the cause in this novel. In fact this novel is Tambudzai's act of sisterhood. "The story I have told here is my own story, the story of four women whom I loved, ..." (204). Much as she puts up the most focused and sustainable fight, Tambu does not fight patriarchy single handedly. I have already discussed how the grandmother and mother assist her. She calls her friendship with Nyasha her first love affair. The experiences of all the women help her to know the gravity of fighting patriarchy in a colonial setting. It is this sisterhood that allows her to probe into how the other women are fairing in their experiences with womanhood and grow into maturity.

In *So Long A Letter*, collaboration with men is minimal and is in the form of Daouda claiming to be feminist in parliament, demanding that women be active in politics and occupy the public space:

Women should no longer be decorative accessories, objects to be moved about, and companions to be flattered or calmed with promises. Women are the nation's primary, fundamental root. From

which all else grows and blossoms. Women must be encouraged to take a keener interest in the destiny of the country (61-62).

Even though his speech sounds more of political rhetoric than a heartfelt stand, it does show that he is aware that women are under-represented in the decision making process. The boyfriends of Ramatoulaye's daughters are portrayed to be sensitive to women's issues. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, there are no male characters that visibly work for the betterment of women.

Belief in oneself and economic empowerment

Nervous Conditions' Lucia uses economic empowerment and belief in herself to fight patriarchy. She asserts herself and claims space that is male, even when it is denied her. She confronts the men she gets into conflict with and fights her battles out in the open. When Babamukuru tells her to leave the homestead she tells him she will do so on her own terms, which she does. Lucia is the only one who confronts Babamukuru about Tambu's rebellion regarding the wedding, proclaiming her support for her niece. She also states that marriage disadvantages women and has affairs on her terms, calling Takesure a cockroach. This means she can discard him when she no longer needs him and he is with her on her terms, she does not depend on him. Lucia shows that an African woman does not need western education to be assertive, the wish to be regarded as a complete human being is universal and clearly not a colonial importation. In comparison with Maiguru and Ramatoulaye, one is tempted to think western education actually makes women docile, taking into account what Maiguru puts up with and how long it takes her to do something about her pitiable plight. Right from the start, Lucia is in control of her destiny. She uses the men to advance her aims. She is the only other person Tambudzai cites as having escaped the patriarchal web.

It is important to note that Lucia like the other women in this novel gets help from men. Babamukuru helps her to get a job, which helps her to buttress her independence. Whilst this might be used as an argument to show that the men are necessary for the liberation of women in this novel, one needs to look at Lucia in perspective. Lucia is assertive from the start. Even before she gets a job, she is able to differ with the patriarch and make her views heard, not only by others but also by him. She sides with Tambudzai at a sensitive and controversial moment, when she is vulnerable to Babamukuru, as she

needs his help to get a job. It is important to note that before the help Lucia, like Tambudzai, demonstrates that she has power from within her to decide her destiny. This is what lays the foundation for her to escape patriarchy. Babamukuru's help is a strong pillar she can use to climb from the well of patriarchy, but it is not the engine that drives her will power.

Some critics would criticize Lucia for her 'promiscuity' and question her strength as a female character. However, her having affairs, if it really happened, should not be questioned on the basis of her being female. In an analysis of *Parched Earth* and *The Stillborn*, Kayoka (2004) argues that characters need to be understood within the patriarchal societies they are set in, where pre/extra marital sex is not allowed for women (9). Li in *The Stillborn* (1988) is nearly beaten up by a group of very angry women who suspect her of having extra-marital affairs with their husbands. Doreen's mother in *Parched Earth* (2001) is ostracized by the society for having a child out of wedlock. This code of conduct does not apply to men. She is actually told:

...you see women and men do not have the same choices. A man can say; I want my marriage, I love my woman, so I will try to strike my luck elsewhere. In that, a man has a choice to bring home a child born outside marriage, after a certain time. Or, he should take the other woman as a second wife. Women cannot do that (Lema 59).

It is for this reason that Babamukuru's assertion of Lucia's promiscuity should be taken in context. What she did might not have been different from what the men were doing and yet, she was labeled promiscuous. Even though, the fact that she changed lovers does not weaken her fight against patriarchy to me; instead, it makes men dispensable to her and demystifies their hold on her.

Women 'oppressing themselves'

Sometimes women in all these novels react to patriarchy in ways that make them look self-oppressive and 'patriarchal compliers'.¹⁰ On the day Babamukuru returns from England and it is time to go to the airport to welcome him, it is made abundantly clear to Tambu she cannot go because as a woman, the natural thing for her to do is to stay at home and prepare for the homecoming of the men. However, Tambudzai merely reports

¹⁰ This term refers to women who behave in ways that appear to support of fertilise patriarchy and has been used in horizontal violence criticism by Funk and O'Carroll (2004).

this rude exclusion but does not contest it, neither does any of the women. Instead, they devote themselves to their pots and make sure the food is ready for the men. What happens when they serve the food further validates that victims can perpetuate their own oppression. The women do the serving themselves but only after the men are served do they attend to their own hunger. The food finishes before they themselves can eat. They had the opportunity and means to be selfish and look out for themselves or at least distribute the food evenly to everybody but they feed into the principle that men must have the best and be first to the exclusion of women. The same problem is evident when Jeremiah does not thatch the hut his brother tells him to. The women end up doing it and do not even tell Babamukuru when he comes. They let him get all the credit. Tambudzai and her mother can see that sex-roles can be broken when it is time to work, not on festivities and issues of prominence. The private space can be feminized but the public one is always male.

A similar incident is portrayed in *So Long A Letter*. Ramatoulaye is located in a predominantly female-defined space. In fact, the novel is about her writing to a woman and throughout the novel, she stays in a place surrounded by women: her sister, female in-laws, young co-wife and the mother of the co-wife. Instead of these women forming a strong sisterhood, Ramatoulaye exposes their life together, to be full of jealousies and rumour mongering. It is a union full of 'woman-to-woman' exploitation, especially the female relatives of Modou. Ramatoulaye's female in-laws, mistreat her. They amass power, status and authority for themselves at her expense. Nabou treats her daughter-in-law Aissatou unfairly and callously, mainly because Aissatou does not come from a home she regards to be elite and respectable.

Ramatoulaye complains her sister-in-laws do not understand the plight of a working woman. They take it that she can hire help and therefore has a lot of free time on her hands. She is not happy that they do not recognize the dual task of a professional woman and think she has time for their idle chat, always expecting her to be hospitable and have time to entertain them.

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, there is a lot of in-fighting between the co-wives, especially Ona and Nnu Ego. They suspect each other of witchcraft and their children

dislike each other and the other mothers. There is a power struggle and they quarrel about the turns to sleep with Nnaife and the use of money.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the female characters in the novels under study react to patriarchy in ways that are not only diverse but fluctuate at times. The young girls tend to be militant and some to the point of losing their mind. They generally want to fight for their self-determination, as in the case of Ramatoulaye's children. The married women tend to complain but be complaisant about it.

CHAPTER 4

THE CHALLENGE OF PORTRAYING PATRIARCHY IN COLONISATION

This chapter marries the perceptions and reaction of the female characters in order to analyse and evaluate which novel portrays patriarchy more extensively, bringing out the interrelatedness of patriarchy with female oppression and capturing the context of colonisation of the female characters.

Female oppression is central to all the novels under study in this paper. An analysis of the perception and actions of the female characters shows that patriarchy underlies most of it. Men and patriarchal institutions shoulder the bulk of their suffering. In *The Joys of Motherhood* what Nnu Ego perceives as her problems and what she does to solve them, proves that they are mainly caused by her society's expectations on a woman. For her to be an acceptable member and fulfilled woman she must get married and be the mother of sons. In *So Long A Letter*, Ramatoulaye has to conform to the dictates of her husband and in-laws and society. The fact that her husband mistreated her whilst he was alive and dead is immaterial. In *Nervous Conditions*, women are voiceless and live prescribed lives on the basis of their gender; this is what some of them are fighting. All in all, we have seen men use familial, ideological, political and traditional power to determine what women shall or shall not do; everywhere woman is a subset of man.

The examples of 'woman to woman oppression' that were discussed in the previous chapter emphasise the centrality of patriarchy to the problems of these women. An investigation into its cause points to patriarchy. I will start by examining Aunt Nabou's case in *So Long A Letter*. She is a very intelligent woman with strong qualities. But, she is also very bitter because she is a member of the ruling family who cannot rule because of being a woman. She is a victim of segregation and is transferring the segregation to another woman, Aissatou. Her son's decision to marry a goldsmith's daughter is something a woman is allowed to voice her disagreement on and reject. She does not pass up a chance to exercise some power. She says this marriage was an insult to her before her co-wives (17). She can only be a respected female patriarch if her son marries well. This affects how much power she can exercise on the upper and lower caste women. The important thing to note is that Aunt Nabou wants to be a female patriarch; she wants to

wield the power men wield in her society. She rejects Aissatou because she reduces her power. She encourages young Nabou to abandon her education, to marry Mawdo so as to elevate her socio-economic status. However, by so doing she inflicts damage onto two women at once, destroys Aissatou's marriage and happiness and kills young Nabou's chances of professional and financial independence, thereby condemning her to a life of economic dependency.

In *The Joys of Motherhood* it is the male privileging in this community that encourages women to hate each other as they all are socialized to admire malehood and hate femalehood. Since marriage and bearing sons define womanhood, the women who are lucky to be married and have sons taunt those who do not, whilst the rest fight to be like them. Jealousy is rife and it is authored by the ideology of male supremacy. For example, Agbadi's relentless pursuance of Ona sparks envy from the other women; she has the privilege of being pursued by a man she is rejecting and this is something they do not have. This situation is also present in *The Stillborn*. Some women suffering in polygamous marriages attack Li at the well because she has refused to share a man like them. Ironically, like Nnu Ego, it is a man who rescues her after being attacked. The rivalry between Adaku and Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood* shows how such marriages foster women fighting each other. Naturally, any wife would want to spend many if not all the nights with her husband. So, the quarrels amongst the co-wives about this issue in Nnaife's home are understandable. It is normal for children to expect their parents to pay the most attention to them, so the rivalry amongst the children from the various wives makes sense too. Therefore, the women are not the source of the so-called woman-to-woman oppression. It is the patriarchal nature of their marriages. The principle of sharing a person authors in-fighting, suspicions and low self-esteem. In *So Long A Letter*, the license for Modou's relatives to behave as they do is Modou. When they are acting, they use his authority and become men, so to say, as they represent their male relative. They are allowed to behave as they do because of being relatives of the husband. Ramatoulaye repeatedly says their behaviour was customary and it was expected and accepted that they get the bulk of Modou's money. They often do not consider the feelings of his wife. Not once is she asked for an opinion on the proceedings.

This behaviour of women 'subjugating themselves' is normal in patriarchal societies. In fact, that is one of the diverse and mutative techniques that patriarchy uses to create and sustain itself. To understand this situation, let us look at how power works. The women are surrounded by male power and it is taken to be the norm. They have been brought up on a system that rewards male supremacy and are surrounded by male power. Those who try to resist it are castigated as social misfits. We have seen Tambudzai and Nyasha getting called all sorts of names and being asked what they are trying to prove. When women try to resist this powerful ideology, they are even threatened with male physical violence; we have seen Tambudzai experience this. This threat of force is internalized and passed on to the daughters. The women have been born into it and grown up with it like Tambudzai, gotten married in it like Maiguru and Mainini and grown old with it like Mbuya. Changing it requires a radical perspective for the women, they have to deviate from the norm and defy it fiercely. This is why some of them appear to be taking part in 'their own' oppression.

Another explanation for this 'woman-to-woman' oppression is the effects of male privileging that we have seen in families discussed in this thesis. From indigenous and colonial angles, men get educated and become powerful, as they gain economic and administrative muscle. Babamukuru and Modou are good examples. The women comply with men and patriarchal institutions even if they do not want to, because often they are the key to education, economic means and success. The women end up 'consenting' to their own oppression. This view is supported by Gramsci's (1979) assertions on the hegemonic characteristic of patriarchy:

Dominance of one group of class in society, is not achieved through force but rather through the consent of the other group. Consent is achieved through the dominant group associating itself with moral and intellectual leadership in society. It can also use violence (14).

The novels are similar in showing how patriarchy is really about power and based on men not wanting to surrender it. When women have it, it means they have taken it from the men. This is evident in the arguments of Jeremiah, Babamukuru, Nhamo, Nnaife, Ubani and many more. Daouda summarises this point well when he complains that women have a habit of undoing each other and ultimately themselves:

If men alone are active in the parties, why should they think of the women? It is only human to give yourself the larger portion of the cake when you start sharing it out (62).

This shows that power is seen as a cake that men deservedly have a large portion of. Therefore women should not expect men to share it, after all, power is rewarding. This proves that women should own the cause of challenging and toppling patriarchy. This makes sense, as they are the ones who have a first hand experience of their oppression. The African proverb cited by Achebe (2000) puts it well, "Until the lions produce their own historians, the story of the hunt will glorify only the hunter"¹¹.

Another similarity of the novels is in the form of patriarchy. They all contain colonial and indigenous patriarchy. However, it is in the manner in which the double patriarchy is unveiled, where the mastery of Dangarembga supersedes the rest. She characterises it more persistently, vividly and with sustenance. The characterisation of the perpetrators and victims of patriarchy is more vivid and credible than in the other novels. Even though patriarchy is shown to be central to female oppression in all three novels, the degree of centrality is more clearly shown in *Nervous Conditions*. Throughout the novel, Tambudzai and the secondary female characters are consistently engaged in analysing or grappling with patriarchal issues, involving women of various ages, localities and educational abilities.

The presence and ugliness of black patriarchy greets the reader on page one. At a very early age, Tambudzai is battling with female oppression, meted out by her father and the other men of her family. The reader witnesses her growing into a young woman, amidst this problem. Her chronicling the experiences of other women, with adequate detail, proves that this is a prevalent problem. Her brother's behaviour shows that patriarchy is a social construct and boys get socialised into it at a young age. Tambudzai can see how patriarchy perpetuates female subjugation, as she has to battle to earn the right to go to school and only gets an opportunity to do so because her brother dies. The fact that women are of second-class status in her home is very clear. In *So Long A Letter*, the reader meets Ramatoulaye as a grown woman and does not know what kind of upbringing she got that might explain her behaviour when she is confronted by patriarchal oppression. In Nnu Ego's case, the reader does see her grow. In fact, her life is

¹¹ This was quoted in The Guardian of Tuesday, November 2003, page 1 in an article on Chinua Achebe's *Home and Exile*.

traced from her conception. However, the kind of upbringing she gets, does not justify or explain her high degree of conformation to patriarchy in marriage. Her father doted on her and she is a product of a man and woman who were very intimate with each other. That the source of Tambudzai's problems is not a husband as in Nnu Ego and Ramatoulaye's case, but her own father, brother and uncle, shows that patriarchy is a force that can be familial and confront women from an early age, not a mere episode in their life or the preserve of marriage.

The fact that Tambudzai views and reacts to patriarchy differently in different contexts increases the credibility of her characterisation and representation. Her ability to see how other women are viewing and reacting to patriarchy further increases the diversity and representation of the narrative. It cements the prevalence of patriarchy and shows that women are different in how they see it but are united in hating its oppressive nature. This is called unity in diversity by Ramazanoglu (1989) and helps women to forge a sisterhood, as they have an anchor to unite them, recognising their differences.

Patriarchy is not a static force. The patriarchal oppression of *So Long A Letter* and *The Joys of Motherhood* is so continuous it appears to be fixed and almost inborn - as if one can never stop being sexist. In *Nervous Conditions*, patriarchy is shown to be a changing feature of society. The chief patriarch, Babamukuru, thaws at the end. The way the patriarchs behave also reveals several characteristics of patriarchy. Babamukuru can allow his wife to work but not to sit at the *Dare*. For Jeremiah, women should not occupy any position of authority. This shows that one can be patriarchal in one instance and not in the other; it means different things to the patriarchs themselves. The change in Babamukuru proves that patriarchy is definitely not fixed; it can be affected by factors such as education and history. It is also evident that patriarchy gives in when it stands to gain something out of the trade with its victims. This is seen in the acceptance of Tambudzai going to school and Maiguru taking on a job.

Dangarembga's use of Nyasha to explore the patriarchy of colonialism gives her leverage over the other novels on the colonial coverage. Through Tambudzai, Nyasha is explored and exposed to a point that both she and colonial effects attain a status of their own. Her character shows how colonial subjects become liminal figures as individuals, in their families and community. The dangers they face are brought to the fore.

Bâ and Emecheta do not have a character that exposes the interrelatedness of colonisation and patriarchy. It is true that In *So Long A Letter* the effect of colonisation is mainly seen through religion and politics. One can decipher how women have been affected by colonialism in Ramatoulaye's discussion with Daouda and also with her daughters. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, the colonial effects have been explored through Mr Meers, the whole urban setting and when the men are taken to fight in World War II on the side of the British. However, the way colonisation affects a woman psychologically is not explored to the level that we see Dangarembga reach with Nyasha. Patriarchy and colonisation are central players and not contributory factors to the outcome of her character.

How an author characterises male characters is quite central to how an author portrays patriarchy. In *Nervous Conditions* the patriarchs are clearly defined and the ideology is defined. Not only Babamukuru embodies patriarchy, the characterisation of Jeremiah emphasises the patriarchal nature of the Sigauke community. A close analysis shows that it is only because of being male that he is treated as a superior to all the women. Jeremiah cuts an embarrassingly weak figure both as a person, man, and husband. Chennels (1992) actually describes his role as:

The complaisant Jeremiah, embraces his role as a feckless 'kaffir' and family slob, with zeal and dedicated precision, born of years of dedication and practice (72).

He does not even try to provide for his family. Jeremiah is overshadowed by his brother and Jeremiah's excuse for the failure to be educated like his brother is, "Ha, Mukoma used to read" (5). This is a very lame excuse, given the fact that he is in a society that puts malehood on a pedestal and believes in educating sons at any cost. He is not ashamed to grovel to his brother, in full view of his brother and community. He even tells people that his brother is the reason for his existence; he has no self-pride whatsoever. He does whatever Babamukuru orders and pales to insignificance in his presence. By age five Tambu already realizes that he is a force to be reckoned without, "I discovered to my unhappy relief that my father was not sensible" (16). However, he still has authority over his family. He actually wants a second wife and more children. Neither Babamukuru nor the women consider the fact that he cannot provide for the ones he has. What is poignant is that his brother, the family and community still regard him to be superior to the

women. The women take orders from him and his brother goes through him when making decisions. Jeremiah sits at the *Dare* that Maiguru cannot attend and Lucia has to force her way into. This shows that in this community power resides in the men, regardless of their deserving it or not.

In all the three novels, solutions to the problems of patriarchy are advanced. In *So Long A Letter* and *The Joys of Motherhood*, economic empowerment is stressed. However, it is in *Nervous Conditions* that characters like Maiguru and Lucia destroy the fallacy that educational or economic muscle equals a liberated woman. Self-assertiveness is emphasised as the hub of sustainable female emancipation. The two characters that are said to have escaped patriarchy are self-assertive, not reactively but proactively. They take personal initiative to better their situation in society. They do not fear to go against the grain and find ways to empower themselves materially, to support their already implanted belief in oneself. The formula that emerges from the novel is: Natural hatred for oppression + belief in oneself + initiative + education + economic empowerment + in-depth knowledge of patriarchy + cultural grounding + persistence = female self-determination.

A protagonist a colonised female readership can identify with

The calibre of Dangarembga's protagonist is pivotal to her success in portraying the patriarchal oppression of women living in a colonial setting. When one looks at Emecheta's Nnu Ego and Bâ's Ramatoulaye, they give us women who are largely obedient to society, even when there are reasons not to. They have what Heidegger (1986) calls a mass-produced or stereotypical identity, not a self-defined critical consciousness (264). They fail to chart their own paths. Not all characters can be active and change the status quo but characters like Nnu Ego make women look vulnerable. Nnu Ego confirms the stereotype of the virtuous African mother who is fertile and dearly loved. She is the negritude mother who sacrifices herself for her children. Her goal in life is to become the mother of children, preferably sons. After becoming a mother, she spends many days enduring tedious labour and even starves so that her children, especially the boys leave a comfortable life. Chikwenje Okonjo Ogunyemi (1982) who has studied Emecheta's works and rejects her portrayal of African marriages:

Her fiction did not affirm marriage as the image of full maturity that could represent the unity of Black people internationally. Quite the opposite, Emecheta's explorations frequently involved an account of failure of marriage (qtd. in Haraway 8).

She actually contends that Nnu Ego embodies western views that were bent on portraying women as primitive people and the characterization of Nnu Ego is exaggerated. I disagree that Nnu Ego embodies western views. After all, the novel documents what Emecheta herself went through. However, I think Nnu Ego's character is a failure as regards challenging patriarchy. She glorifies rather than fights it.

The protagonist of *Nervous Conditions* makes it very clear that her battle is against being judged as a female and not as a human being. This declaration by Tambudzai is very important because it is strategic; it clarifies her feminist stance right from the start, makes her own the cause and be a proactive fighter. This makes Tambudzai a character with a feminist agenda, unlike Nnu Ego. As a young girl, the latter does not clearly register a hatred of female oppression, instead, she looks forward to getting married and bearing sons. It is when she grows up that she becomes bitter with the unfair treatment her society metes out to women, because she has problems to become a mother. Her complaints are a reaction to failing to fit into the female mould of femininity prescribed by her society. When she gets the sons, she is fulfilled and waits for the next complication to come, in order to resume her complaints about patriarchal oppression. Her rebellion against patriarchy is not a preset principle as in the case of Tambudzai. In Ramatoulaye's case, I have already shown how her statements even contradict the attainment of female self-determination.

In *Nervous Conditions*, we get a character that shows that patriarchy can be challenged. Tambudzai fights it with persistency. Both Ramatoulaye and Nnu Ego are mainly defeated by patriarchy and portray a pessimistic picture of women as regards patriarchy. D'Almeida (1986) describes Ramatoulaye efforts to fight female oppression as almost futile (171). Just like Nnu Ego, she puts up sporadic efforts that are mainly reactive and she only warms up to the task right at the end. Their solutions to patriarchal problems are often ambiguous, contradictory. Ramatoulaye is very tolerant of an abusive situation that has erosively stung her repeatedly, for a long time. She has seen her best friend walk away from it and has a daughter who is urging to leave this husband. Even her reasons for staying are not convincing. She cites economic reasons and actually says

she has 'no energy to be alone' (40). All these reasons are not supported by what happens. She quickly informs the reader that Modou was largely absent at home and efforts made by his relatives to get him to come back home, proved futile. So, married or divorced, loneliness was a reality. She talks of sleeping alone many times. Ramatoulaye says she ended up doing all the jobs that Modou used to do, including plumbing and other maintenance jobs. That should have shown her that she was already alone, all that remained was legitimizing it. So we end up with a female protagonist who spends almost all of her life waiting for a man who has shown openly that he loves someone else. Such a character reinforces the stereotypes of wives as helpless and docile people who make a career of sacrificing themselves for the good of others. This would confirm the common saying in Malawi that marriage is perseverance; pain should be borne as a badge of honour. Ramatoulaye wears this badge for a long time. Her declaration that she cannot do without marriage undermines her declared spirit of personal choice and makes her look like someone whose identity is dependent on and defined by marriage and men:

I am one of those who can realize themselves fully and bloom only when they form part of a couple. Even though I understand your stand, even though I respect the choice of liberated women, I have never conceived of happiness outside marriage (55-56).

Whilst I appreciate Ramatoulaye's value of marriage, I depart from her stand when she rests her happiness on it, declaring her dependency on it. One must find the self first before enjoying union with the other. Dependency makes marriage and man, the center for Ramatoulaye. Her utterance above brings into question issues of marriage and the liberation of a woman. Can a woman be married and liberated from patriarchy? Ogundipe-Leslie, says it is within marriage that African women suffer most:

She becomes a possession, voiceless and often rightless in her husband's family, except for what accrues to her through her children. She also loses much of her personal freedom, which she can only regain at prices expensive to herself: the admittance of other wives or publicly acknowledged girlfriends of her husband. She has to admit to the dominance by her husband or face blame from the total society . . . There is also peer-group pressure on the husband- pressure which encourages even would be gentle and just husbands in the direction of male supremacy (qtd. in Verba 4).

I largely agree with her but I believe what matters is the degree of patriarchy and how the woman regards marriage. The problem is when it is the main source of happiness because one fails to function when it does not work out. Characters like Ramatoulaye, Nnu Ego,

Mainini and Maiguru, have patriarchal problems because their husbands are their main source of self-definition, sexual satisfaction and social standing, for a lifetime. Jacqueline in *So Long A Letter* is a good example. True independence means accepting that one might have to be alone. This might mean opting to be a divorcee or single woman instead of persevering marital abuse, thereby perpetuating it. This being alone does not include promiscuity, as that would just be swapping the form of dependency.

Another issue that makes the character Ramatoulaye contradictory and spineless as regards confronting patriarchy is her failure to attack the patriarchy displayed by her religion. After the death of her husband, she rejects her brother-in-law Tamsir's offer to marry her and help take care of the children. This is in accordance with the Senegalese and Muslim tradition. She refuses and outlines her reasons:

You forget that I have a heart, a mind that I am not an object to be passed from hand to hand. You don't know what marriage means to me: it is an act of faith and love, the total surrender of oneself to the person one has chosen and who has chosen you (61).

It is good that Ramatoulaye is exercising her right of choice. She says she wants a monogamous romantic marriage, sanctioned by the two people involved. However, she lacks consistency. Islam sanctions polygamy but she does not question it on that. Islam also sanctions the mirasse but she does not interrogate it from that angle. The fact that it is only observed by widows and not widowers is not an issue she confronts directly. She dogmatically submits to Islam yet this is the very woman who says in her youth she could not wait to get "out of the bog tradition, superstition and custom"(15). She is now the guardian of these oppressive practices, vowing to be faithful to them. Ramatoulaye fails to trace the roots of her patriarchal woes holistically. She does not attack the double standards condoned by Islam. This silence on the patriarchy of religion is prevalent in the novels studied, including *Parched Earth* and *The Stillborn*. The patriarchal nature of Christianity is glossed over. It is as if the characters and the authors of these novels respect religion too much to criticize it, or are afraid of doing so.

Ruth Besha (1996) has cited religion as one of the reasons for the pathetic position of African women (59). She states that the history of religion is that of reinforcing patriarchal values in society. She further contends that Christianity has actually reversed the successes of women in Africa, as it did in Europe (59). I agree with her entirely and believe that the patriarchy in religion needs to be exposed urgently, given its colonial role

and level of influence in Africa. We have already seen how African tradition partners with religion in oppressing women. If this area is not interrogated, the marriage of these two will be so airtight that female oppression will increase and each can cite the other in legitimizing female oppression. One wonders how many communal practices that oppress females are passed and legitimized in the name of culture and tradition when their real source is religion and visa versa. Patriarchy needs to be unveiled wherever it is if we are to solve this problem of female oppression for good.

Unlike Tambudzai, Ramatoulaye lacks the ability to make decisions that are decisive and sustainable in her fight against patriarchy. Instead of confronting what is oppressing her in all possible angles Ramatoulaye believes that when one is faced with difficult situations like the one she is in, one should make the most of the present moment.

To overcome distress when it seats upon you demands strong will. When one thinks that with each passing second one's life is shortened, one must profit intensely from this second; it is the sum of all the lost harvested seconds that makes a wasted or a successful life (41).

She explains that the above analysis led to her decision to stay in a polygamous marriage. However, it is hard to find the sum of the good times she had with Modou. Her idea that life is measured by an accumulation of harvested moments explains her compliance with female oppression. Her main objective in life is to be able to add up a few moments. This is pessimistic, and explains why she says: "My voice has known thirty years of silence, thirty years of harassment" (57).

Nnu Ego also subscribes to the principles of patriarchy, as she wants Nnaife to be the chief provider of the family. She wants to be dependent on him. Her career decisions are centered on Nnaife. After stopping her petty trading to concentrate on motherhood, she only goes back to work when Nnaife loses his job. Even then, she does not earn enough to support the family. This reinforces the stereotype of man as the breadwinner. Even Nnaife tells her that the leaving of Mr Meers shows her the value of Nnaife's income. She also fails to provide for the family. She neglects her daughters and slaves for the sons. She fails to react against her oppressive forces in order to bring about change for her and her daughters. She takes in so much abuse that she is living proof that patriarchy is powerful. It is not surprising that the novel has solicited some western views that border on racism like the following one:

In contemporary America it is often difficult for us to comprehend the acceptance of status relative to gender, yet, in *The Joy's of Motherhood*, we are hit in the face with the reality of gender "discrimination" in the education system. We have a difficult time accepting that these beliefs are still being practiced in some areas of the world (qtd. in Webb 3).

This view is hypocritical, as there is lots of proof that there is gender discrimination in the west.¹² However, Nnu Ego's portrayal plays right into the hands of minds that have a stereotypical perspective of Africa.

Nnu Ego even fails to fulfil her mother's last wish "to have a life of her own, a husband if she wants one" (28). She spends her life in polygamy, which she hates and having male children because that is what her society prescribes.

It is for the above reasons that this paper argues that Tambudzai is a heroine and protagonist who can appeal to today's readership.

An ambivalent end

The endings of *So Long A Letter* and *The Joys of Motherhood* are very definite. In the former novel, Ramatoulaye has taken some decisions to remedy her situation but most of the reform is to be implemented through her children. Nnu Ego dies. Whilst the definite endings are decisive and clear, I find the ending of *Nervous Conditions* very empowering to the readership. When the story ends, Tambu says she is sure of one thing and that is, something new is happening within. Whatever that thing is, is not clearly defined. What Tambudzai will do is open to anyone's guessing. In my opinion, that uncertainty is a strength of the novel as it leaves the reader free to explore various options for the protagonist and her female relatives. This makes the novel not prescriptive, especially with today's readership, which is increasingly diverse, due to individual differences and colonial effects. When the novel ends, Tambudzai is still a young woman and can channel her change into many directions with different levels of success. Her being open to any end releases the secondary characters to become anything they can be. This makes the novel evolve and increases its closeness to real life situations.

¹² The debate on the appointment of Condoleezza Rice on the GWS Network is proof that the issue of gender and status is very present and topical in the Western world.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that patriarchy is an oppressive force both from the perceptions and the experiences of the women in all the novels under study. The women differ mainly in what to do about it. Some accept the oppression whilst others fight it. Even the fighting is different and the same person can fight it differently too. However, it is *Nervous Conditions* that displays a more extensive and diverse portrayal of patriarchy. The principle of male supremacy is shown to inform the oppression of five female characters comprehensively, in their private and public spaces, at different ages, settings and professions. The colonial face of patriarchy comes out distinctly through Nyasha's character and one sees how complex patriarchy is and how it affects a female colonial subject. *The Joys of Motherhood* and *So Long A Letter*, expose how patriarchy informs and underlies the so-called 'female to female oppression.'

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to explore the importance of portraying patriarchy in its totality, especially when dealing with a novel with a colonial context. It has argued that compared to *The Joys of Motherhood* and *So Long A Letter*, Dangaremba's *Nervous Conditions* portrays patriarchy more adequately and authentically in its double form. Its female characters react to patriarchy in diverse ways thereby capturing the effects of colonisation and individuality, thus making the novel representative in terms of its character and content.

In the introduction, the centrality of patriarchy in African female oppression was established and the flaws in how patriarchy is commonly portrayed were discussed. The second chapter examined how female characters in the three novels perceive patriarchy and it was found that they agree in its being oppressive but differ on the solutions to the problem. In chapter three, the female reactions of the female characters ranged from either being silent, fighting mildly, to militantly opposing the force. In Chapter four a discussion on how patriarchy was presented in the three novels followed. A justification for my preference for Dangaremba's text amongst the three was given.

Interviews with Dangaremba show that she wrote this novel to tell the story of her life and advance her views on female oppression. Many writers who write to advance an ideology, usually end up creating characters who are mere vehicles of their thoughts. What I find remarkable in *Nervous Conditions* is that, Dangaremba manages to largely escape that web, save for one character, Nyasha. The main character is not romanticised or utopianised. She has flaws and contradicts herself. Her end is uncertain.

Uwakweh (1995) argues that the novel

fully explores the patterns of female subordination arising from patriarchy and its interrelationship with the experience of colonisation (75).

She emphatically argues that the novel has attained a voice that is liberational, self-defining and cathartic. I agree with her and attribute this unique level of portraying female oppression to the way the author avoids entrenching in the social fabric, the

idealised traditional image of the hardworking, all enduring, self-sacrificing woman. We saw the latter type of woman in Ramatoulaye and Nnu Ego.

Ogundipe-Leslie (1997) says a female writer is given a responsibility by feminists, namely that of being committed to her craft as a third world person. This includes

amending the image of the conceptual African woman by confronting and dismantling female stereotypes commonly found in African and European literature (qtd. in Verba 6).

In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga's female characters, especially Tambudzai, dismantles many stereotypes. It is not common for a young girl to take herself to school and Tambudzai vows to do so. Lucia breaks the stereotype of uneducated women suffering in silence. Maiguru shows that educated women can be oppressed; money and education are not enough to be a liberated woman. Babamukuru shows that patriarchy is not inborn, one can unlearn it. By distributing these stereotypes to various characters, the novel appeals to many readers. It shows that there is no silver bullet in the struggle against patriarchy. It is complex and there is no one-way to challenge it. This also explains the differences amongst women ranging from their theories concerning their oppression to their views on how to solve it. It shows that diversity is normal and does not necessarily mean they cannot be united. It proves the legitimacy of Ramazanoglu's unity in diversity (194).

The main stereotype I applaud Dangarembga for breaking in this novel is that of showing that patriarchy has a black, African and familial face, separate from the one in the marriage setting. She shows that patriarchy is a lifelong problem that is universal and was always there even before whites colonised Africa. By portraying patriarchy in this manner, she exposes its colonial and indigenous face, revealing the real hub of female oppression. By knowing the patriarchy that meets you right from birth, in your formative years, the African women can move from the known to the unknown, before battling with the imported colonial one. One gets armed to confront both.

In this novel, the interrelatedness of patriarchy and colonialism is shown. This partnership shows that sexism like racism are social evils that are constructed, can be reduced and eradicated from a society. A novel that portrays a protagonist who has an androgynous vision, who portrays the struggle against female oppression as one aimed at getting women to be treated as human beings, not like men, opens up a debate on woman

as a person, not as woman like man. I believe the latter pegs women to what men have achieved and stifles growth of both sexes. The question now would be what is it we call a human being minus the gender factor. This calls for interrogation into several post-modernist theories and is an area somebody else would or has already looked into.

The ending of this novel has what I describe as a post-structuralist cum post-modernist quality that helps it march into the future of feminist and colonial debates, at a level that *So Long A Letter*, *The Joys of Motherhood* and many more would labour to attain. When the novel ends, one does not know if Tambudzai is and will be the sign or the signifier. She has amply demonstrated an ability to charter the rough waters of patriarchy, but this is not a closed deal. The challenges facing her and contradictions she is living make her ambivalence only too clear. There are no barriers set to what she can achieve or who she can be. Nyasha could even become a lesbian and shock her Shona father; she is already smoking. She could reform and learn to deal with her challenges. Tambudzai could turn out to be a female version of Nhamo, nobody knows. In this way, this novel underlines the ambivalence, hybridity, and most importantly, the unpredictability of the colonial female subject in a patriarchal world.

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