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Mansour Gueye. ”Women in African Women’s Writings: A Study of Novels by Buchi Emecheta and Tsitsi Dangarembga.”. Humanities and Social Sciences. Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines de l’Université Cheikh Anta DIOP de Dakar, 2017. English. NNT: . tel-02418559

HAL Id: tel-02418559

<https://hal.science/tel-02418559v1>

Submitted on 18 Dec 2019

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UNIVERSITE CHEIKH ANTA DIOP DE DAKAR
FACULTE DES LETTRES ET SCIENCES HUMAINES



Ecole Doctorale ARCIV



Formation Doctorale: Etudes Anglophones et Comparées
Spécialité: Etudes Africaines et Postcoloniales

THESE DE DOCTORAT

Soutenue: le 03 Avril 2017

**Pour obtenir le grade de Docteur ès Lettres de l'Université Cheikh
Anta Diop de Dakar**

*Women in African Women's Writings: A
Study of Novels by Buchi Emecheta and
Tsitsi Dangarembga.*

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My acknowledgements go first to Professor Gorgui DIENG. As a postgraduate student majored in African Studies, I am indebted to him for his commitment to his field and his willingness to foster me to becoming an accomplished researcher. Indeed, if this work has come to fruition, it is mainly because of him, for without his initial encouragements and guidance this thesis would not have probably been written. A special acknowledgement goes to Pr. Abdou NGOM, for his proficiency and availability, I really appreciate it all. My acknowledgement also reaches all the African and Postcolonial Studies Laboratory lecturers: Pr. Santiago Valez, Dr. Pape DIOP, Dr. Aliou SOW, Dr. Abdoulaye DIONE, Dr. Saliou DIONE, to name but a few, not to mention the Head of the English Department, Dr. Alioune Badara KANDJI, and all the lecturers, Dr Ousmane SENE, Pr. Bathie SAMB, Pr. NDONGO, especially, Pr. Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba DIENG and Dr. Yankhoba SEYDI for always encouraging me.

My acknowledgements also go to all the postgraduate students of the Laboratory, particularly, those with whom I exchanged on seminars conducted by Pr. DIENG during our pre-doctoral classes. It was very constructive for our development as budding researchers. My deepest gratitude goes to my parents and my beloved wife. Acknowledgements are due to my brother, El Hadj Ousmane GUEYE, a former student of the English Department, for proofreading this work, advising me and providing materials. A special acknowledgement goes to my brother-in-law, M. Abdou GUEYE, former senior teacher at the British-Senegalese Institute, who proofread this work and encouraged me. This is an opportunity too to thank M. Ciré DIAKHATE and a former lecturer of the English department, Dr. El Hadji MBENGUE, who volunteered to proofread my work. It was a real privilege, indeed.

One way or another, I am indebted to all those with whom I have worked, whether as colleagues or resourceful people that I cannot name for their direct collaboration and contribution to the realization of this project. God bless you!

DEDICATION

*TO MY FAMILY,
TO MY PARENTS,
FRIENDS,
BROTHERS
AND
SISTERS*

Résumé:

La femme, à travers le monde, est sous l'emprise de divers fléaux qui vont de la discrimination sexiste, au chauvinisme de l'homme et à la violence physique. A la lumière de cela, il urge de se pencher sur le rôle des chercheurs et intellectuels face à cette réalité. C'est dans ce sens qu'il faut comprendre l'ostracisme des femmes écrivains sur le plan littéraire. Cependant, grâce à leur engagement, certaines s'appuient sur le féminisme comme mode propre d'écriture afin de briser les mythes qui empêchent leur émancipation en tant qu'individus.

Les deux femmes écrivains à l'étude, Buchi Emecheta et Tsitsi Dangarembga, s'inspirent profondément de la critique du courant littéraire

féministe dans leurs œuvres. Sous ce rapport, elles axent leurs romans sur leur propre contexte culturel africain et sur le milieu pour passer en revue les aspects sociaux qui assujettissent la femme, et ainsi lancer une offensive contre cette pratique. A travers la représentation de la femme, elles mettent en exergue le patriarcat, qui avec les cultures contraignantes et la colonisation compromettent sa promotion. Ceci illustre leur engagement dans le combat pour la justice sociale à l'égard de la femme, avec une plus grande portée et profondeur dans l'analyse, sans préjugés sexistes.

Les romans à l'étude sont thématiquement liés, puisque les deux auteurs fondent leurs intrigues sur le triptyque, genre, race et classe, des catégories discriminatoires qui rebondissent dans l'œuvre littéraire des femmes écrivains et qui empêchent généralement le développement de la gente féminine, de l'enfance à l'âge adulte. L'asservissement de la femme est inéluctable, car la tradition et la colonisation sont dans ce cadre liées. Etant donné que la femme est victime de préjugés, les personnages qu'Emecheta et Dangarembga dépeignent dans leurs ouvrages déploient des moyens de survie pour une société plus juste. Ce qui donne une lueur d'espoir à leur fiction, qui peut être placée dans la catégorie de romans d'apprentissage et/ou de développement. Ainsi, leur ingéniosité à adapter la tradition féministe courante au contexte africain en se basant sur les théories de *déconstruction* et de *construction* dans une approche inclusive entre les deux sexes, les place toutes deux comme écrivains humanistes socialement engagées.

Mots clés: colonisation – engagement -féministe - justice sociale- tradition

Abstract :

Women, throughout the world, are under the sway of various scourges that range from gender-based discrimination, male chauvinism to physical violence. In the light of this, one needs to ask the role scholars and intellectuals play to change this reality. It is from this perspective we should understand the ostracism of women writers from the literary field. However, thanks to their commitment, some of them use the feminist literary tradition as a writing strategy designed to dismantle the myths that hamper their emancipation as individuals.

The two women writers concerned in this study, Buchi Emecheta and Tsitsi Dangarembga, dig deep in mainstream feminist literary criticism in their novels. In that respect, they base their work on their own African cultural context and respective countries to investigate the social aspects of women's subjugation, and mount a protest against it. Through female characterization, they put under the critical spotlight patriarchy with encroaching cultures and colonization that compromise women's promotion. This illustrates their commitment to women's fight for social justice, with greater scope and in-depth analysis, regardless of gender-based obstacles.

The novels studied here are discursively intertwined, as the two women writers build their female protagonists' own stories around the triptych that rebounds in women's writings, gender, race and class, discriminatory categories that impede their growth from childhood to womanhood. Their entrapment is unquestioned because tradition and colonization collude to subjugate them. Since women are victims of prejudices, the female characters Emecheta and Dangarembga depict in their works design survival strategies to outsmart social injustice for a better world. Such strategies give some measure of optimism to their fiction, which can be labeled as apprenticeship and/or development novels. Thus, their ingenuity to adapt mainstreaming feminist tradition to their own African context based on *deconstructionist* and *constructionist* theories through an inclusive approach to the two sexes, hails them both as humanistic and socially committed writers.

Key words: tradition- colonization- social justice- commitment- feminist

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Introduction

The topic under study addresses women in two African women writers' novels, Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*, *Double Yoke* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, *The Book of Not*.

The choice we make on the two writers is not fortuitous, for, even though they are geographically distant, Emecheta is from Nigeria in West Africa and Dangarembga from Zimbabwe in Southern Africa, there are intersections in their literary works in terms of discourse. They are vivid examples of committed writers whose works are widely acclaimed throughout the world. I articulate the topic under study on women's condition in African women's writings in the two authors' works for various reasons. First, for the vicinity of the selected novels, second, for their commitment to the emancipation of woman, and third, for the ideology of inclusiveness vis à vis women as well as men throughout the world. For Emecheta and Dangarembga, gender issue should be based on womanism because it is not a battle between men and women over power. Rather, it is a fusion where men and women are seen to be complementary, as partners for a better social life and development for mankind. As Akachi Adimora- Ezeigbo* argues:

“Gender interaction is regarded as being complementary and balanced (...) rather than being conflictual or competing for the same positions of social and political power.”¹

Most of the literary criticism on Buchi Emecheta and Tsitsi Dangarembga is accessible through newspaper articles and essays, but also through anthologies and other books that were written on each of the selected writers. Even though there is a bunch of published works on Buchi Emecheta, the selection of essays in the published anthologies, *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta (1996)*,

* is a Professor of African Literature at Abia state University, Uturu, Nigeria, in the Department of English

¹ Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo in *Post-Colonial and African American Women's Writing* by Gina Wisker, New York, ST Martin Press, LLC, 2000, p.135.

edited by Marie Umeh and *Emerging Perspectives on Tsitsi Dangarembga: Negotiating the Postcolonial* (2002), co-edited by Ann Elizabeth Willey and Jeanette Treiber, are crucial materials in my reading and broadening of the subject for textual analysis. However, the literary review of this study is based on scholars' critical works on women's writings in general and African women writers' literary production in particular, before it delves into the topic's raw nerve.

Indeed, the recognition of women's cognitive ability and ingenuity has always been put under the critical spotlight, to say nothing of their creative writing. In her essay, *A Room of One's Own*, the nineteenth and twentieth century British writer, Virginia Woolf, describes the ostracism of women writers from the literary community. She foregrounds the causes of women's intellectual "handicap" in sexist conceptions that consisted in not only preventing them from reading available resourceful books, but also in denying them a formal education without disregarding the impact of poverty. To her, there is an intrinsic correlation between poverty and women's inventiveness:

*"I thought of (...) the shut doors of the library; and I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; I thought how it is worse perhaps to be locked in; and, thinking of the safety and prosperity of the one sex and of the poverty and insecurity of the other and the effect of tradition and the lack of tradition upon the mind of the writer."*²

Woolf demonstrates that, economic freedom is crucial in women's social equilibrium and intellectual "health" despite the weight of tradition and an environment conducive to their intellectual development. On this score, she is congruent with Buchi Emecheta and Tsitsi Dangarembga, but also with many African women writers like Grace E. Okereke and Ama Ata Aidoo. But even

² Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, London, Penguin, 2000, pp.25-26 (first edited in 1945)

though Okereke is of the same opinion, Western women writers are better-off than their African counterparts, and that environment is determinant in their writing. She contends that: “... *the African woman writer unlike her counterpart in the West does not have ‘a room of one’s own’ where she can have solitude and privacy to write.*”³ This statement is far from being a lurking suspicion to Emecheta who argues that, “*To be a good novelist the writer must have time and space to reflect and indulge in introspective thinking.*”⁴

Similarly, in the nineteenth century, the misconception and unrecognition of women’s literary talent loomed large in the American woman writer’s critical work, Elaine Showalter. In her essay, *A Literary of Their Own*, Showalter decries what Mary Ellen calls male writers’ *phallic criticism* that Cynthia Ozick qualifies as the *ovarian theory of literature*, which is merely a sexist approach to evaluating women’s works as feminine. She comments on male writers’ pessimistic stance regarding women’s writings. In her essay, Showalter particularly insists on the sexist theories male critics have developed on women to define the dearth of women’s literary tradition and commitment in their writing, if there is any. To her, critics have been judgmental when it came to making an epistemological assessment of women’s literary production in the Victorian period. They judged them, not from the quintessence of their work, but rather from belonging:

³ Grace E. Okereke in “Female Creative Writers and Social Changes in Nigeria, 1960-1985: A Historical Change” by M.A.Y LEWU, *Majass*, vol.3, N° 1, June 2005, p.4.

⁴ Buchi Emecheta in “*Female Creative Writers and Social Changes in Nigeria, 1960-1985: A Historical Change*”, op.Cit, p.4.

“(…) it has been difficult for critics to consider women novelists and women’s literature theoretically because of their tendency to project and expand their own culture-bound stereotypes of femininity, and to see in women’s writing an eternal opposition of biological and aesthetic creativity.”⁵

Showalter underlines here not only the exclusive stance of male critics’ standpoints, but also the lack of literary insight that justifies the critics’ feminine inclination to women’s writings. Thus, the British woman writer, Virginia Woolf, and the American woman writer, Elaine Showalter, among many other Western women writers, demonstrate in their works that their peers’ creative works have been unrecognized in the literary terrain by males who merely buttressed their judgments on *phallogentrism*.

Likewise, African women writers are no exception to the sad rule: they have undergone the same biased treatment of their works. A vivid example is the first Stockholm Conference on *The Writer in Modern Africa* in 1967. On this occasion, male writers gathered to discuss African writers’ commitment to the current predicaments that plagued the continent. Surprisingly enough, the conference was held without any woman writer. The exclusion of women from the panel of literary policy makers points to the unrecognized of their full membership in modern African literature.

Furthermore, Ama Ata Aidoo’s feelings were hurt, following Professor Dieter Riemenschneider’s lecture in March, 1985, Harare. Professor Dieter lectured on how to develop a regional approach to African literature. The lecture lasted two hours and he made no reference to any African woman writer. Worse, he minimized the flaw of such an omission and when Aidoo asked him about it,

⁵ Elaine Showalter, “A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelist From Brontë to Lessing”, London, Virago, 1978, p.7

he only said he was sorry. By the same token, analyzing Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* as a novel of reference for understanding her major fiction, Abioseh Michael Porter⁶ cries fault at one critic who fails to mention the writer's work in his essay dealing with female *bildungsroman*. It is worthwhile to clarify here that what basically grieves Porter, is not the omission *per se*, but its oddity because Emecheta's work addresses the issue of women's development and personal growth.

In fact, some literary critics' reluctance towards women writers' creative works accounts for the misconception they hold for them in general. In her essay, "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak views subaltern women, particularly second-class Indian women and all subjugated women as people who are denied agency. In her essay, "*Exclusion as Violence*", Chantal Kalisa uses the postulate of the *voicelessness* to elicit male writers' skepticism, which she sees as violence in Caribbean Studies. On a larger scale she says that, the first anthologies of African literature dodge women's literary production because of the *voicelessness* injected on women writers by their male counterparts.

In *voicelessness*, Chantal Kalisa juggles with three theoretical viewpoints. The first one is about the historical absence of women's writings on postcolonial issues like *slavery*, *colonialism* and *decolonization*, to name but a few. Secondly, she talks about *voicelessness* in relation to the socio-linguistic discourse focusing on the stereotyping of women and their unfitness to take sides while using foreign languages in their works, which might distort discourse quintessence. The third dimension concerning *voicelessness* Kalisa puts forwards is the pervasive issue of gender discrimination in women's writings. But even though Kalisa seems to typify women's violence through the

⁶ Abioseh Michael Porter: "*Second-Class Citizen: The Point of Departure For Understanding Buchi Emecheta's Major Fiction*", *The International Fiction Review*, 15. N. 2. 1988, pp. 123-124.

concept of *voicelessness*, particularly for francophone women writers, it also applies to Anglophone women writers and, to a certain extent, all women writers worldwide.

Historically speaking, African women writers have gone through quite a number of sad experiences in their lives and works. Both Anglophones women writers analyzed in this study, Buchi Emecheta and Tsitsi Dangarembga, are no exception. At a national level, the literary tradition of their own countries, Nigeria and Zimbabwe, has followed different stages marked by male writers' predominance and women's exclusion that was, and still is, grounded in socio-cultural mores.

Thus, analyzing women's creative works and commitment to their emancipation in Nigeria, from pre-independence onwards, Lewu qualifies the Nigerian literary scene as *phallic*, which, to her, is trendy in the literary world. To Lewu, if one ventures to scrutinize the evolution of Nigerian literary production, women's portrayal is backward. It hails men on top while silencing women:

“Looking at the literary development in Nigeria from pre-colonial to post-independence period, it is observed that the literary scene had also been dominated by men just like most other spheres of life. Male writers (...) write about themes of male interests often situating women in uncomplimentary roles.”⁷

To Lewu, the Nigerian literary arena is not the only domain where men impose supremacy and masculinity upon women. There are other aspects of life where they outdo them. But, if we solely focus on male writers' literary works, there is an acute misogynist tinge in Nigerian and African male writers'

⁷ M.A.Y LEWU, “*Female Creative Writers and Social Changes in Nigeria, 1960-1985: A Historical Change*”, *Majass*, vol.3, N° 1, June 2005, page 4.

discourses in general, which is also noticeable in Tsitsi Dangarembga's own country, Zimbabwe. The literary history of Zimbabwe is unique. Not only were women writers' works undervalued, but they were themselves victims of an unprecedented discrimination in the literary production, exclusively dominated by male writers and monitored by the colonial authorities with the implementation of the Rhodesian Literature Bureau.

The Rhodesian Literature Bureau has had a great impact on Southern African writers' literary works, particularly on women's works. It was created in 1954 for the publication of Zimbabwean literature in the country's two main vernacular languages: Shona and Ndebele. In fact, the literature bureau was set up by the colonial authorities to foster a good grasp of writing techniques for potential writers. They taught them the "rules" of literary writing in a colonial context. Consequently, they were compelled to be blindfold regarding current political issues in order to be socially and politically non-committal. As Simon E. Gikandi acknowledges it:

*"Literature grew under the watchdog eyes of publications officers whose job was to ensure that writers did not publish politically subversive works."*⁸

Gikandi's comment is worth recalling here, as it relatively accounts for Zimbabwean writers' non-committal stance and unprolific literature under colonial rule because of gender discrimination. Gikandi provides here a key element in Zimbabwean literature history, but he does not give any detail concerning women writers who had suffered from discrimination until late 1980s. This is of no small importance since Dangarembga herself was a victim of the Literature Bureau's rigidity: when she finished the first manuscript of her novel in 1984, it was rejected by three publishers in her own country

⁸ Simon Gikandi, ed. *The Encyclopedia of African Literature*, New York, Routledge, 2003, p.495.

because of her concern about women's condition. The book was eventually published in London in 1988, four years after it was written.

The above literary review has shown that women's works have been prejudiced by their male counterparts and colonial authorities that collude to nip their literary ingenuity in the bud. However, in the face of men's over-representation in their works and women's stereotyping, the following questions arise: did women fold their arms while men led the literary world? Or did they opt for a committed stance to safeguard their literary survival and, if they did, what resistant paradigms did they use to maintain themselves?

The advent of women in the literary world and their commitment are mere artefacts of the social and economic "violence" they underwent just like male writers were socially committed to the progressive movements during postcolonial era. In fact, it is the colonial violence that fuelled African male writers' social commitment. However, despite their commitment to the social issues that have plagued the continent; male writers projected an outgrowth of their masculine inclinations onto their literary productions, ostracizing women from the national literary tradition. They beautify them in their narrations. In other words, they focus on the aesthetic features of women by portraying them like the *Mother of Universe*. Rarely do they take into due consideration the intricacies of woman issue in their writings.

In fact, the dearth of women's representation in male writers' literary production is intrinsically related to African traditions, cultures and civilization. What is generally said on women about their status is merely a representation, which can be viewed as flawed, since the history of the continent is imbued with countless iconic women. Camara Laye reminds readers that:

“(...) generally the role of the African woman is thought to be a ridiculously humble one, and indeed there are parts of the continent where it is significant; but Africa is vast, with diversity equal to its vastness. The woman’s role in our country is one of fundamental independence, of great inner pride.”⁹

Indeed, history has shown that women had certain privileges and power in some kingdoms before colonialism. The Abyssinia, Benin, Songhai, Mali, Kanem, Ghana and Zulu empires are good illustrations of the political and social integration that empowered women before the intrusion of the White man. The culture and customs of such empires enforced matriarchy, which is merely a social system in which women are entitled to make decisions and act as real participants, leaders, heads of families and tribes. In such a system, they could possess land or any property they bequeathed to their daughters to ensure their social and economic security.

On the other hand, the misrepresentation of women in male writers’ works can be ascribed to the social stratification of African communities which privilege men. They generally advance masculinity and patriarchy, at the expense of women. In Igbo and Shona societies, anybody who keeps a high profile among their people must have many male children and be illustrious in working the land. On top of the above-mentioned factors, there is colonialism. With the advance of colonialism, women’s condition had been relegated to an unprecedented position, with the impoverishment and austerity measures imposed by colonial rule. The intertwined subjugation of women by opaque tradition and colonialism has brought about the ‘hybrid term’ *Double-*

⁹ Laye Camara, *The Dark Child*, Translated by James Kirkup and Ernest Jones, New York, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1954, p.69.

colonization, a recurrent concept in women's writings that theorizes their 'victimization' by both male-dominated cultures and colonialism.

Basically, since the ultimate function of any writer is primarily their devotion to the ongoing setbacks of their community, regardless of gender, race or religious beliefs, still, women represent the "lame duck" of modern African literature. Consequently, male writers' indifference to women's condition and social commitment undoubtedly urged them, to not only start off writing, but also to *re-evaluate* male writers' work and to *reconstruct* their status and cultural identity through it.

The materialization of modern African literature is intrinsically correlated to oral storytelling through which traditional forefathers fostered children's moral values under the palaver tree. The colonial school did exist, but most African indigenous people have been steeped in their cultures and traditions which they blended with Western education to crystallize their craft in writing. This boils down to saying that, even though text books were written by British writers to indoctrinate Africans, the latter had already a good grasp of oral arts that could facilitate the acquisition of writing techniques and "initiation". The enrolment to school became a necessary evil for potential writers, male as well as women, for it provided them with the language medium they needed to write with, but, in no way, does this suggest that modern African literature is synchronically related to colonialism. On this account Ahmadou Kourouma postulates that:

“The history class was in its essential character like the storytelling sessions with which each of us was familiar with from our experience at home, as a given of our cultural background.”¹⁰

Thus Africans had oral skills prerequisites before they used foreign languages as tools. This elicits the existence of African written works before colonialism which was unbeknownst to the public: ancient Egypt scripts, hieroglyphs, and Afro-Arab literature are good examples. Today’s recognition of women writers in the literary scene owes much to the latter’s perseverance, commitment and humanism. Even though they are flung in a patriarchal society where formal education was almost denied to female children, some found their ways out to get educated, out of survival. Because of such “violent” experiences female writers underwent at an early age, a violence founded on sexism, pioneers channeled their protest against female characterization by male writers as second-class citizens. Due to gender-oriented statements and the *deconstruction approach* of their works, women writers’ production was seen as too “daring” and awkward in the literary scene already dominated by their male counterparts. In fact, women appeared like pariahs who protested against retrogressive cultural norms. Besides, the two selected writers, Buchi Emecheta and Tsitsi Dangarembga, have not escaped *phallogocentric criticism* before and after the publication of their works.

Although their works have been undervalued, women do not lag behind men in modern African literature. In 1950 the playwright and poet, Efua Sutherland from Ghana made her debut, and between 1962 and 1967, she published, respectively, her two plays, *Foriwa* and *Edufa*. In 1965, Ama Ata Aidoo wrote her first play, *The Dilemma of a Ghost*. The following year, in

¹⁰ Ahmadou Kourouma in *The African Imagination: Literature in African and the Black Diaspora* by Francis. Abiola Irele, New York, Oxford University Press, 2001, p.99.

1966, Flora Nwanzuruahu Nkiru Nwapa of Nigeria, the first African woman to have written a novel in English, finally crossed the Rubicon with her book, *Efuru*. In her work, Nwapa castigates some traditional practices, like genital mutilations and the stereotyping of barren women. She paved the way for many more women writers who became later, icons in modern African literature. Our point of reference is no other than the two selected women writers, Florence Onyi, born Buchi Emecheta of Nigeria, and Tsitsi Dangarembga of Zimbabwe.

Buchi Emecheta was born in 1944 in Lagos, Nigeria. Like most of her characters, she was orphaned during childhood. When she was nine years old, she lost her father who was killed in Burma while he was serving in the British army. Following that event, her mother was inherited by her father's brother. She was deeply shocked by the discriminatory treatment of her parents who chose to send her younger brother, Adolphus, to school while she remained at home and to work like an "unpaid servant". Despite her parents' refusal to maintain her at school, Buchi Emecheta managed to win a scholarship with full board to the Methodist Girls' School where she distinguished herself as one of the best students.

She went to live in Lagos with her mother, but she was not happy there. Later on, in 1960, she married Sylvester Onwordi without a bride price. She gave birth to two children before her husband went to England to pursue higher studies in accounting while she worked at the American Consulate in Lagos. Two years later, Emecheta joined her husband in London, but the living conditions were precarious for her, as an African and a mother of five children, she bore in six years. One of the hardest experiences she had with her husband occurred when the latter burned the manuscript she wrote in her spare time, as she says in an interview: "*The first book I wrote my husband burnt, and then I found I couldn't write with him around.*" This gave her ground to break up with him at the age of twenty and this did not change her urge for writing. When she

worked as a librarian at the British Museum, she took up writing again in her spare time to support herself and her five children.

She enrolled at the University of London where she earned a sociology degree. Her first productions were published in a British magazine, *New Statesman* which she later collected in her first novel, *In The Ditch*, (1972). Two years later, she wrote a prequel to *In The Ditch*, *Second-Class Citizen*. Emecheta's life experience is reflected in her works. Her debut novels, *In The Ditch* and *Second-Class Citizen*, are good examples in which she fictionalizes her own life. Not only does she talk about her own life experiences as an African woman and immigrant prejudiced by countless tribulations that range from poverty, racism to motherhood, but she incorporates all oppressed women in her text. In an interview, she posits a discursive commitment in her first two novels and argues that:

“(...) most of the episodes that I have used usually come from what I have seen or experienced or what somebody who experienced it told me....”¹¹

Marian Aguiar sees *Second-Class Citizen* as a novel that brings to light the socio-economic issues in Africa and the diaspora in particular, while encompassing the different mistreatments that plague women all around the world.

Buchi Emecheta's second selected novel, *Double Yoke* (1982), connotes African popular romance through Ete Kamba's telling story of his love affair with Nko, but it is more about the relationship between men and women torn between tradition and the budding capitalist and imperialist systems within the rural and the academic environments.

¹¹ Buchi Emecheta in “A conversation with Buchi Emecheta” in *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta* edited by Marie Umeh, New Jersey, African World Press, p.450.

The Nigerian writer's novels include *The Bride-Price* (1976), a book centered on cultural superstitions over the issues of caste and marriage. Another point central to the book is the encroaching customs according to which people believe that whenever the bride-wealth remains unpaid, the bride would eventually die in childbirth, which leaves some readers perplex. *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) is also one of Buchi Emecheta's best novels. Emecheta's analytic discourse is closely related to Flora Nwapa's standpoint on gender issue, for it is grounded in the theme of motherhood: the ability to bear sons is the symbolic glory of the traditional woman.

Buchi Emecheta is one of the most renowned African women writers. She has earned an undisputed place in African literature as a strident articulator of the female sensibility. Some hail her as one of the most influential and prolific contemporary women writers. Her books are translated into French, German, Dutch and Swedish. All in all, she has published thirteen novels, four children's books and three plays.

Buchi Emecheta is, literally speaking, in cahoots with Tsiyi Dangarembga. Even if the latter is neither of the same generation, nor as prolific as she is, they have more similarities than dissimilarities. The unprolific literary production of Tsiyi Dangarembga's own country is due to the historical context of Zimbabwe. While many Anglophone and Francophone writers relatively gave free reign to their thoughts in the fifties onwards, Zimbabwean writers were still under the vigilance of the Rhodesia Literature Bureau. The racism Dangarembga witnessed while she stayed, at Cambridge University in England, and which she experienced again in Rhodesia spiced up by the struggle for independence that raged in the country, surely urged her to get out of her comfort zone and embrace new challenges under the spur of writing.

Tsitsi Dangarembga was born in 1959 in Bulawayo, Rhodesia. At the age of two, she left for England for four years. She returned to Rhodesia in 1965 where she got her A-levels at the mission school called Hartzell High school. In 1977, she went back to England to take up a degree in medicine, at Cambridge University. Three years later, she came back to Rhodesia to study psychology, while she worked as a typewriter for a marketing agency. This forged her craft in writing. A playwright, movie director and a novelist, Tsitsi Dangarembga wrote *Nervous Conditions* in 1988.

Nervous Conditions is about the pursuit of education by Tambudzai Sigauke, who is denied formal education because of her family's discrimination against women, just like Buchi Emecheta's heroine in *Second-Class Citizen*. The co-editors of the anthology, *Emerging Perspectives on Tsitsi Dangarembga: Negotiating the Postcolonial*, Willey and Treiber summarize Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* as follows:

“(…) a text that raises crucial questions of how identities are formed in the crucible of African nations in search of independence, *Nervous Conditions* broaches several of the topics that have come to occupy the forefront of Postcolonial Studies in general.”¹²

The book's plea is a pattern of the author's advocacy of the struggle against gender oppression and social predicaments that befell Rhodesia in particular and Africa in general in the postcolonial era. The plot revolves around the crucial issue of gender under the collision of socio-cultural mores and colonial capitalism at all levels.

¹² Ann Elizabeth Willey and Jeanette Treiber, *Emerging Perspectives on Tsitsi Dangarembga : Negotiating the Postcolonial*, op.Cit, p.xi

In 2006, Tsitsi Dangarembga wrote *The Book of Not*. The novel is a sequel to the previous one. It is centered on Tambu's search for happiness in a country where racism is in full swing exacerbated by the raging liberation war. She also wrote the story for the film *Neri* (1993), one of the most powerful films in Zimbabwean film fiction. The film is about a desperate woman, Neri, who is engaged in a struggle for total economic and social reconstruction after she has lost her child and assets. In 1996, she directed the film, *Everyone's Child*, relating the plague of AIDS on women and the impact of poverty on them. She has also written many essays.

Dangarembga is as committed as Emecheta to women's condition and cultural identity, and to mankind as a whole. Her fiction is deeply rooted in Postcolonial Studies and widely studied in African and American universities and across the world, for its transversal discourse. She is in line with Frantz Fanon's psychoanalysis of colonialism as *Nervous Conditions* is a clear reference to Fanon's psycho-analytic vision of colonialism: in Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, Jean Paul Sartre postulates in the preface that *the condition of native is a nervous condition*.

If we agree that women are part and parcel of Modern African Literature and that they question the male writers' representation of women's living conditions, we need to ask what is the literary theory they base their writing upon and which can fit their textual discourse. Basically, women's writings are ingrained in feminist literary criticism. Thus for the sake of internal consistency we cannot avoid a suitable approach for our study.

The novels under review will be examined in a block structure and through the lens of feminist literary criticism because of the theoretical vicinity of the two selected writers. Nonetheless, we will branch off to other literary theories, like: postcolonialism, structuralism 'Fanonism' and, particularly,

‘womanism’, while clearly evidencing the discrepancy between Western feminism and African feminism.

Feminist literary criticism is a discipline which focuses on gender bias. It seeks to find the main explanations of the inequality of sexes first before it attempts to liberate women from male cultural paradigms through a female perspective to change the tradition that subjugates them. But, if Western feminism is committed to female hegemony, it does not take into account women of “color”, African and African-American women in particular, on its agenda: it dissociates race and class from its axes. Western conception does not fit women of “color”. The African-American woman writer, Alice Walker, wryly denounced the awkwardness of the theory and coined a new concept, *womanist* which connotes *Black feminism* or a ‘feminist of color’. Most African women writers like Ama Ata Aidoo, Flora Nwapa, to say nothing of the most contemporary ones, like Tsitsi Dangarembga and Buchi Emecheta, do not feel at ease when they are referred to as feminist writers; they accept full responsibility for not being feminists in its broadest sense.

If we take into account the two writers’ texts, they enhance the social reconstruction of women with a more egalitarian balance between men and women in a male-dominated society. Thus, it is essential to focus the study on African feminism. For, even though social equity has been the backcloth of socialism, its pioneers do not fight, radically, for women’s improved social condition. Therefore, Black feminist literary criticism attempts to achieve the social reconstruction of women, while advocating for them full economic, cultural and social rights ingrained in a patriarchal civilization. As a theory, African feminism is more suitable as it gives premium to the trilogy problem of women’s issue: gender, race and class, but also, to patriarchy and ‘oppressive’ cultures against women’s emancipation and mankind’s as a whole, without falling into radicalism. The subjugation of women through colonialism will also

be examined through a postcolonial approach. These different perspectives will hopefully help gain significance as this study will ultimately seek to propose a tool in women's writings that would correct the negative portrayal of women through unfair gender stereotypes, say, female subjugation and conflicting cultural values of Africans torn between the competing claims of traditions and modernity. The approach seeks redress for social injustices that have affected Nigerian and Zimbabwean women in particular, African women in general, and women as a whole with a view to hailing them as participants in the world-capacity building.

In terms of structure, this work falls into five chapters. Chapter one is on the socio-cultural heritage. It incorporates the sacredness of traditional beliefs, the weights of patriarchy on female individuals and some impeding ordeals to their lives and progress. Chapter two will be insisting on women in the economic context, more specifically on poverty and the impact of money. It sheds light on the relationship between women's illiteracy and their personal fulfillment through personal strategies. Chapter three focuses on education and emigration as pathways to social mobility while laying emphasis on self-displacement, personal sacrifices, the illusion and the predicaments that are related to them. Chapter four and five offer a more optimistic vision for women: chapter four is centered on the construction of female self-identity through personhood and tolerance in addition to the impact of parental love on progenies, friendship and group-solidarity. Chapter five will address women's hegemony within socially destructive powers while exploring self-reliance, assertiveness and the new African woman.

Chapter one: The Socio-Cultural Heritage

One of the peculiar features of the African continent is the diversity of its society. Each country evolves according to its code of conduct within the community, tribe or clan. The Nigerian and Zimbabwean societies are good examples of tribal diversities. People have deep faith in and respect for the social beliefs that rule people's ways of life through well-organized structures, reinforced by a traditional religion. In this respect, it becomes relevant to study Buchi Emecheta's and Tsitsi Dangarembga's works through the following points in relation to women's condition: the traditional beliefs, the weights of patriarchy on females, their servitude and domestication that can be seen as the backcloth of African societies.

I.1 The sacredness of traditional beliefs

It is commonly acknowledged that the African continent has one of the wealthiest societies with regard to tradition. In fact, it is of paramount importance here to talk about the way Africans adopted a real code of conduct in their community before the advent of colonialism, and the place of women therein. Before colonialism, African societies were ruled through a well-organized policy. But one needs to know the very core of these societies. Before the advent of colonialism, Africa was not a religious vacuum where anarchy ruled supreme. On the contrary, Africans held a deep faith in traditional beliefs, considered as icons that embodied the disciplinary mind-set of the community. To put it differently, they believed in traditional gods, chiefs, legitimate rulers and, most importantly, the whorship of ancestors. Though the latter were no longer on the land of the living, they stood as watchdogs for the community. In this respect, we can quote the Ghanaian historian, A. Adu Boahen's viewpoint on the structure of African societies:

“(...) *by as late as 1880, with very few exceptions, Africans were enjoying their sovereignty and were very much in control of their own affairs and destinies.*”¹³

Boahen’s description corroborates what has earlier been said about the Africans’ full grasp of self-rule, governance and religious affiliation. In most parts of Africa, traditional beliefs were sacred and people who lived in a given community had to abide by the general rules and regulations of the group. Any infringement of the “law” inscribed by society was severely punished. Therefore, people have to take the “straight and narrow” way. They have to be in accordance with the community they live in. They cannot act as they wish: they have to mould their actions out of their community’s framework of reference.

If one agrees that any individual’s destiny is shaped and defined by a traditional god, one should not question the sacredness of such traditions. The fear of offence coupled with a possible punishment seems to change people’s negative intentions and induces them to a fuller righteous behaviour towards traditional society’s religious criteria that are mainly grounded in the faith of deities and to a certain extent in that of the ancestors. The common knowledge of such sacredness accounts for people’s deterministic beliefs regarding certain social problems. Some people see determinism as: *the beliefs that acts and events are settled by earlier causes and nothing can be done to change them or prevent them.*” From this perspective, it becomes clear that whatever man endeavours to avoid the misfortune that is to befall him, he cannot alter the situation, for there is a “master hand” that handles his destiny, and any effort will be in vain to change the course of life. This definition of *determinism* does not carry much weight among the Igbo and the Yoruba communities in Nigeria, and the Shona in Zimbabwe.

¹³ Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, p.27

For the Igbo and Shona people, the above-mentioned *acts* and *events* lie in the hands of the traditional gods and the ancestors, since they control man's life according to his faith. This is what actually leads people to resort to witchcraft when they are at a loss. Robert Cameron Mitchell's article about religion in Western Nigeria is a good illustration of deterministic beliefs:

*“ The belief in witchcraft is strong among the Yoruba arising from... the conflicting relations of a husband and wife Sickness, premature death and misfortune are all attributed to the activities of the witch. The key figure in the traditional religious system was the diviner-healer of the cult, the babalawo. He was consulted with great frequency for spiritual advice prior to life or, when sickness or some other misfortune occurred.”*¹⁴

Robert C. Mitchell's point is noteworthy as it fits Emecheta's and Dangarembga's visions about the misgivings Africans had for divinities. Besides, the two writers have not failed to highlight them in their works.

Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* is an interesting case in point. For instance, when the family council meets to talk about Jeremiah Sigauke, the heroine's father, and about the different problems the whole Sigauke family has faced, he, himself, does not mince words. He overtly tells his elder brother, Babamukuru, that the explanation for their turmoil stems from their softness towards religion. The “lethal sin” he has committed is to marry Tambu's mother improperly, that is in a traditional way instead of a Christian one. Hence, it is essential to cleanse the sin and appease both traditional divinities and the church. Consequently, his marriage with Tambu's mother is to be celebrated

¹⁴ Robert Cameron Mitchell, « *The Place of African Independent Churches in the Analysis of Religious Change : The Case of the Aladura Churches in Western Africa* », Congrès International des Africanistes, Deuxième session Dakar, 11-20 décembre 1967, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1967, p. 307.

anew so as to be in conformity with the now prevailing religious code of conduct.

In fact, Jeremiah's family is *a problem family* to his brothers and sister, as Emecheta terms it in *In the Ditch*. The way in which they can help him solve his social problems is by mystic means. Takesure, a distant cousin of his, has even proposed the family council, without any ray of hope, a brevage in order to quell Jeremiah's sexual inclination towards his sister-in-law, Lucia: "*Maybe some medicine, suggested Takesure to fix Mukoma Jeremiah ... so that he cannot be influenced by that woman*"¹⁵ This explains once again people's ingenuity whenever they are at a loss. For Takesure, nobody on earth can help Jeremiah lower his sights on Lucia, except a divine force. The family council even goes further and concludes that Jeremiah is not the only family member who is struck by misery or misfortune: there is also his sister, Tete Gladys who is dismayed by her social tribulations in her family affairs.

Although Tete Gladys does not talk about it openly, in actual fact, misery is "naked truth" in her branch of family: her two daughters have borne children out of wedlock. On top of that, her son is too violent towards her. The family's social problems do not stop with Takesure, Lucia, Jeremiah and Tete Gladys; they also reach Babamukuru. He is not leading a happy life, simply because his son behaves strangely, to say nothing of Nyasha, Babamukuru's only daughter, who is very difficult to discipline, according to her father. The social problems of each family member may differ according to the individual, but they have a common denominator insofar as the means of solving them is concerned, which is no other than to appease the ancestors' spirits/deities through sacrifices and good conduct. Dangarembga writes:

¹⁵ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, Washington, Seal Press, 1989, pp, 145-6.

*“The problems are everywhere in the family These are serious misfortunes. They do not come alone. They are coming somewhere. It’s obvious. They are being sent. And they must be made to go back where they come from, right back! It’s a matter of a good medium... with everything-beer, a sacrificial ox, everything.”*¹⁶

Through Tambu’s family, Dangarembga shows the ambivalent stance of the Shona community with regard to tradition. The above-mentioned passage suggests the extent to which fear fills people’s hearts and minds. Not only does this show the Shona people’s superstitious stance, but on a larger scale, it illustrates African people’s encroaching traditional beliefs and the link they establish them with fate. Moreover, this peculiar traditional feature of the Shona people can be likened to the Igbo’s. From this perspective, Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* and Emecheta’s *Second-Class Citizen* are similar:

To bring to light the two authors’ congruence on the issue, we may refer to Emecheta’s *Second-Class Citizen* and some of her other works for analysis. In *Second-Class Citizen*, the Nigerian writer uses Adah, the heroine, as a mouthpiece to show the intrinsic relationship between traditional beliefs and fate. She uses as a pretext the arrival of Nweze who has been to England for a few years to study law; now his people are getting themselves busy to welcome him back to Ibuza, his homeland. Once among them, the elders of the village notice the sudden change in their son, particularly, his whims about local food. He can no longer consume and digest properly the food he is given: *“The meat they cooked for him had to be stewed for days until it was almost a pulp.”*¹⁷ Though Nweze’s food habits have changed, this does not startle his folks. What surprises them is to see one of them who has sojourned in the White man’s

¹⁶ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p, 146.

¹⁷ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, New York, George Braziller, 1975, p, 15

country for years without bringing home a white woman as a spouse, and the punishment such a thing would bring about from the traditional god, Oboshi:

“He did not bring a white woman with him. All Pa’s friends agreed with him that that was a good thing. If Nweze had brought a White woman to Ibuza, Oboshi would have sent leprosy on her.”¹⁸

This passage illustrates, not only the repressive stance of *Oboshi*, commonly known as “the goddess of the river”, but it also shows the fear Ibuzians have for their deities in general. More interestingly, Emecheta evokes here her elders’ objection to interracial marriage which is regarded as an abomination people should avoid doing. Hence, when an individual commits such a crime, he deserves the worst. His sin shall be adjusted to the punishment. Such a sin is seen as *leprosy* which is considered to be a plague or curse in people’s minds.

The sacredness of traditional beliefs is strongly related to the condition of women. In fact, tradition does not take into account women as fully-fledged members of society. They are pushed back to the background. Their secondary status is multi-faceted and its most apparent aspect is the deprivation of a voice in the decision making process. This disadvantage is the crux of the problem when we analyze women’s condition through the polarities between traditional sacredness and women’s “voicelessness”. This is relevant, since women are generally “robbed of their tongues” in the African context, for the sake of the sacredness of traditional beliefs, which is African women writers’ main concern.

In her essay, “*A River in My Mouth: Writing the Voice in Under the Tongue*”, Meg Samuelson explains the setbacks of colonialism coupled with traditional beliefs that deprive a woman of her voice in one of Zimbabwe’s

¹⁸Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.15

pioneer writers' works, Yvonne Vera, in her book, *Nehanda*. What is interesting here is that, the mere fact of showing women as victims is an acute way of fighting traditional system of beliefs. In her novel, Vera portrays her main protagonist as a commander in chief to unshackle the chain that bars her people from freeing themselves from gender discrimination and retrieving the lost land from the White man:

*“Yvonne Vera’s writing offers a critique of colonialism, oppositional nationalism and patriarchal structures, and their customary ideas of land ownership and control over the female body.... Silence is posed as the standard response to the trauma and national rape.... This silence operates most fully under the restrictions of taboo, which mute the cry of pain from the female body.”*¹⁹

This raises the issue of language, for women fail to convey intelligibly the dismay that gnaws at their hearts. The sacredness of customs is embedded in a binary relationship between taboo and language. Women are at a loss when they are confronted with harsh tribulations within their own community, yet they cannot protest against them.

In *Under the Tongue*, another book by Yvonne Vera, she tells the story of Zhizha, the main protagonist. Raped by her own father, she undergoes a psychic trauma. She wants to talk about her pain but since she lives in a Shona clan that believes in traditional values where taboos are deeply rooted, she tries to find the register to convey her trauma but in vain:

19 Meg Samuelson, “A River in My Mouth: Writing the Voice in *Under the Tongue*” in *Sign and Taboo: Perspectives on the Poetic Fiction of Yvonne Vera* edited by Robert Muponde and Mandi Taruvinga, Harare, Weaver Press, 2002, p. 15.

*“Father whispers an embrace of lighting. I bite hard on my tongue, hold my breath deep in my chest. My voice is sinking down into my stomach. My voice is crumbling and falling apart and spreading through his fingers. My voice hides beneath a rock. My voice burns beneath my chest.”*²⁰

The rape Zhizha is undergoing is painful and she is helpless. Her inability to utter a word to defend herself is not only physical but also emotional: the *tongue* is not strong enough to speak out her inner feelings. It is used here metaphorically to reveal her denial of a voice. Likewise, the “rock” symbolizes the rigidity and the traditional power her father incarnates. Samuelson hits the nail on the head in her analysis: *“In ‘Under the Tongue’, Zhizha’s rape by her father robs her of her voice.”*²¹

Emecheta’s and Dangarembga’s discourses mesh together. Like two voices pronouncing simultaneously the sufferings of a multitude of women, they team up to voice the powerlessness and defencelessness of their respective protagonists and posit the origin of the “victimization” of women on the issue of rape and women’s silence. Given that the traditional authority on which they lean upon does not side with the female gender, they end up being men’s preys. Many a time in their works, their heroines, in the midst of dismay, are at their wits’ end. Far from being lenient towards women, customs and taboos are central factors that exacerbate the subordination of women. In Emecheta’s writing as well as Dangarembga’s, women’s pride is hurt while they remain unresponsive out of fear: they do not want to be “ridiculous” in the eyes of the community. They are so much stereotyped that they eventually accept their lot, unbearable as it might be.

²⁰ Yvonne Vera, *Under the Tongue*, Harare, Baobab Books, 1996, p. 3

²¹ Meg Samuelson, “A River in my Mouth: Writing the Voice in *Under the Tongue*”, op.Cit, p, 15.

In another novel, *Gwendolen*, Emecheta confesses through her heroine's mouthpiece "(...) *you had to accept what you could hardly change.*"²² Emecheta and Dangerembga explain how, at an early age, girls are indoctrinated by their male counterparts. This indoctrination on female 'inferiority' primarily takes place at the private level at the hands of the persons they trust and identify the most with, their parents, especially their mothers, before it reaches and is reinforced at the community level. It is from this perspective we have to analyze their writings to grasp the quintessence of their discourse.

Again, in *Gwendolen*, Emecheta's heroine, Gwendolen, is a victim of rape. Following her parents' trip to England, she remains with her grandmother, Granny Naomi, in Jamaica. Uncle Johnny, who is not a real uncle to Gwendolen, has always been kind to her, until he ruins the little girl's life.

*"One such night, she dozed off however, was woken up by Uncle Johnny. He was kneeling on the bamboo bed. He was now touching her face and mouth, telling her not to cry."*²³

Gwendolen is struck not only by the suddenness of Uncle Johnny's violent act, but also by her voicelessness. She wonders whether her grandmother and neighbors will take the matter seriously. She is confronted here, once again, with the same authority tradition imposes on her people. This is all the more challenging as customs do not confer much attention upon women, to say nothing of a female child. Gwendolen's pride has been hurt:

²² Buchi Emecheta, *Gwendolen*, London, Fontana Paper Back, 1990, p, 21.

²³ Ibid.

“Was this Uncle Johnny who used to call her Juney-Juney and wink at her and she would wink back? Was this Uncle Johnny who mammy had cried all night when Granddaddy Richard died because they were friends?”²⁴

Uncle Johnny is a friend of the family and has mourned Richard, Gwendolen’s grandfather, on the day he died, yet, he does not hesitate to rape her coldly when the opportunity arises. Emecheta shows that the household, far from being a sanctuary for young girls, plays host to one type of the most humiliating violence that men can perpetrate against them: rape. What makes things worse, according to Emecheta, is that the oppressor is always close or related to the victim’s family. Through this, the writer invites people to be careful about friendship and man’s nature. Man, as an individual, can be generous, but can change and be surprisingly dangerous according to circumstances. This shows some people’s lack of collaboration and their passive resistance to sexism. Following her rape, Gwendolen does not obtain her grandmother’s support even though she believed her when she first tells her what happened; the community does not show any sympathy, either. This accounts for her escape to her father’s family members who live in Kingston where she was given a cold welcome before her grandmother finds her and brings her back. In fact, they only act in keeping with what tradition expects them to do:

²⁴ Buchi Emecheta, *Gwendolen*, op.Cit, p. 22.

*“She must remember that it was Gwendolen’s word against that of Johnny. Granny must not forget Johnny’s status in the society. All Naomi (her grandmother) had to do now was to try to forget it and keep her eyes wide open, hoping that things like that would never happen again. Very few people would believe Gwendolen, she must never forget that.”*²⁵

The double aspect of violence against women within the family and the community is private before becoming public. The unwritten laws and ever-watching eyes of the community are at work once again. Instead of supporting the “victim”, the community compels the heroine to back down in order to remain on the same wavelengths as society. Uncle Johnny keeps a high profile in his community and, in people’s eyes, the infringement he has committed cannot ruin his profile. Gwendolen’s grandmother has no other choice than to conform to the group’s will and be more vigilant over her granddaughter.

In *Nervous conditions*, Tsitsi Dangarembga does not talk about rape or incest, but this does not mean that she ignores woman’s deprivation of a voice in tradition or customs. She satirizes it the way Emecheta and other female writers do in their literary works. In *Nervous Conditions*, the heroine, Tambu, is entrapped by customs. Her mother is illustrative of the ideal traditional woman. From an early age, she warns her daughter not to be too ambitious, because of her gender. Her mother, as a woman in a Shona community where tradition reigns supreme, has gone through a myriad of hardships. She sees herself as a predictor of Tambu’s future life by taking her own life experience as example:

²⁵Buchi Emecheta, *Gwendolen*, London, Fontana Paper Back, 1990, p.35.

“(…) you can’t just decide today I want to do this, tomorrow I want to do that… when there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one who has to do them. And these things are not easy; you have to start learning them early (…).”²⁶

Visibly, to Tambu’s mother, a woman does not have a lot to choose from since she is denied the privilege of decision making and power. The rigidity of society offers no alternative to the ambitious. The only opportunity for escape, if there is any, is to give up hope. She is pessimistic about life, yet she tries to open her daughter’s eyes to follow her own steps as an obedient and ideal woman in conformity with tradition. In fact, she is haunted by the fear of the sacred. In this respect, she can be likened to Ete Kamba, the main character in *Double Yoke* who venerates his mother:

“His mother, to him, had been the epitome of motherhood, the type whose price was above the biblical rubies. The type who took pride not in herself but in her man. The type who would always obey her man, no matter what, even if he commanded her to walk through fire.”²⁷

Tambu’s mother’s mind-set, in Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*, is the same as Ete Kamba’s mother in Emecheta’s *Double Yoke*: they accept the lot tradition sets for them. The only difference in the two novels is that, in *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu reacts from a young girl’s point of view. She observes through different episodes the tribulations of her living conditions under traditional rule, whereas, in *Double Yoke*, Ete Kamba’s mother plays the ideal mother’s role. As for Ete Kamba, himself though a man, he is torn between conservatism and modernity. Consequently, he wants to marry a woman who shares the same traditional values as his mother. It is clear in the above-

²⁶ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p, 16.

²⁷ Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, London George Braziller, 1983, p, 37.

mentioned passage that, apart from customs, there is a religious paradigm that entraps women.

Religion has an influence on the way women, as wives, interact with their husbands: they must obey and serve them. To some extent, their low status is common everywhere. But, female writers have never failed to *deconstruct the* traditional literary discourse on their condition, seen as a second nature. Sally G. McMillen's work is a landmark in women's writings and gender politics. In her analysis, she sees religion as a hindrance in the process of empowering women in nineteenth century America, which also fits the African context:

*“The message articulated by clergymen in their sermons and religious tracts articulated the ideal: that women were to be virtuous, pious, obedient, and submissive but, at the same time, strong and hard-working....”*²⁸

According to McMillen, women's regular attendance to religious preaching is partly due to their faith in God, but also, to their second rank, compared to men. In her analysis, she even pontificates on to demonstrate that the position of women is also the outcome of American legislation, with the Blackstone's Law that reinforces the low esteem that tradition and religion have already crystallized in people's minds.

*“According to Blackstone, a White man became independent at twenty-one and was then accorded both political and legal rights. A wife never gained such privileges, whatever her ages. Indeed, a wife had no legal existence apart from her husband.”*²⁹

²⁸ Sally G. McMillen, *Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women's Rights Movement*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2008, p.18.

²⁹ Ibid.

Tradition is not the only explanation for women's subjugation. There are many other social factors, such as law, which hampered their empowerment. In fact, there is a huge gender discrepancy regarding the efficiency of the law because it deprived them of their most basic right to vote. The Blackstone's law is one of the political inequalities that reinforced the traditional ideologies that led to women's secondary status in Western countries, like America in the nineteenth century.

This is one exemplification of the universality of women's predicaments which beat time and space, seen from this perspective. The Blackstone Law places the wife behind her husband. The Law dispossessed her of her assets once she is married:

*“A wife could not sign contracts in her own name or claim custody of her children in the rare instances of divorce or legal separation.”*³⁰

In the African context, marriage is a fundamental aspect of civilization that unites African societies. It is a social contract with its rules and regulations, a rite of passage bonding two persons and enshrining obligations and values. It is a central issue in African literature. Emecheta's novel, *The Bride Price* is a poignant depiction of the traditional sacredness of marriage. The story is about Aku nna, who, after the death of her father, leaves Lagos to go back to Ibuza with her mother, Ma Blackie, and her brother, Nna-nndo. She falls in love with Chike, her teacher, but the love affair turns out to be a delicate one, because Chike is a descendant of a slave while Aku-nna is freeborn. There lies the problem of caste which complicates the celebration of their wedding. Here, Emecheta brings into focus the issue of intertribal marriage, but the main plot branches out into many other topical issues embedded in traditional beliefs.

³⁰ Sally G. McMillen, *Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women's Rights Movement*, op.Cit, p.18.

As Emecheta tells the story in *The Bride Price*, the reader is introduced to various traditional values which deserve an in-depth analysis. As one of the pillars of traditional African societies, marriage is a celebration of love, synonymous with happiness and freedom, even if it does not always have the same value and symbol in traditional African life. Emecheta, in her writings, scorns the values which, in the eyes of Africans, are regarded as sacred and which basically hinder women's self-development. The sacredness of some ideologies is unassailable as it becomes part and parcel of people's everyday lives. In *The Bride Price*, the heroine terms these ideologies as “primitive”, which imparts the author's disapproval and distance regarding certain traditional norms.

Marriage, or the bride price, is a factual hindrance to women's empowerment. In Nigerian society, the bride price, commonly known as “dowry” in our country or elsewhere, does not have the same value. In the old days, it was an amount of money or an asset in kind which the groom offered the bride in recognition of love. In contrast to the Igbo society, the bride price is a symbol of economic advancement for the woman's family. So, marriage does not always mean happiness for the bride, as it is mostly her parents who fully benefit from it. Worse, in certain cases, she can even be a victim of forced marriage or abduction, particularly, when she happens to love an outcast, like Chike and Aku-nna's case in the *The Bride Price*.

Here, Aku-nna dreads her marriage because of her family's negative view of Chike. In no way do her cousins and her uncle, who has inherited her mother after his brother's death, want a mixed marriage between Chike, the descendant of a slave, and Aku-nna, their “daughter”, a freeborn. This is all the more surprising as, though they are not in favor of Chike marrying Aku-nna, they are eager to snap up the money of the bride price. The girl appears here as a “commodity” whose “price” depends on her value. Even before he died, Aku-

nna's father had always set his eyes on the money the bride price of his daughter would bring: he had a particular relationship with his daughter, based upon fatherly love, but this did not prevent him to look forward to receiving her dowry. Emecheta explains:

“Ezekiel Odia often pitied his daughter, particularly she took more often from him than his Amazon of a wife[...] He had named her ‘Aku-nna’, meaning literary father’s wealth, knowing that the only consolation he could count on from her would be her bride price. To him this was something to look forward to.”³¹

Aku-nna's father is eager to marry his daughter for the money despite all the love he has for her. Nonetheless, this does not prevent her from being an economic pathway for him. He has to depend on the bride price to enhance his economic status and keep a higher profile in his community. Ironically enough, the woman-to-be is dismayed in that situation. This is all the more difficult as tradition reinforces the parents' conception of marriage and bride-price. Such conventions have surely triggered Emecheta and Dangarembga, and other female writers, to use their writings to develop a feminist literary approach to thwart repressive customary beliefs reinforced by patriarchal ideologies.

I.2 The weights of patriarchy on female individuals

The backbone of traditional African beliefs resides in the sacred character of their deities and faith, but other factual elements that can account for the stratification of African societies need to be brought to light. Broadly speaking, many African societies share the same traditional principles. If we take the example of Nigeria and Zimbabwe, the most outstanding community groups, respectively the Igbo and the Shona, have rooted their traditional cultures in a

³¹ Buchi Emecheta, *The Bride Price*, Alice & Busby, New York, p-p, 9-10. 1976.

rigid architecture based on seniority, status, masculinity, wealth, and of course, patriarchy.

In fact, the two cited communities lay much emphasis on the issue of women. Beyond the sacredness of tradition, the Igbo and the Shona societies are characterized by their respect for patriarchy. Patriarchy does not involve women, as a whole, in the process of development. More often than not, it contributes to the perpetuation of “violence” against them by treading on their rights and inhibiting their chance to advance in life. That is where feminist literary criticism is helpful to women writers, for it ultimately thwarts the depreciative discourse of gender-based discrimination. As Gayle Greene and Coppèlia Kahn argue:

*“Literary criticism, like history and the social sciences, has traditionally asked questions that exclude women’s accomplishments. Feminist scholarship undertakes the dual task of deconstructing predominantly male cultural paradigms and reconstructing a female perspective and experience in an effort to change the tradition that has silenced and marginalized them.”*³²

It is from this perspective that we shall look at women writers’ works in general, Emecheta’s and Dangarembga’s in particular, among many others. The two writers examine their societies and the way they function while putting patriarchy at the center of the social organization. In other words, males have a superior position compared to females. They enjoy countless privileges that are justified by right of tradition, which strengthens the position they hold in society. The sacredness of traditional beliefs has a mighty impact on people because it

³² Gayle Greene and Coppèlia Kahn, « *Feminist Scholarship and the Social Construction of Woman* » in *Making a Difference, Feminist Literary Criticism*, edited by Gayle Greene and Coppèlia Kahn, London, Methuen, 1985, p. 1.

explains their readiness to accept the traditional mores, though they do not favor the female sex.

The issue of education is a good illustration of patriarchy in women's writings. Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* and Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* are tinged with suffocating patriarchal stances that plainly show gender discrimination in children's education. In Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, for instance, Tambu, the female protagonist, is keen on studies but she is not encouraged by her mother to pursue her dream. Paradoxically, her brother, Nhamo, goes to school without major problems, for in colonial days it also required means to attend school. Sure enough, on the one hand there is the problem of money, but the basic obstacle is her sex. In fact, she is merely a victim of a preferential treatment based upon patriarchy:

“The needs and sensibilities of women in my family were not considered a priority, or even legitimate.”³³

If we read between the lines, there seems to be a paradox regarding the authority of customs, the way individuals are treated depends mainly on their sex rather than on equity. This is visible in children's education as society denies them one of the main rights that international organizations, such as Amnesty International fight for today: the right to education.

Similarly, Emecheta evokes the partial treatment girls are subject to in education, which society legitimates. Like Dangarembga's heroine in *Nervous Conditions*, Emecheta's female protagonist, Adah, experiences the same treatment. She has the same eagerness to go to school as Tambu in *Nervous Conditions*, but her parents are not ready to send her to the Ladi-lak Institute, the private school attended by her brother, named “Boy”:

³³ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op, Cit, p. 12.

*“So even though Adah was about eight, there were still discussions about whether it would be wise to send her to school.”*³⁴ Though Adah’s parents find it too expensive to send her to school, their abstention is not merely for economic reasons, but rather based on discrimination.

The discriminatory treatment female children undergo has an acute impact on the relation between the discriminated, the discriminators and the privileged. Indeed, the two female protagonists (Adah, in *Second-Class Citizen* and Tambu, in *Nervous Conditions*) who are denied education are not left unaffected: they have a deep feeling of bitterness towards the opposite sex, which is represented by a father, a brother or an uncle. For instance, Adah and Tambu hold their “oppressors” in contempt. In *Second-Class Citizen*, Emecheta shows the naked truth of this discrimination through her heroine who is so disappointed by the discriminatory treatment that tears almost well up in her eyes whenever she sees her brother leave for school or when she goes with him to Ladi-Lak Institute and just remains there to watch him enter his school:

*“Whenever she took Boy to ladi-Lak Institute (...) she would stand by the gate and watch all her friends lining up by the school door, in their smart navy-blue pinafores looking clean and orderly.”*³⁵

The writer seems to show, at the same time, that the envy and eagerness her protagonist feels is not skin deep as it so pervades her mind and soul that it exceeds all bounds and turns out into frustration:

*“This envy later gave way to frustration, which she showed in many small ways.... She would lie, just for the joy of lying; she took secrete joy in disobeying her mother”*³⁶

³⁴ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p, 9.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

The way Adah is treated leads to a tense atmosphere in the family because she starts to be rebellious, particularly to her mother, which is the sign of the trauma she experiences. Holding such a negative feeling towards her mother seems paradoxical since she is not the authority in the family. Simone de Beauvoir's analysis of the relationship between mother and daughter sheds light on that issue. In a case like Adah's and Tambu's, the discriminated girl would point at her mother as the guilty one as she accuses her of being too possessive. Hence she becomes jealous of her and manifests her disapproval through antipathy:

“Most young girls’ dramas concern their family relationships; they seek to break their ties with mother: now they show hostility toward her They often make stories, imagining that their parents are not really their parents, that they are adopted children.”³⁷

As the story unfolds, Emecheta unveils the degradation of the family relationship. Adah has sad memories of her mother that induce her not to have faith in herself. This, indeed, affects her psyche, which generally leads women to develop an attitude of self-denial.

Likewise, Dangarembga depicts the contemptuous family relationship in *Nervous Conditions* that stems from gender-based discrimination. Tambu feels the same as Adah. The discrimination she is victim of is suffocating her, so much so that she starts looking down upon her brother, Nhamo, who, unlike his sister, has the opportunity to go to school. His enrolment to school by his uncle, Babamukuru, is a measure of patriarchal authority. Babamukuru has chosen the eldest boy of his brother's offspring by right of tradition, which Tambu finds too much to tolerate. This undoubtedly urges her to substitute the love she has for

³⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *“The Second Sex”*, *The Classic Manifesto of the Liberated Woman*, New York, Vintage Books Edition, translated by H. M. Parshley, 1974, p, 324

her brother for hatred. Dangarembga starts her novel with a description of Tambu as a blunt character: *“I was not sorry when my brother died. Nor am I apologizing for my callousness, as you may define it, my lack of feeling.”*³⁸

Not only does this account for Tambu’s bitterness, but also explains her choice in resolving not to get rid of her feeling of contempt she holds for her brother. The question that arises here is how has she come to this stage? Generally speaking, people say only good things about people who have passed away. The mere fact that she dare make such a confession suggests that she is really antipathetic to her brother. She has witnessed and undergone gender-based discrimination that tarnished her image and polished her brother’s. She is a victim of her own sex. As Gayle and Kahn put it:

*“(…) whatever power may be accorded to women in a given culture, they are still in comparison to men, devalued as the second sex.”*³⁹

It is important to mention that there are two polarities society casts on boys and girls. Respectively, as children, boys are seen as privileged and girls as “good-for-nothing” creatures. In Tambu’s case, her brother, who is only one year older than her, is aware of his privileged status. Through the way he interacts with his two sisters before he dies, he has learnt to impose his male authority upon them. Since he lives in the mission building with his uncle, Babamukuru, whenever he comes to the family homestead for vacation after each end of term, he makes it a rule to make her sisters carry his luggage from the station, which the latter do naturally, for they cannot do otherwise:

³⁸ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op. Cit, p. 1

³⁹ Gayle Greene and Coppèlia Kahn, « *Feminist Scholarship and the Social Construction of Woman* » in *Making a Difference, Feminist Literary Criticism*, p.2

“Knowing that he did not need help, that he only wanted to demonstrate to us and himself that he had the power, the authority to make us do things for him....”⁴⁰

Nhamo exercises his power upon his sisters and following his parents’ steps, he also defines the division of labor according to his gender. Beyond the discrimination in education, Tambu is bewildered with the way her brother enjoys his supremacy and boasts over it: her suffering is kindled by his irresponsible attitude towards her, her younger sister and her parents. Not only does Nhamo enjoy the favor he has to go to school, at the expense of his sister, but also the fact of leaving his parents and his native village to live in the mission with his uncle Babamukuru has negatively changed his outlook on the world and his next of kin.

In other words, Nhamo looks down upon his parents, which is perceptible in the way he acts and talks to his sisters. He behaves exactly the way Tambu reacts when her mother reminds her to accept what life has given her. From the first day he starts to live in the mission, he becomes antisocial with his family. Living with them does no longer appeal to him much:

“Helping in the fields or with the livestock or firewood, any of the tasks he used to do willingly before he went to the mission, became a bad joke.”⁴¹

Nhamo’s sudden change is not fortuitous as his new attitude stems from the subtle work of the mission, one of the many pillars colonial authorities have to rely upon in their new quest for a male-dominated society in which the subordination of women and their “inferiority” to men will deepen further. He implicitly shows the persons who live around him, particularly females, that he

⁴⁰Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op. Cit, p.10

⁴¹ Ibid.,p.7

is “superior” to them. The awareness of his masculinity justifies his authoritative stance, because he is learning to acquire what society has given him as right. The medium he uses to live up to his rank, is first, to turn his back to the task his parents expect him to do in the house and the fields, and then to make life unbearable for his sisters, to the point of beating Netsai, the youngest girl in the family, more than once, to remind her of his authority.

Likewise, the fathers’s authority is important among the Shona, as in many African tribes. Nhamo’s rebellious attitude evidences his father’s lack of authority in their own family. In contrast, his uncle, Babamukuru, is the epitome of authority and power. Though he is reluctant to help in the fields whenever he visits his parents, he always wants in front of his uncle to keep a high profile:

“The only times that he would expend any energy to help around the homestead were the times when Babamukuru sent word that he was coming to visit. On such days Nhamo would rise at dawn with the rest of us, working so hard that the dirt ingrained itself into the skin of his hands and the sweat ran down his bare back....”⁴²

From a psychoanalytic perspective, the mind is central to understanding the individual in women’s condition. That is to say, a good reading of the society we live in can help decipher people’s inclinations and attitude towards gender. In Nhamo’s case, society empowers males to the detriment of females. In her words, Dangarembga overthrows not only the literary tradition dominated by male writers, but also questions the relevance of the cultural norms that hinder women’s freedom. Nhamo’s reaction which is to reject his sisters and to refuse to work is illustrative of his authoritarian male status. He is torn between his

⁴² Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op. Cit, p.7.

self, his parents' authority, and love. As argues Judith Kegan Gardiner in one of her articles studying women from a psychoanalytic perspective:

“The little boy desires to possess his mother absolutely, regarding his father as a hostile rival. To resolve the fear that his father will punish him with castration, he represses both his desire for his mother and hostility towards his father. Instead, he identifies with his father’s social power and his possession of women.”⁴³

This natural fact usually referred to as the *Oedipus complex*, though relevant for Gardiner, has to be further analyzed. If we consider Nhamo's situation, he does not fear his father's authority, as inferred in the previous passage. So, he identifies himself more with his uncle, Babamukuru, the holder of social power, than with his biological father. To him, the latter is nothing compared to his uncle:

“(…) he (Nhamo) knew that when he grew up he was going to study for more degrees like Babamukuru and become a headmaster like Babamukuru.”⁴⁴

Furthermore, To Nhamo, everything revolves around Babamukuru who is the symbol of power and authority and not his father. The authority his uncle incarnates is exactly the type of authority he wants to impose upon his sisters. This shows, once again, the masculine stance of the Shona clan. His tendency to identify himself with his uncle shows the key role paternal uncles play in African societies in general. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a good illustration of masculinity as it shows the power men hold among the Igbo. The

⁴³ Judith Kegan Gardiner, « Mind Mother : Pschoanalysis and Feminist » in *Making a Difference, Feminist Literary Criticism*, edited by Gayle Greene and Coppèlia Kahn, New York, Mateu & Co. Ltd, 1985, p. 116.

⁴⁴ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.15.

novel tells the story of Okonkwo, a man who rules his life and that of his family with “zero tolerance”.

Like Nhamo, in *Nervous Conditions*, Okonkwo rejects everything his father, Unoka, held dear. In his lifetime, Unoka had been a soft person who did not care for his offspring, worse he was in debt up to his ears. If the ideal for a son is to idolize his father and identify with him, Okonkwo thinks otherwise. In fact, Unoka is Okonkwo’s leading opponent who can claim to be a hero to a certain extent because he has succeeded in obtaining the two titles which are the epitome of any man’s social status among his people, whereas his father dies with no feather in his cap:

“When Unoka died he had taken no title at all and he was heavily in debt. Any wonder then that his son Okonkwo was ashamed of him? Fortunately, among these people a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father.”⁴⁵

The male child’s identification with his father depends ultimately on the father’s full control of authority and power. If the father fails to assume his role as the chief of the family, the male child might impose himself or even question his father’s authority and identify himself with a person who is more authoritative and inspiring, as shown by Dangarembga through Nhamo and Babamukuru. This amounts to saying that the status of women can be likened with that of men. But this does not mean that a woman can fully play a man’s role in a normal patriarchal order. As has been said, though most African societies are patriarchal, the value of a man lies in his hands. He is the only one that can define the low or high profile his people may cut for him.

⁴⁵ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, Bantam Doubleday, New York, 1994, p. 8.

Literary works have shown men who have lost the high profile they should enjoy within their community simply because they failed to assume themselves the role their own community has ascribed them. Hence, they are victims of patriarchy, just like women. More than once, a man who ignores his male privileges is portrayed as a lonely person or an outcast whose future is very often gloomy and uncertain. Dangarembga talks about it overtly in *Nervous Conditions* through the characters of Jeremiah and Takesure. The former does not use the privileges society has conferred upon him as a man. Little is he in a position to “rule” his family as Okonkwo does in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, the writer puts it metaphorically with a “(...) *with heavy hand.*”⁴⁶

Unlike Okonkwo, in *Nervous Conditions*, Jeremiah, Tambu’s father, rules his family, not with “a heavy hand”, but according to his elder brother’s vision: Babamukuru. In other words, Tambu’s father is portrayed as a puppet in the hands of Babamukuru. All the decisions in his own family are taken by his brother, which does not escape his young daughter’s eyes. In addition to the poverty which grips his family, he fails to take his courage in both hands and impose his authority on them and his brother. When the family is to tackle serious issues, like the education of Nhamo, Babamukuru is the one who makes the most authoritative decision without any measure of contradiction from Jeremiah. Even if the proposal is a good one, his duty, as father and chief of the family, is to make sure his authority is unquestioned. His daughter notices that it is Babamukuru’s voice which prevails, after all, to the detriment of her father’s, whatever the consequence may be in their family: “*It had been my uncle’s idea that Nhamo (Tambu’s brother) should go to school at the mission.*”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, Bantam Doubleday, New York, 1994, p. 13.

⁴⁷ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op. Cit, p. 4.

Through her main character's eyes, the Zimbabwean writer digs deep in the changeable nature of patriarchy which puts masculinity and authority first. In fact, this is central in Dangarembga's writing, and many African women writers are homogenous on this score. This is understandable, as women are more affected by patriarchy prevailing in African societies. The interesting point beyond patriarchy confining women to a secondary position is that some female writers point out male "victimization" as well. Because of their weak character, some males, as heads of families, are not strong enough to play their role, hence they are down-ranked like women.

Emecheta hints at men's irresponsibility in her novels just like Dangarembga in *Nervous Conditions*. In *Second-Class Citizen*, through the character of Francis, the husband of the female protagonist, Adah, the writer calls the reader's attention covertly to her husband's ambivalent character. Though evolving in a male-dominated society, he does not fully give free rein to his voice and is deprived of any right to expression, just like women in a traditional context.

Like Tambu's father in *Nervous Conditions*, in *Second-Class Citizen* Adah's husband handles his wife roughly, but does not have a full grasp of his power. He does not rule his family efficiently as a responsible leader, for the most crucial decisions are handled by his parents, particularly his father. For instance, it is the latter who decides whether or not he can travel to England and whether his wife can join him or not. His parents hold the chief role in Francis's family. This is striking as Adah is the one who caters for the family's financial needs. His attitude is uncharacteristic in a male-dominated society where men always come first. The mere fact of letting another person, even one's parents, lead one's own family is a sign of weakness in the mind of people, though society regards seniority as a real reference in moral terms. Adah experiences all this:

“(...) as most African wives know, most of the decisions about their own lives had to be referred to Big Pa, Francis’s father, then to his mother, then discussed among the brothers of the family before Adah was referred to. She found all this ridiculous, the more so if the discussion involves finance.”⁴⁸

Adah is torn between her society’s moral code and her husband’s lack of authority. The situation is all the more complicated as it is a male-dominated society, her in-laws have a say on the way her husband “rules” her family. The issue of decision making is interesting, as far as his mother is concerned, as it is Francis who keeps her informed about everything that concerns them. But, this does not imply that his mother is empowered compared to the other wives. Rather, this accounts for her privileged status as the senior wife of Francis’s father, a privilege that does not fully grant her the right to make important decisions. In fact, her power and authority are restricted to the sphere of her children and her daughter-in-law, Adah.

Emecheta provides even more details about this when the occasion occurs for Adah to join her husband in England. This event marks the so-called power Francis’s mother holds now in her homestead. Even though that power is limited to Adah, she means to use it fully. Hence she depends on her mother-in-law to join her husband to England, and she has to be convincing:

“Adah won over her mother-in-law She had several necklaces for her little girl and herself. She gave all to her mother in law (...) Adah boasted with a faked smile on her face, whilst her heart sent her mother-in-law to her Master.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op. cit., pp. 26-27.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p.33.

Emecheta's heroine is at her wits' end and is well aware of her mother-in-law's "power", but, surprisingly enough she has manoeuvred to outfox her. She sacrificed herself by giving her what she loved most, that is to say her jewellery and that of her children. When Francis announces his father the trip he wanted to make to England in order to pursue his studies in accounting, the latter accepts, but this shows once again his lack of authority and power in the eyes of his wife. Visibly, he cannot make a decision without "writing home about" it. Since he is answerable to his decisions and inclinations, Adah is no exception. Her life project is also to be discussed with her mother-in-law just as her husband did with his father. For Adah, the whole situation suggests that her mother-in-law has tried to blackmail her. Then, one may ask whether she would have let her join her husband if her proposal had not convinced her.

The male-dominated society in traditional Africa is not only detrimental to women's empowerment, it also affects men, for, even though women are oppressed, men are not better off. The moral code gives them privileges over women, but their power and privileges are limited, that is to say even the most important or titled man must be answerable to any infringement he commits. The man who misuses his power or fails his life is regarded as worthless and, consequently, little can he expect from his community. In her essay "*Tradition and the African Female Writer: the Example of Buchi Emecheta*", Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo gives a telling account of democracy, ethics and justice in Nigerian society:

"Traditional society in Iboland was patterned as a communal one; so it was the responsibility of the society to uphold the moral code and ensure that it was rigidly adhered to by all. The proverbial saying 'If a finger touches oil, all the other become soiled' was truly applicable to traditional society because a community could be made to

suffer as a result of a misdeed of one of its members. Consequently individuals were answerable to the people and each person's conduct was the responsibility of the entire community."⁵⁰

Not only does Theodora focus on society's communal stance, but she also hints at the responsibility of individuals regarding their actions and interactions with their community. In other words, individuals cannot act deliberately because they have to enforce and abide by the law of the community. This is what accounts for the withdrawal of power and status or title from men who go astray. In fact, an irresponsible man holds the same position as a woman the day he goes aside against the group's will and moral code. This is noticeable in Achebe's male protagonists. In his book, "*Chinua Achebe et la Tragédie de l'Histoire*", Thomas Melone describes the writer's male protagonist as a two-faceted character whose fate tilts respectively two extremes:

*"L'histoire de l'homme dans l'œuvre d'Achebe peut être représentée par une courbe circulaire où le point de chute, au terme de l'existence, vient toujours se confondre avec le point de départ."*⁵¹

Fiction in the African context shows ambivalence as far as male characters are concerned. This ambivalence is one of the main characteristics of life in African societies as a whole. In a male-dominated society, men can run a great risk if they misbehave or misuse the authority that is conferred upon them. Little do they enjoy the sympathy of their people. Such irresponsible people are easy preys for their community as they are victims of repressive traditions the way women are.

⁵⁰ Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo, "*Tradition and the African Women Writer: The Example of Buchi Emecheta*" in *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta* edited by Marie Umeh, Africa World Press, Trenton, 1996, p. 8.

⁵¹ Melone, *Chinua Achebe et la Tragédie de l'Histoire*, *Présence Africaine*, Paris, p.204. 1973.

The Zimbabwean male writer, Shimmer Chinodya depicts the uncompromising feature of his people in his novel *Dew in the Morning*. Through Jairo's character, he unfolds the ambivalent nature of people and customs. Jairo is the headman of the village whose title dates back to a long time. It is related to his ancestors' own status, his authority is never questioned by the community because of the sacredness of tradition.

Under colonial rule, when the Southern population called *derukas* have come to the North to settle down, Jairo is the first to offer them plots of land to farm and build up their homesteads. As head of the village, he has all the power needed to make a name for himself, but his authority as chief does not permit him to reduce his own poverty, eke out a living and set himself as a good example. Instead, he acts irresponsibly and tries to get money from the new comers dishonestly, through blackmailing. He does not make himself known by his valour in agriculture, but indulges in drinking to hide his worthlessness:

*“Here is a headman who spoke of prosperity, peace and progress, and yet made not one positive effort to achieve these standards He spoke of honesty and decency when he stole eggs and failed to hand in the taxes to the district office. The shocking state of his household spoke against him”*⁵²

Jairo is not a man of his word, nor is he fully committed to developing the village, its prosperity is not his concern. To him, more *derukas* means more beer and privileges. He has lost the high profile he is meant to hold in his community, the same as Jeremiah and Takesure in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Francis in Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*. Eventually, he dies alone. He does not even deserve a decent burial because he is a victim of his own misdeeds:

⁵² Shimmer Chinodya, *Dew in the Morning*, Oxford, Heinemann A.W.S, p.74. 2001.

*“They buried him in the pouring rain on the day before Christmas. He had delayed the Christmas preparations. They did not even have a coffin for him. They just wrapped his body, small and bony as an unfeathered chick, in a blanket and laid him down to rest.”*⁵³

So, it is clear that women go through much hardship due to the weights patriarchal customs of their society on them. Most of the discrimination they face is legitimate according to customs. No access to education is one of the discriminations they undergo. But to talk about the patriarchal stance of African societies without bearing in mind its complex nature would be very simplistic. In other words, females, as well as males, can be victims of traditional norms. Men are privileged to the detriment of women, but this does not mean that they are exempt from losing their status. As mentioned above, a man who does not succeed in making the best of the advantage society has given him is unpopular among his own people. Still, a detailed study of the predicaments women encounter in their respective societies and everyday life should show how unbalanced their situation is, as compared to their male counterparts.

I.3 Women’s impeding ordeals

Any patriarchal order has an impact on women’s lives. Typical African societies do not put women’s empowerment at the heart of their concerns. A woman will undergo a series of setbacks that hinder her social promotion. The predicaments she faces are noticeable in some female writers’ discourses. Fiction is used to hint at the impeding ordeals women go through. The two female writers under study discuss the various hardships their female protagonists experience in their social environment. These various ordeals are

⁵³ Shimmer Chinodya, *Dew in the Morning*, op.Cit, p.215.

going to be tackled in their novels, at different levels and from various perspectives in order to have a transversal analysis of the issue at stake.

Women's condition is almost the same everywhere in the world as they are the victims of society. Indeed, their "victimization" starts at an early age. Later on, they encounter more and more tribulations as long as they live within the same oppressive environment. As children, women experience social ordeals that prevent them from taking full advantage of their lives and freedom. First, men start by making them feel like a "second nature". Consequently, they become aware of their sex as a hindrance to their own development and integration into their society. This psychological stance, which is merely a brain-washing procedure on the part of men towards women, is viewed by some advocates of women's empowerment as awkward and overpowering. According to Simone de Beauvoir:

*"One is not born, but rather, becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature...."*⁵⁴

Simone de Beauvoir argues that human beings have made their own laws about the way they stereotype women, but from the beginning, men and women were created by God regardless of their genetic features. This sheds now light on women writers' position on the issue. Emecheta and Dangarembga for example gauge the weight of tradition on their protagonists at a very early age.

In *Second-Class Citizen*, Adah recalls her first sad life experiences as a little girl, for Emecheta wants to be as explicit as possible about the harshness of the Igbo male-dominated society Adah lives in, all due to her sex. She has to rake up the past events of her heroine during her childhood to unfold the story:

⁵⁴ Simone de Beauvoir , "The Second Sex", op.Cit, p.301

*“Adah did not know for sure what gave birth to her dream, when it all started, but the early anchor she could pin down in this drift of nothingness was when she was about eight years old.”*⁵⁵

The writer infers that the female child’s early age is not an excuse that can exempt her from oppression. To her people, women's destiny is subordination and obedience. At a certain age during childhood, they are generally denied of the right to get educated that stems from the prejudicial nature of their social environment. They experience other constraints that are noticeable at different levels. These constraints are predicaments to their own development as individuals, all the more as they cannot fully express themselves. Those predicaments are various, they occur within the family to a higher degree.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga’s female protagonist, Tambu, does not lead an easy life during childhood. In the same way, Emecheta recounts her female protagonist’s story and the tribulations she encounters from childhood, Dangarembga uses the same strategy. She tells the historical events that her heroine has undergone. Consequently, she goes as far back as possible in order to be not only explicit, but also to be consistent in the way she analyzes women’s issues. The Zimbabwean writer finds it useful then to rake up the events that have occurred to Tambu and the way she interacts with her parents, mainly her brother, Nhamo. The nature of the relationship between Dangarembga’s female protagonist and her brother is far from being tender, respectful and humanistic. Rather, it is a relationship that promotes men and confines women to a secondary position.

⁵⁵ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.7.

The family environment and the relationship female children establish with their parents and their brothers are very complex, for they include sad episodes that often crystallize on girls' minds before they start to nag them. Therefore, when women writers talk about them, it is very often with a tinge of regret and anguish. This is the reason why Dangarembga insists on the death of her heroine's brother in *Nervous Conditions*, which is central to the book. She confesses the harsh treatment Tambu's brother has inflicted her during her childhood. But, one ought to bear in mind that the mere fact of turning back the hand of time to the death of her brother imparts the kind of treatment the author, herself, has had with her own brother and the anguish she has been through during her childhood: "I was thirteen years old when my brother died."⁵⁶

This passage is an illustration of the writer's satirical stance regarding the living conditions of the female child. It shows that being a young girl does not, in any way, exempt her from being a victim of sexism. In this regard, Dangarembga and Emecheta are in perfect symphony in their respective stories, *Nervous Conditions* and *Second-Class Citizen*. In both novels, both of them begin the stories of their heroines at an early age. Emecheta's heroine, Adah, is eight years old when she starts to puzzle over her different tribulations as a young girl. Likewise, Dangarembga's heroine is thirteen years old when her first nightmarish episodes start off.

Writing has a social function. As such, the evocation of personal experiences for women writers is not just a figment of their nostalgic feelings but rather a commitment to change their condition even though some writers recall their childhood memories with passion and enthusiasm, particularly in autobiographical novels. As far as the two chosen writers are concerned, their childhood memories truly impart the treatment they face at an early age. Thus,

⁵⁶Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.1.

the description of early events that occur in their lives includes the most turbulent moments in their existence.

In *Second-Class Citizen*, Emecheta uses ambiguity to evoke the very beginning of her heroine's story: “*She was not quite sure that she was exactly eight....*”⁵⁷ Here, to her, what is important is not simply the notion of time, but the duality between time and event. In other words, she highlights the relationship between female children and the prejudices they face. All this happens through her heroine’s mouthpiece, Adah. In fact, she infers that, in her own traditional environment, girls and children, in a broader sense, are victims of “objectification” which is mainly characterized by a biased treatment through excessive work and, sometimes, brutalization.

At an early age, children are not exempt from labour. They help around the house and the fields. In *Second-Class Citizen*, Adah is the household drudge: she shows a slavish devotion to domestic work by taking on her mother’s domestic chores, which can compromise her health and development:

*“The day's work! Her day started at four-thirty in the morning. On the veranda of her new home in Pike Street, there was a mighty drum used as a water container and Adah had to fill this with water before going to school. This usually meant making ten to twelve trips to the public pump.”*⁵⁸

The task sounds here like torture to Adah: the least thing that reminds her of it discourages her. The work itself seems to be undoable with, as Emecheta puts it, “*a mighty drum used as a water container*”. The young girl has her work cut out for her. This is a duty she is compelled to do. The question is not whether

⁵⁷ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.7

⁵⁸ Ibid, pp, 17-18.

she can do it properly, for she is supposed to do it without questioning. This shows, once again, that the little girl is forced to do things she visibly does not want to do. This way of treating children is not even tolerated by Western modern society simply because it does not promote children's rights and development.

The development of all individuals, particularly children, requires some spare time and freedom. This leads us to ask how children can advance in life if they are not given the opportunity to do certain things on their own. This is the situation with Adah: she is a young school girl and a "maid" at the same time. She wants to excel at school while doing all the household chores. Her future might be compromised because people around her do not give her enough time to think about her own future or concentrate on her studies. This general attitude remains unquestionable since she lives in a patriarchal society. Through Adah's ordeals, Emecheta reveals the patriarchal nature of Igbo people that legitimates the sad condition of women.

More importantly, not only does young Adah seem bonded to men, but she also appears as an easy prey for them. The situation worsens following the death of her father; her mother is re-married in a homestead filled with relatives: each one of them with their own family. Her mother's second marriage means that her "new father" and relatives will treat her badly:

*"So Pa's death was a blessing to them, for it meant they could have Adah as an unpaid servant to help in this bulging household Her being up so early was also a great help to her new Pa and Master. He went to work by six-thirty in the mornings and Adah had to be there to get him his odds and ends."*⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.18.

There is no escape for Adah. Her mother's new husband rules the house, without making her any concession. In fact, she is “enslaved”. Emecheta’s heroine is roughly handled by her new family who takes advantage of the situation: they make her work like a drudge without a wage or any other form of compensation. There is an exploiter (Pa, his children and siblings) and an exploited (Adah). Hence her “new father” is referred to as a “Master”, which denotes domestic slavery.

Unlike the explicit portrayal of children's exploitation through household chores in *Second-Class Citizen*, in *Double Yoke* Emecheta portrays different forms of exploitation young girls are subject to: here, she denounces mental and sexual exploitation between the heroine and her tutor. This is understandable as the two novels’ historical backgrounds are not similar in terms of background. *Second-Class Citizen* is set in the pre and post-independence periods, when Nigerians were more prone to accepting the principles behind traditional values which were, indeed, deeply grounded in a patriarchal culture. Contrary to *Second-Class Citizen*, which is mainly set in the Western world, *Double Yoke* unfolds essentially an intellectual environment between the collision of tradition and modernity. The female protagonist in *Double Yoke*, Nko, lives on the campus at Calabar University. Naturally, she is not as young and vulnerable as Adah in *Second-Class Citizen* or Dangarembga’s heroine, Tambu, to some extent. Nonetheless, she falls prey to men's power.

Double Yoke does not tell the story of a young girl who evolves in her traditional family with household chores already cut out for her. Rather, it portrays a young female student torn between a traditional and modern environment in the midst of a learning centre, caught between herself and a “sex-maniac”, Professor Ikot. This shows that living in a modern world does not save girls from being exploited. Professor Ikot uses his status to blackmail the young student, Nko. He is aware of her desperate situation to abuse her. He

offers to help her only if she accepts to sleep with him, knowing that she will rise to the bait and accept the offer:

*“He was going to have her, she dared not refuse... and like a wooden doll, she let the man have what he wanted. He thundered and pushed her around and promised heaven and earth, but Nko was very still. At the end she asked, ' have you finished now? I must have a wash. ' Her voice was icy...”*⁶⁰

Emecheta shows a sexual interaction devoid of love and consent, where only the dominant enjoys the intercourse whereas the other partner candidly follows its course. The rhetorical question Nko asks: “... *have you finished now?*” explains her impatience and disgust about the sexual ordeal. After Ikot is sexually satisfied, she feels soiled and wants to cleanse herself, as signals the “*icy*” tone of her voice.

Thus, sexual exploitation is one of the scourges female writers castigate in their literary works. It is a way for them to fight against male domination. This is understandable since, from a feminist scholar’s perspective, male domination is rooted in human nature. In other words, the male is very often haunted by a phallogocentric feeling that only leads to male chauvinism. Feminist scholars such as Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn believe that women writers have a big challenge to overturn the table regarding male biological “superiority” which is only an ideology promoted by men and supported by tradition at the expense of women:

“That men have penises and women do not, that women bear children and men do not, are biological facts which have no determinate meanings ...'The social construction of

⁶⁰Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, London, Ogwugu Afor co, 1982, p.140

gender takes place through the working of ideology. Ideology is that system of beliefs and assumptions – unconscious, unexamined, invisible- which represents the imaginary relationships of individuals to their real conditions of existence'.⁶¹

For Greene and Kahn, the downgrading of women is a pure invention of society. People knowingly create gender differences on the basis of their essence or cognitive features, but not on the basis of phallogentric features. Ideology appears here as an excuse to legitimate the hegemony of men over women.

Presumably, in *Double Yoke*, the ordeals the heroine faces are mainly related to her quest for identity at all costs. The kind of relationship Nko entertains with Professor Ikot is an unbridled and yet well-planned strategy on her part. Her sexual exploitation is very much like a calculated ordeal in which each of the two parties has their “share”. Unlike the household chores that impede Adah’s good progress at school in *Second-Class Citizen*, Nko’s ordeal with Professor Ikot is one with a purpose, because, for her, the end justifies the means. She accepts the ordeal even though she repels it personally. The whole thing remains harmful since she regrets it immediately after the deed.

In this episode, Emecheta evokes the conflictual relationship between men and women in which the former always succeed in manipulating the latter. Hence, whatever Nko's motivation for accepting to have an affair with Professor Ikot, the fact remains that it is Professor Ikot who has the last laugh.

By the same token, the writer deplores men's irresponsibility and lack of loyalty towards the state institutions such as the schools or colleges they represent. This is exemplified through Dr Edet, professor Ikot's colleague. She

⁶¹ Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn, *Making A Difference: “Feminist Literary Criticism and the Social Construction of Woman”*, in *Making A Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, op.Cit, p.1.

flatly rejects professor Ikot's offer to supervise Nko, while countless students he is meant to supervise are deprived of such a right. Dr Edet surely puts it right when she tells her colleague:

*“That will be ethically wrong. What about those students, brilliant ones who had been waiting for you to be their supervisor for these three years? A man of your standing should be supervising post graduate students and you know that many students in this department would give their right hand for you to have a look at their work.”*⁶²

Ikot's lack of ethics is reminiscent of his professional duty as a teacher/lecturer. Furthermore, it is indicative of the extensive severity of women's exploitation by men. Emecheta posits a pessimistic attitude when it comes to getting rid of this cancerous plague to which women are subjugated. Ikot's immoral behaviour evidences that the “oppressors” and “oppressed” are either educated or uneducated. His attitude validates the truth that the injustice perpetuated by men against women has no boundaries that can protect the latter from such misdeeds. As an intellectual, he is supposed to be “above the fray” given his stature. But, unfortunately by blackmailing Nko, he puts his finger on the sore. This shows the corruption colonialism has brought to African societies and noticeable even after independence. Ikot appears just like an irresponsible person, for he betrays his wife by entertaining and making love to another woman, while his wife is all by herself at home. He shows her the “niceties of the savannah”, though he does not truly love her, whereas his wife never goes out to enjoy life: *“The professor's wife was seldom seen outside her home”*⁶³. Ikot's attitude is paradoxical: he neglects his wife and fails to make her happy.

⁶² Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, op.Cit, p.108.

⁶³ Ibid.

Yet, he behaves quite differently and openly with his student, Nko. On top of that, he knows that the latter is engaged to Ete Kamba, one of his students.

On the whole, in *Double Yoke*, and in the other books under study, Emecheta and Dangarembga are unanimous in their discourse: such ordeals hamper women's development. Even though there are household chores in *Double Yoke*, which represent the crux of the problem girls come across in their childhood, the exploitation of the female individual still remains one of Emecheta's and Dangarembga's main concerns.

Besides, *Nervous Conditions* is a good example of the constraints that hinder females' promotion in the prime of age. Though a little girl, Tambu represents a great asset for her parents. Her ordeal seems to be less bearable than Adah's. Not only does her servitude reside in domestic chores, but she also represents a chief asset for her father in his farming activities: she plays a double role for him. In traditional Africa, male children naturally dedicate themselves to working in the fields and act as a labour force for their parents. But Tambu is not lucky: her only brother, Nhamo, is exempt from working the land the day on he joins his uncle Babamukuru to live in the mission. Consequently, in addition to her heavy domestic chores, she finds herself in a situation where, not only does she have to help around the field, but she must also fill her brother's part, and this will not leave her unscathed. Although she is keen on going to school, her advancement seems to be jeopardized: "*He (Nhamo) would drink sweet black tea while he read his books and we went about our chores.*"⁶⁴

Like most girls of her age group, Tambu takes care of the family house. Her young sister, Netsai, and herself are perfect symbols of sexual injustice. Nhamo, the male child, takes good advantage of the situation. The writer ironically describes two telling pictures of gender-based discrimination.

⁶⁴ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.9.

It is noteworthy here that, contrary to most of the young girls in their households, in *Nervous Conditions*, the case of Dangarembga's heroine goes beyond the family setting. She partakes in working in the fields to her peril:

*“We used to itch viciously at the end of each day during the maize harvest and straight to the river from the fields to wash the itching away. It was not surprising that Nhamo did not like the harvest. None of us found it a pleasant task. It was just one of those things that had to be done.”*⁶⁵

Obviously, Nhamo is not the only person who dreads working in the fields. Tambu and her sister, Netsai, do not like it, either. They cannot do otherwise as it is a compulsory task for both. His cold-hearted refusal to help is partly the result of the delicacy of the task, and partly the result of his budding masculinity he wants to impose upon his sisters. The latter have no other choice than to comply with the insurmountable norms embedded in a tradition that they daren't reject at this age.

To put it in a nutshell, there is enough ground to say that, be it in *Second-Class Citizen*, *Double yoke* or *Nervous Conditions*, the three novels override the ordeals that impede the female individual's advancement. In fact, one cannot gloss over the ordeals women face without going back to the very beginning of their childhood memories. For each stage, starting from early age up to motherhood, it holds a particular treatment that catches the two writers' attention. Nonetheless, if the three novels highlight the subordination of young girls through work, Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* reveals a dissimilar form of children's treatment.

⁶⁵ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.6.

More specifically, in *The Book of Not*, Dangarembga's heroine and the female characters, mostly free born Rhodesians, are victims of discrimination and racism. The writer shows a more traumatic ordeal the young girl has to cope with beyond family politics. Here, in the midst of the educational system, through her interactions with her fellow students monitored by the colonial administration, mostly of whom white dominated, the young girl goes through a myriad of setbacks she has to endure. The Sacred Heart institution is a cosmopolitan milieu of native young girls who happen to distinguish themselves through hard work. The children's different social status and backgrounds have an impact on the way they interact since they are in a racist system that is far from being lenient to them. In the light of this, it goes without saying that the young Black girl evolving in such a situation faces racial discrimination.

Dangarembga's heroine and some of her school mates are good examples of female subjugation. The environment is very oppressive to them because they are victims of a triple oppression: class, colour and age. The degrading treatment they experience daily accounts for the attitude they have towards the *other*. In fact, it explains the aloofness they keep vis à vis everything and everyone different from them, so much so that they lose confidence in themselves. For instance, Miss Plato, the matron at the Young Ladies' College of Sacred Heart, does not facilitate things for Tambu and her classmates. Through the way she interacts with them, she more than once reminds them of their second class nature. Even the way she dresses reveals her antipathetic stance:

“Miss Plato relentlessly desires each and every item to be in order. Miss Plato wore White, of a particularly antiseptic unsulliable sort, over every clothable part of her body. She increased the sense of not wanting anything unsanctioned or disordered to touch her by wearing, even in the horrible heat of October, long White sleeves sewn tightly into cuffs

*that fitted precisely, without a centimetre to spare about her wrists where flesh hung loosely.*⁶⁶

As the matron is in charge of the students' well-being at the Sacred Heart, Miss Plato rather reminds them of their differences and *Otherness*. Her attire tells a lot about her mind-set since her clothes cut a clear boundary between her and the African female students, which signals aloofness and protection. Dangarembga ironically portrays Miss Plato as the prototype of wickedness, even in the way she is dressed. Her rigid attitude towards the students, particularly blacks, alienates her mind. She fails to distinguish the difference between heat and cold when it comes to getting dressed the way she thinks right.

As already been said, *The Book of Not* shows a more pronounced ordeal, as far as gender and age are concerned. Contrary to young girls' overall subjugation, here the situation they experience goes beyond the home environment with all its chores and labour. Through the matron's episode, Dangarembga shows that Tambu's and her fellow students' pride is hurt: discrimination goes beyond gender, it is also about color. The administration of the Sacred Heart is part of a nationwide prejudice against women.

Although the school is home for the most distinguished students whose parents' better social position is unquestioned, still, the administration is discriminatory towards some indigenous African students, among whom Tambu and her roommates. The boarding house is a good example of the nightmarish experiences the young school girls suffer. They are categorised according to their colour and background:

⁶⁶ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, op.Cit, p.50.

“... *the African dormitory This dormitory which was the only one to have its own ablution section, was called the African dormitory because we six young women slept there.*”

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Through her heroine, the Zimbabwean writer recalls her past sad memories as a school girl at Sacred Heart at an early age, which she satirises now through fiction. Not only does she blow the whistle on the segregationist boarding school system, but she also denounces the insanity of the living conditions there. The fact that the "African dormitory" is equipped with an "ablution section" does not mean that the girls who live there (Tambu and her five roommates) are well treated or that they take good advantage of the situation in the boarding system. Rather, it accounts for the discriminatory treatment of Tambu's school in particular through the whole of Rhodesia under colonial rule, as it is an allusion to their "weird" religious practice.

Be it Emecheta or Dangarembga, their works take into account the ordeals females undergo traditionally in their respective societies. They start at an early age in various forms. But they are obviously not profitable for them, as far as their advancement is concerned. In *Second-Class Citizen*, Emecheta shows that the little girl is even deprived of her most basic right to go to school, like Dangarembga's heroine. The former reveals a young girl who is merely a victim of her sex. Even if *Double Yoke* drifts a bit away from the traditional "victimization" of girls at home, it still deals with the same setbacks females have to face in modern societies. In *Double Yoke*, if Nko has a "chance" to toil her way from school up to college, she cannot thwart the constraints she encounters unscathed: she has to accept the conditional help of her tutor.

⁶⁷ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, op.Cit, p.51.

In *The Book of Not*, Dangarembga goes beyond domesticity and talks about more serious ordeals women face. The young girls at Sacred Heart show that they live under a system that does not promote interracial relationships in an institution that represents colonial power. This points to the kind of injustice women undergo in a colonial context where they are expected to abide by the ideology of the most powerful ones.

Dangarembga and Emecheta tackle the weights that lie heavy on women's backs. They start from the very beginning; early when the young girl's mistreatment starts off, to depict her entrapment in an oppressive environment, embedded in patriarchy. Even though Dangarembga's depiction of the young girl's prejudices are more vivid in *The Book of Not* where discrimination and racism are central points, still, she is congruent with Emecheta who focuses more on children's exploitation through girl's education and "servitude". Their discourse aims to raise awareness on a common issue that is grounded in children's exploitation which is merely a root cause and an impediment to women's social advancement in general. Emecheta believes that, although some parents overwork girls with domestic chores or field work, as part of their initiation, it still remains that young girls' self-development is, more often than not, played down or even forgotten:

*"One might think ... that Africans treated their children very badly. To Adah's people and to Adah herself, this was not so at all, it was the custom. Children, especially girls were taught to be very useful very early in life, and this has its advantages."*⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.18.

To Emecheta, if people in general overwork children, precisely girls, on the grounds that it is to prepare them for their future life, it is perilous to them, for what they ask for and expect from them is beyond the girls' capacities. Emecheta digs deeper in her analysis by calling her people's way of treating "self-centeredness". As a matter of fact, people's primary motivation is not the child's well-being, but the gains they make from her: "*Nobody was interested in her (Adah) for her own sake, only for the money she would fetch, and the housework she could do....*"⁶⁹

The predicaments that strike the young girl go crescendo as she gets on in years. Each stage of her life corresponds to a form of constraint she must go through. The nightmarish childhood she experiences does not leave her. In their adulthood women realise that oppression changes in kind and duration. People come up with a different form of oppression that fits them as adults. Hence, in the midst of adulthood, they cannot escape the psychological pressure their parents put on them on the issue of marriage. Rarely do females have the freedom and will to deal with the issue of marriage in a traditional context. More interestingly, marriage remains the chief ordeal females sustain. Unluckily for them, the union does not usually take into account the partner of their own choice.

In traditional Africa, because manhood is deeply grounded in people's minds, the more male children parents have, the higher their status is. But female children can be beneficial for parents too, mainly when they come of age, as parents wait for this moment for the good fortune it brings to the family: the dowry men bring when they marry their daughters, in kind or cash. Thus, anyone who knows the African context easily understands the place that money holds in the minds of the people. Since in Africa men, as heads of the family, are the ones who "wear the belt", children, particularly females, and wives, do not

⁶⁹ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.18.

always have freedom of expression on the issue of marriage. Consequently, men's decisions on issues such as marriage remain sacred.

As writers, Dangarembga and Emecheta take the issue of marriage as a major topic which is also part of their humanistic commitments. They set their respective heroines between two paradigms: tradition and patriarchy. These polarities are not in favour of the females as far as marriage is concerned. Among the Igbo and the Shona, tradition and patriarchy are complementary in the sense that their main concern is to empower males at the expense of females. As a result, female protagonists are more than once beset by customs they dare not question and also by men's everlasting quest for power. Caught in such a situation, they are at a loss in their pursuit of emancipation.

In *Nervous Conditions* and *Second-Class Citizen*, the two heroines are caught in the above-mentioned situation where there is no room for them to make their own decisions. Consequently, marriage, which should be one of the most joyful moments in any female's life, is awaited with mixed feelings and skepticism. Eventually, it turns out to be a terrible psychological pressure on her. In *Second-Class Citizen*, the socio-cultural and economic context impact clearly on parents' attitude. Although Adah's father is no longer in the land of the living, the weight of tradition lies heavy on her shoulders. Since colonialism has deeply shaken the economy of African countries, the rampant poverty that plagues the Igbo society aggravates the enforcement of the traditional ideologies that favour fatherhood and patriarchy over the females. This accounts for the increased sacred value of the dowry, as it contributes to lift the family out of poverty.

Additionally, in *Second-Class Citizen*, the issue of marriage is informative of the sacredness of the dowry, but more importantly, it reveals the patriarchal order of Igbo people. This is understandable as the heroine's brother, called "Boy", benefits from the money his father has put aside in order to enable him to

pursue his studies. Naturally, after the father's death, the family starts to run out of money, and his studies are almost compromised. Knowing the stakes attached to Adah's marriage, the family attempts to find a husband for her, so as to save her brother's studies:

*“Time went by quickly, and when she reached the age of eleven, people started asking her when she was going to leave school. This was an urgent question because the fund for Boy's education was running low; Ma was not happy with her new husband and it was considered time that Adah started making a financial contribution to her family. This terrified Adah.”*⁷⁰

The male child's needs come first, compared to the female's ones. When it comes to save *Boy's* studies, little do Adah's parents think of their daughter's future. Since there is an urgency to solve the family's problems, the only way out is to hasten up things for Adah and find a husband to snap the bride-price.

Like Adah, Emecheta's female protagonist in *Second-Class Citizen*, Dangarembga's heroine in *Nervous Conditions* too, is confronted with the same issue. Tambu is not free from the psychological trauma of marriage. When she starts coming of age, her mother who embodies tradition reminds her of the situation which awaits her as a female individual, which of course is related to her marriage. Tambu's mother is well aware of the fact that at a certain age, by right of tradition, young girls are assets to their families for the bride-price they bring to them. Knowing the rigidity of the customs, she prepares her daughter to be mentally strong to weather the predicaments she might endure in her life: *“What will help you my child, is to learn to carry your burdens with strength.”*⁷¹

⁷⁰ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.18.

⁷¹ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.16.

Worse, Tambu's father reminds her that he can no longer stand by her side to back her financially in her school fees. He even goes further as he makes it clear for her to be more involved in domestic chores. To her father, her fancy for school will inevitably lead her to her ruin, all the more as there is no means for her to pursue her schooling. He ironically tells her that the fact of holding to books is a dry loss for her, simply because, never in her life, will she feed her husband with books: *“Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables.”*⁷²

The narrator's father is partly pessimistic about his daughter, and partly chauvinistic. He believes that the essence of life for women is solely to please their men. He does not promote women's entrepreneurship, nor does he believe in their cognitive ability to work out the quintessential value of school. To him, his daughter's place is like that of her mother, at home and on the farm.

As already been said, the young girls' subjugation is correlative to their age. It becomes unbearable as they grow. Their parents often talk about the issue of marriage with them in their prime, when the family thinks of them as assets for the prospective dowry they would bring. This is understandable because the marriage issue is sacred: it is attached to a traditional and colonial law that also enforces its rituals on the issue. Analyzing *“Nigerian Family Law”* Alfred B. Kasunmu and Salacuse W. Jeswald state that:

*“By customary law, puberty must be reached before marriage. By received British common law, the minimum marriage age for a monogamous marriage for boys was age 14 and for girls age 12.”*⁷³

⁷² Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.15.

⁷³ Alfred B. Kasunmu and Salacuse W. Jeswald in *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta* in *“Nigerian Legal Concepts”* by Rebecca Boostrom in Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price* edited by Marie Umeh, Africa World Press, Trenton, p. 62.

Although puberty is a stage entitling the girl to get married, she still remains unprepared for such a project. What matters most is just the money marriage would bring to face poverty which is the end result of colonial impact. However, Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price* surely sheds light on the intricacy of marriage for the female, but it raises a more serious issue: the caste system. Here, the heroine, Aku-nna, is a victim of love and traditional power. The naked poverty of Aku-nna's uncle who has inherited her mother after the death of her father is visibly the only reason that drives him to want to marry his niece:

“She (Aku-nna) did not know that her uncle wanted to be an Obi, how much he wanted the Eze title. She did not know that her mother Ma Blackie was expecting a girl for Okonkwo and was at that early emotional stage of pregnancy what she wanted was peace and to think of her unborn child, and was deliriously happy that she would give in to anything rather than upset the man who was the author of her present happiness.”⁷⁴

This shows that Aku-nna's uncle is motivated by his own social rise. Given that the celebration of the *Eze title* requires money, in addition to his wife's pregnancy, the only thing he can lean upon is Aku-nna's marriage to quell his problems. Not only is she undergoing an ordeal but, more interestingly, she is barking up the wrong tree if she counts on her mother as she has so withdrawn that she scarcely thinks of her daughter. Beyond the financial problems facing her uncle, he keeps a stiff upper lip as far as the issue of caste is concerned, to say nothing when his pride is tried. There are many pending things Aku-nna's stepfather wants to solve with his niece's dowry; but, to him, it is unthinkable to marry her to a descendant of a slave like Chike. In this respect, Emecheta shows

⁷⁴ Buchi Emecheta, *The Bride Price*, op.Cit, p.111.

that, though Igbo people pay a particular attention to money, they keep their pride in order to enjoy a good image among their community.

The two writers, Dangarembga and Emecheta, have brought the issue of marriage to the forefront, as it represents an obvious torment for their heroines. Adah, in *Second-Class Citizen*, as well as Tambu, in *Nervous Conditions*, experience the delicacy of marriage in the midst of their adulthood. For instance, in *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu's cousin, Nyasha, does not live in the same environment as Tambu's mother, but the latter draws Nyasha's parents' attention to her physical change by showing that the time has come for them to find her a husband:

“The breasts are already quite large, she declared, pinching one and causing Maiguru to wince with embarrassment. When do we expect our mukwambo (son-in-law)’, my mother teased her niece”⁷⁵

Even though Tambu's mother speaks to her niece ironically, there is a tinge of caution in the message she addresses her parents. Here, not only is the female a victim of her gender, but also of her plump body. The dismay Dangarembga's and Emecheta's female protagonists feel in the above-mentioned novels reflects one of the countless predicaments women endure. The issue of marriage extensively discussed in Emecheta's *The Bride Price* is a proof of her concern and commitment as a writer to the issue of marriage in particular and to the empowerment of women in general. Through their works, the two female writers contribute to women's enlightenment. Heather Zwicker puts it right when she says:

“The systematic disenfranchisement of women,; the question of experience, its rendering by memory and its

⁷⁵ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.130.

translation by writing, agency, especially women's; the difficulty of evaluating the effectiveness of different modes of resistances, the value and meaning of self-determination, history, independence, and violence (...) are issues faced by women struggling to navigate both colonial and patriarchal authority and they are heightened by being contextualized in a nationalist struggle."⁷⁶

For Zwicker, female writers' ability to record events is of paramount importance. So, the experiences a woman has known should clearly be registered on her memory, and her cognitive ability is to serve as a medium to transfer the sad experiences she encounters, which is of no mean feat to do, in term of discourse. Her statement converges with that of Emecheta and Dangarembga because the two writers' main arguments take into account the triptych, patriarchy, culture and tradition as scourges to fight to ensure women's empowerment. This is all the more true as these obstacles are used as experiences and excuses to write about their lives as individuals who live in a society that does not really promote their advancement.

The harm the woman goes through from childhood onwards is the bondage that never leaves her. If she has had sad experiences at an early age, in adulthood her psychological balance is shaken by her parents over the issue of marriage and bride-money. But her condition becomes more oppressive the day she finds herself in her husband's home. Here, other forms of predicaments befall her as marriage is not an end in itself in traditional Africa. In other words, children, chiefly male ones, are central to a couple's life: they are the epitome of hope. Consequently, people cannot tolerate barrenness. A barren woman will be

⁷⁶ Heather Zwicker "The Nervous Collusion of Nation and Gender: Tsitsi Dangarembga's Challenge to Fanon" in *Emerging Perspectives on Tsitsi Dangarembga: Negotiating the Postcolonial*, op.Cit, p.13.

the village's talk: they call her all the names under the sun, making her carry the world on her shoulders.

In “*Procreation Not Recreation: Decoding Maman in Buchi Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood*”, Marie Umeh explains the ordeal Emecheta's heroine, Nnu Ego, is subject to when she fails to have children in her first marriage to Amatokwu. So depressed has she been, that her father, Nwokocha Agbadi, has thought it wise to appease her daughter's personal god/ *chi* for her to have children. Umeh's argument strengthens Emecheta's concern over the issue of barrenness and the psychological trauma it earns women.

“[the] glory of a woman is a man; a woman without a son is a failure; marriage is for the production of male heirs to continue the husband's lineage; and a complete mother is a mother of healthy sons.”⁷⁷

Marie Umeh's statement illustrates Igbo society's masculinity. It raises the question of countless women's lives, who, not only fail to have male children, but on top of that are barren.

In fact, barrenness is one of the central issues in women's writings. We can recall Flora Nwapa's work in this respect, one of the pioneers of African women writers, who has devoted herself to fighting barrenness as a plague that befalls women. Her novel, *Efuru*, is a good example that shows her position on that issue. The heroine, Efuru, has been married for more than two years to Aduzia. Yet, she fails to bear a child, which surprises her community. She becomes the village laughing stock. Her husband's people are so disappointed that they talk him into taking a second wife:

⁷⁷ Marie Umeh in “*Procreation Not Recreation: Decoding Maman in Buchi Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood*” in *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*, edited by Marie Umeh, Africa World Press, New York, p.192. 1996.

“A year passed and no child came Neighbours talked as they were bound to talk. They did not see the reason why Adizua should not marry another woman since, according to them two men do not live together. To them Efuru was a man since she could not reproduce.”⁷⁸

If Umeh is mainly concerned with women who fail to give birth to male children, in the above-mentioned statement, Flora Nwapa goes further. She talks about the eeriness an “unproductive” married woman endures while denouncing the impatience of Igbo people regarding child-bearing. Hardly does Efuru start her marital life with Adizua when they expect her first baby. Besides, Efuru has not even lived with her husband for more than two years' time when they start to question her fertility. The other side of the coin about barrenness is that, women are always the ones who foot the bill: people take for granted that they are always responsible for their barrenness and find a second wife for the husband who, more often than not, accepts the decision just to be in keeping with his people's code of conduct.

As barrenness is not condoned in African societies, an unproductive woman appears to be an outcast. To people, children, particularly males, are a twofold asset: they assure the man's lineage and constitute a working force to bring the family out of poverty in colonial era. This represents torture for the unprolific woman in her first marital years.

In *Second-Class Citizen*, Emecheta insists on the sacredness of children. But she also ponders over the psychological trauma of those unlucky women who happen to wait for years and years without any real hope to have a baby, and the ordeals they go through. If Adah gets on well with her in-laws, it is partly because she is prolific:

⁷⁸ Flora Nwapa, *Efuru*, A.W.S, Heinemann, U.S.A, p.24.

“Apart from the fact that she earned enough money to keep them (her parents-in-laws) all going, she was very prolific, which among the Ibos, is still the greatest asset a woman can have. A woman would be forgiven everything as long as she produced children.”⁷⁹

Unprolific women feel like a fish out of water in their own environment, for in the minds of the people it is intolerable. Their perception of women's fertility rekindles Emecheta's attention and it is noticeable through her female protagonist. In England, Adah happens to meet an old woman there when she delivers her baby at the hospital. The old woman in question is about the same age as Adah's mother, she has stayed seventeen good years without having a baby, which startles Adah. She puts herself in the woman's shoes by imagining the kind of turmoil the old woman would have been through if she had lived among her people:

“She imagined herself in the woman's position. Waiting and waiting for seventeen years for a child that was taking its time to make up its mind whether to come or not to come. She tries to find what her life with Francis would be if she had given him no child.”⁸⁰

Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* is also a good example that sheds light on the importance of procreation. Ekwueme, Wigwe's son, is married to Ahurole. Judging from the way Ekwueme looks at Ihuoma, a beautiful and highly respected woman, one might say that his son has made the right choice. He seems to be unhappy with his wife, because even though he has married the woman of his dream, they fail to have children. But most importantly, contrary to writers who generally put the emphasis on the psychological dimension of

⁷⁹ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p. 26.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p.112.

barren women, Elechi Amadi focuses on men's state of mind regarding fertility. Ihuoma's husband is more affected by his wife's infertility than his own wife. This is obvious in the way he interacts with his neighbours' children: he longs for becoming a father and acts as a substitute for their father:

“Though he had no child yet, he began to get into the habit of saying ‘my son’ when addressing a little child. At first, he felt like an impostor and the words rolled out heavily from his mouth. To make it easier for himself he confined this practice to very small children to begin with.”⁸¹

The place of paramount importance children hold in traditional African societies undoubtedly accounts for people's impatience and the stereotypes they cast on barren women. By the same token, this echoes men's frustration when their wives fail to bear children or are slow in bearing them. But it is of no little importance to point out that, if husbands and wives go through the ordeals of infertility or barrenness, women seem to suffer more, because they start to be threatened with polygamy the day they are proven barren or infertile. In the books under study, Emecheta's text is more prone to satirize the issue of barrenness through *Second-Class Citizen*. As for *Double Yoke* and Dangarembga's two other novels, though they do not ultimately put the emphasis on “unproductive” women, they hint at children as the cause of women's bad luck.

If domestic chores, female stereotyping, barrenness and infertility are part and parcel of women's lives, they can be all ascribed to gender-based violence. The violence they are subject to is twofold: psychological and physical. Even though we have broached some inferences of psychological violence through

⁸¹ Elechi Amadi, *The Concubine*, Heinemann, London, 1985, p.130, first edited in 1966.

stereotyping mostly, we cannot move on to the next chapter without touching on the physical violence females go through, which is indeed another female writers' pet subject.

Dangarembga's and Emecheta's female protagonists experience acute physical violence. The use of violence is very often an artefact of male chauvinism. To enforce their authority, men resort to physical violence whenever they are disappointed by women, to remind them that they are “the weaker sex”. Women writers' characters are more than once victims of physical violence due to male characters' impatience with them. For instance, in *Nervous Conditions*, Nyasha, Tambu's cousin, is a victim of violence in her father's hand. This occurred when she went to a party on Christmas day with her brother, Chido, and Tambu, their school mates had organised to celebrate their successful school results. Although this is an excuse for going out, Babamukuru cannot condone the new freedom the young women are enjoying, particularly Nyasha who dare to stay outdoors when her brother and Tambu are already at home. To regain the upper hand, her father finds no other way than hurting her daughter's pride before brutalizing her:

*“Babamukuru (Nyasha's father) alternately punching Nyasha's head and banging it against the floor, screaming or trying to scream only squeaking, because his throat had seized up with fury, that he would kill with bare hands....”*⁸²

Babamukuru grabs the above opportunity to remind his daughter that, given that she is merely a “woman”, she is in no position to question his authority and privilege as a man and head of the family as well. The fact of calling his daughter a *whore* is just a subterfuge of justifying the violence he harbours towards her, which is a resultant of his hybridity. In *Double Yoke*,

⁸² Tsitsi Dangrembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p. 115.

Emecheta talks about physical violence through the interactions between Ete Kamba and his beloved one, Nko, and in the way Ete Kamba's own father sometimes treats his mother.

The first sexual intercourse Ete Kamba has had with Nko is very informative. It partly shows the violence males inflict on women, and partly carries a new dimension that is very often forgotten. In actual fact, physical violence is intrinsically related to sexism. In other words, just to control women's sexuality, men often resort to physical violence as a way. The sexual affair Ete Kamba has had with Nko has, in all likelihood, occurred without the latter's consent: it happens outdoors, *at the wall*. The place where it takes place shows its indecency. The whole process amounts to rape. On top of his lack of decency, Ete Kamba expects his fiancée to conform to his community's code of conduct, which says that a woman must keep her virginity until a husband is found for her. This is what basically leads him to call her a whore before he ill-treats her, the same way Babamukuru has accused his daughter, Nyasha, of the same misbehavior in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. The only difference here is that the violence Babamukuru has inflicted on Nyasha is mainly out of chauvinism, whereas Ete Kamba's is twofold: out of chauvinism and lust:

*“He lost his cool, and reacted the way his father would have reacted, like an ordinary village man, who cared for his woman and had little patience in talking her out of her evil ways. He resorted to the method he knew was the quickest and the most effective- the brutal near animal method. He started to beat her.”*⁸³

Indeed, gender-based violence is an expression of male dominance, and one of the central issues of African women's writings. Dangarembga and

⁸³ Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, op.Cit, p.59.

Emecheta describe a brand of violence through the characters' experience in the novels. If *Double Yoke*, *Second-Class Citizen* and *Nervous Conditions* deal with both emotional and physical violence, *The Book of Not* is more about emotional violence, for it portrays the entrapment of female students in the midst of an exclusive colonial environment: the Young Ladies' College of Sacred Heart. Whether emotional or physical, violence does not promote equity and justice; they are violent attitudes towards women that start off at an early age in different forms up to womanhood. Violence does not promote a female as an individual but it hinders her empowerment and brings about her "objectification". Neither does it promote humanism, nor can it be justified by men. After Nyasha's brutalisation, Dangarembga gives her position overtly:

*"The victimization, I saw, was universal. It didn't depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition. It didn't depend on any of the things I have thought it depended on. Men took it everywhere with them....But what I didn't like was the way all the conflicts came back to this question of femaleness. Femaleness as opposed to maleness."*⁸⁴

Through the entrapment of her female characters, Dangarembga clearly depicts the "oppressive" world she has lived in through a succinct analysis of women's condition. She points out that women's condition may transcend geographic boundaries, but African women may be kept in shackles by poverty, lack of education/training or the weight of tradition, as well. But, to Dangarembga, the chief explanation is the opposition between femaleness versus maleness. Male hegemony undergirds women's oppression. As long as men seek to dominate women, the latter will always be regarded as second to the former.

⁸⁴ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, pp 115-116.

From a feminist point of view, women are held back by a cultural prejudice that does not take their condition into account. Tradition, which promotes masculinity, does not give them a full voice because of male chauvinism. The violence women face day-by-day induces female writers to react in order to *re-visit* and *re-evaluate* the traditional prejudices that weigh down on women. As such, women's writings become instrumental in raising awareness about women's subjugation. As male writers have produced a postcolonial discourse to liberate themselves from colonial violence, female writers too should craft a literary genre that would safeguard their freedom as individuals. As Ziauddin Sadaq posits, violence against women, simply because of their gender, is a human rights issue as it already happened in the past, and still happens in the present, when some groups of people are denied their human rights and dignity. He argues:

*“The inhumanity of today is not different from the inhumanity of yesteryears for all sources of exploitation resemble one another; they are all applied against ‘object’: man. We need to do much more ... than simply be aware of this reality: we need to take continuous action to transform and transcend this reality’.”*⁸⁵

In conclusion, we have tried in chapter one of this work to shed light on the cultural and social background and heritage of the two writers' own context in relation to women's entrapment. On the whole, Emecheta and Dangarembga have the same traditional values that do not promote women's development to pave the way for their own emancipation.

⁸⁵ Ziauddin Sadaq : “ *Forward to the 2008 Edition*” in *Black Skin White Masks* by Franz Fanon, London, Pluto Press, Translated by Charles Lam Markmann, p xix. 2008.

Chapter two: Women in the Economic Context

Postcolonialism is closely related to women's issue as women always strive to improve their living conditions before and after colonialism in Africa. They are generally seen as the second sex or the weaker one, if compared to men. The stereotyping of women through patriarchy, male chauvinism, gender-based violence and discrimination are all forms of injustice that hinder their entrepreneurship and development. Modern African literature, pioneered by male writers, is pessimistic about women's genuine talent. Consequently, their contribution to nationhood through entrepreneurship is generally overlooked. But, one needs to ask how women can alter their difficult condition through entrepreneurship in traditional African societies. Thus chapter two mainly deals with this paradox focusing on women's endeavors in the midst of the drastic economic context in postcolonial Africa.

The prevailing overall economic situation helps us better understand women's entrapment and bondage. The economies of African countries have been jeopardized by colonialism. Such a precarious condition has a great impact on social life in general and women's economic situation in particular as it has an impact on their condition. This chapter falls into three parts that take into account the hard economic context and women's entrapment and struggle.

II.1 Poverty and the impact of money

Poverty is strongly correlated with colonialism in Africa. Colonialism occurred in the continent in an unprecedented context as the White settler came to Africa with many purposes. As alluded to above, the first step had been the civilization project, followed by the imposition of power. The outcome of colonialism has been negative for Africans. It has dried up the economy of a continent which had been one of the richest on earth. Historians have been ambivalent regarding its outcome, but theories depend mostly on the stakes involved and the writers' commitment to Africa. Hence, on the one hand, we find historians who wrote from the outside, whose theories ultimately focused

on their personal feelings and interests. On the other hand, other historians based their writings on the inside. Walter Rodney is one of such Afro-centric writers who strongly believed that colonialism had robbed Africa of its resources.

His book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, is an attempt at *de-constructing* the colonial discourse. He starts from the collective conclusion drawn by most Western thinkers who state that colonialism is somehow beneficial to Africans. Rodney does not corroborate their quick conclusion and pessimism, but instead, he retaliates and argues that although the white man has built up some facilities like schools, hospitals and rail ways, it has been to the peril of Africans. On the contrary, colonialism has squeezed the lack continent of its vital substance. He decries the dearth of technology in agriculture that has slowed down the sector. To him, the lack of technology is paradoxical since the same white man who colonized Africa had been on the forefront of the industrial revolution the European continent experienced in the nineteenth century. Moreover, the same white man had leaned upon the same technology to produce a quantity of goods that was beyond his needs:

“Of course, in 1885 Africans did not have the technical know-how which had evolved in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. That difference was itself partly due to the kind of relations between Africa and Europe in the pre-colonial period. In a few places, such as South Africa and the Rhodesians, this was due to specific racial discrimination in employment, so as to keep the best jobs for Whites [...]. The most decisive failure of

colonialism in Africa was its failure to change the technology of agricultural production.”⁸⁶

Rodney’s conclusion is all the more informative as it accounts for the capitalist causes and some colonial writers’ commitment to colonialism. The White man’s arrival in Africa is purely grounded in economic interests through the imposition of power and culture. Though the Guianese historian’s insight is helpful in this chapter, we focus on the impoverishment of the continent in relation to colonialism and its impact on women’s condition.

In fact, Buchi Emecheta and Tsitsi Dangarembga’s works are deeply embedded in the postcolonial context. Consequently, our study cannot depart from it, for the simple reason that the novels under review give a particular concern about poverty which is at the social and family level. But it also hits individuals, men as well as women, though the latter hold the lion's share. Emecheta and Dangarembga use poverty and misery to pin down women’s entrapment in relation to their status. Lethargic poverty pervades the fabric of society as it has a great impact on the way people interact, especially with women.

Patriarchy and traditional conventions that feature many African societies have an impact on women’s development. But, the crux of the problem is its relation to poverty that has resulted from colonialism and totally disturbed the continent. This is clear, since in pre-colonial Africa, the main activities the head of the family depended for a living were farming, hunting, fishing and trade, but villagers used bartering to quell economic disparities as well. Droughts were more bearable with the leaders’ provisional insights, but with the advent of colonialism the fabric of African economy was torn upside down. This had a

⁸⁶ Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Washington D.C, Howard University Press, pp, 217-219, 1982.

great impact at continental and national levels, to say nothing of the impact on families which deeply fell apart:

“In many parts of the African continent, there arose what is known as ‘symbiosis’ between earning their living in different ways- which really means that they agreed to exchange goods and coexist to their mutual advantage.”⁸⁷

The unprecedented situation of colonialism had ultimately disrupted the community’s social and economic balance. At the family level, men, as heads of households, have to go beyond their limits to meet their needs. This has been hard for them, since many people practiced farming activities to feed their families. Working in the fields required skill and technology. The technology most Africans used was obsolete. Therefore, the need for an efficient workforce in the fields became crucial for male farmers to boost production. The consequence of such a crisis was the “objectification” of women by men and tradition. In other words, beyond tradition and patriarchy as impediments to women’s development, the issue of poverty has exacerbated their poor condition. In reality, it hampered their advancement in life, leading men to become even more demanding towards them.

In *Second-Class Citizen* and *Nervous Conditions*, the two writers open their novels with the endemic poverty that befalls the Igbo and Shona people. At an early age, the heroines, Adah in *Second-Class Citizen* and Tambu, in *Nervous Conditions*, are already aware of their obligations as females to their families and communities. As a young girl, Adah is trapped. Since her family is in the poverty line, she cannot be exempt from doing domestic work, nor escape from servitude in her new homestead. For, following the death of her father, she has joined her mother to live with her as the latter is betrothed by her late husband’s brother. Since she has nothing to give or contribute to her new home, because of

⁸⁷Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, op.Cit, p.45.

her young age, they make her work like a “slave”. So, she has a series of tasks that are clearly cut out for her, among which getting up at the crack of dawn to go and fetch water for her step-father.

Later on, Adah is referring to her step-father as “new Pa and Master” which is sorely facetious, since a father is supposed to love and protect his daughter. In Adah’s case, this is totally the contrary because her “new father” takes advantage of the situation to use her at will. The father’s reaction underpins the heresy of some traditional conventions which consist in inheriting women following the death of their husbands. Here, through the character of Adah, Emecheta castigates the betrothal while questioning the relevance of its practice.

Adah’s own situation is comparable with that of the slaves working in their masters’ houses or plantations. Slaves were exploited simply because they worked in the white man’s houses and were denied respect and consideration. She is exploited just like those slaves as her step-father and mother see to it that the tasks and chores that are given to her be done without complaint or delay.

In *Nervous Conditions*, since poverty is everywhere, including the heroine’s family, this has an impact on Tambu, like Emecheta’s heroine in *Second-Class Citizen*. Family gatherings are good occasions for Africans to foster family ties. Dangarembga chooses Babamukuru’s return from England as a pretext to exhibit the Sigauke family’s poverty. As a girl, Tambu is fit for domestic work. In fact, she is the carbon copy of Emecheta’s heroine. In other words, Tambu’s and Adah’s families are heavily affected by poverty. Everything weighs heavy on their shoulders. Both girls are used for domestic work, to the extent that whenever they are busy doing it, they forget their frustration. For Tambu, the fact of being occupied in domestic work is a way to forget her brother’s obsession and provocations. Generally speaking, people complain when they are overloaded with work, but, the hard work she does at

home and in the field has turned out to be like leisure to her because she cannot do otherwise. It seems awkward, but it explains her despair: “*The housework was agreeable when it did not have to be done.*”⁸⁸ The housework is for Tambu an outlook to social pressure as it is a way for her to while away time and forget her brother’s lust for power.

Similarly, Emecheta depicts Adah with the same state of mind regarding domesticity. She has made it a rule to get up very early in the morning to fetch water. It is sure the amount of work she does is beyond her ability. Emecheta makes an intrusion here. To avoid any kind of discrepancy, she acknowledges that hard work is part and parcel of children’s upbringing; yet, people should not abuse them, out of their innocence. More interestingly, the immaturity of Adah turns her into a fragile prey. Her parents are barely interested in the girl’s future development, instead, they are motivated by sheer interest and money:

*“Nobody was interested in her for her own sake, only in the money she would fetch, and the housework she could do and Adah, happy at being given this opportunity of survival, did not waste time thinking about its rights or wrongs.”*⁸⁹

Emecheta crisply fustigates female exploitation. She does not stop there but “blows the whistle” on children’s exploitation through child labor. She reminds that under no circumstance can child oppression be promoted or legitimized since the end cannot justify the means. Even people who live in extreme poverty cannot justify their act, particularly when it is inflicted on the female child. By the same token, she evokes people’s opportunism, when they use tradition as an excuse to achieving their personal goals. In Adah’s case, the endemic poverty that befalls all her society gives way to selfishness and meanness that are legitimized by traditional conventions. Adah’s family is poor

⁸⁸ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p. 39.

⁸⁹ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op. Cit., p .18.

and they cast their eyes on the prospective money she would bring along in her marriage dowry.

Dangarembga's text is embedded in the poor economic situation of Rhodesia. Babamukuru's family may be portrayed by Tambu as blessed, but actually, they are not beyond the poverty line, particularly when we consider the heroine's family. Besides, Babamukuru does not fail to hint at it on the first family gathering following his return to England:

“Looking at the family as it stands today,’ continued Babamukuru, ‘I see that the main problem is with Jeremiah (...) the family does not go hungry.’ ”

In reality, the equilibrium Babamukuru is inferring is debatable because poverty hangs over the family. This is exemplified through Jeremiah's letter to him, when he was in England asking for help. Of course, it was for money because he leads a precarious life and is in debt and the laughing stock of the village, which does not escape the heroine's sharp eyes: *“my father is the sort of person to whom people decide not to lend money only after they have already done so.”*⁹⁰ Jeremiah is a typical case of failure to his family. He is the type of person that does not inspire respect or honor among his people. This is ultimately true since in traditional Africa a man's worth and merit are reckoned according to his attitude towards work and the number of male children he has begotten.

In Jeremiah's case, poverty remains an unsolved puzzle. He is a man who is always under his brother's wings because he is unable to face his own problem: he is a victim of patriarchy. He fails to fight and keep his head above the trouble water that colonialism has engendered. He is in debts up to his ears, yet keeps on borrowing money from people without any sense of decency. In

⁹⁰ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous conditions*, op . Cit., p. 31.

this respect, Jeremiah can be likened to Achebe's protagonist, Okonkwo's father, Unoka, in *Things Fall Apart*. Okonkwo is hard working and enjoys good reputation among his people due to the illustrious life he has led through personal endeavors. He has full control of his family and is in line with patriarchal principles. His father Unoka on the contrary, is his antagonist in the novel since he turns his back to the cardinal values that define just a man in the class. On top of that, he is in debt up to his ears like Jeremiah:

*“Unoka was, of course, a debtor, and he owed every neighbor some money, from a few cowries to quite substantial amounts.”*⁹¹

Unoka has lived poor and he has died poor and a debtor. He is a shame to his son. Many a time, Okonkwo has looked at him and called him “a *worthless father*”. He cannot stand him. He is a perfect match with Unoka, though there are some discrepancies between them. The difference between Tambu's father and Okonkwo's, is the lens through which their progenies see them. Okonkwo sees Unoka from a masculine and a leader's perspective, whereas Tambu sees her father from a young girl's perspective. But above all, her father's weakness is very visible to her.

Still, with Jeremiah, his debts complicate his life. His poor living condition is noticeable on the day the whole Sigauke family welcomes Babamukuru from England. In Africa “guests” are kings. Their homecoming is always joyful moments. But Babamukuru's return coincides with acute social problems. Jeremiah cannot afford the bus fare from his village, Umtali, to Salisbury, nor can he afford the provisions, for poverty is at its climax in the family, it even hits neighbors. Ironically, it is the “guest” himself, Babamukuru, who provides for all the merriments of his return and without him the event would have been a total humiliation, not only for him, but for the whole family:

⁹¹ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, op. Cit., p. 4.

“This crisis was resolved in the usual manner. I fetched cornmeal from my aunt’s, having first tried the neighbours and found none, though when I explained to them why the cornmeal was needed they gave me peanuts instead. The sweet potatoes did not ripen in time, but the day before the trip (to the Salisbury) news reached us by telephone that message via the Council Houses that Babamukuru has sent money for a goat.”⁹²

The neighbors are poor, yet sensitive to other people’s misfortune. At first, they feel reluctant to help, but when they know the very purpose for the quest, they fend for themselves to give a little bit of something for the event celebration. The food they have offered is not that fresh, but the gesture foretells the spirit of collaboration and mutual help, which we will expatiate upon in chapter four. The passage is noteworthy, it does not only show the nakedness of poverty at individual level, but it also imparts a sense of the acute economic crisis that compounds people’s lives. Families do not have enough to get by and meat is luxurious food for some, as evidenced by Jeremiah’s family. Babamukuru’s return seems to be a good opportunity for them to eat decently, but this was not the case, unfortunately.

The celebration of Babamukuru’s return is nightmarish for Tambu because she works herself out. While her brother is being well treated, she plays the “servant’s role”. At meal time, she is obliged to kneel down to enable her brother to wash his hands, as she has done for the honorable guests and relatives. She is a bit taken aback to see him taking advantage of the situation unfolding. If such a thing has occurred, it is partly because of her father who has talked her into treating her brother the way she has done for the “guests”. The context is compelling for her as she does not want to give a bad impression in front of her

⁹² Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p. 33.

people who live in community where masculinity rules supreme. To Tambu, the occasion is a joke; it is like a “meal without food”. The men have the best of it while the females serve them right, except the aunts who have a patriarchal status merely because they belong to her father’s family lineage:

*“The meal began with much clapping of hands, praising of the gods for their providence and of us for our hard work. In the kitchen we dished out what was left in the pots for ourselves and the children.”*⁹³

The scarcity of food affects people’s poor diet. They eat less refined food than they were used to. They go hungry most of the times. For Jeremiah’s family, and even for some of the guests, such occasions are good opportunities for them to eat well. But visibly, on occasions like these, age and gender prevail over beauty. The children, particularly girls, are discriminated or almost forgotten.

Likewise, in *Double Yoke*, Emecheta depicts mealtime as an occasion on which masculinity prevails. Ete Kamba’s mother does not have spare time since she works the land all the day long, and at home she is always in the kitchen. At mealtime, the father eats with the male children while his mother shares her food with the female ones. Her husband never takes time to pay her a compliment. Rather, he always spots things he does not like in the food to gloat over his wife. Emecheta depicts domesticity as an impediment to women’s entrepreneurship. In relation to work, Eta’s mother is like an unpaid “slave” just like Adah in *Second-Class Citizen* and Dangarembga’s heroine in *Nervous Conditions*. Her commitment to her family hampers her self-fulfilment as a woman:

⁹³ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.41.

“(...) women like his mother, who still had their own farms to work on who spent three quarters of their time sweating on their cocoyam patches.”⁹⁴

Poverty is very often associated with farming activities. Although the historical background of *Double York* is set well after independence, poverty and bad governance are noticeable in the novel. Most village women are poor farmers, say, peasants. These women are basically peasants, for a farmer, in its loosest sense, is someone who works the land to produce crops for sale. It is different from a peasant who works the land to feed himself and his family. *Double Yoke* shows that poverty is still a sad reality after independence and women feel it more than anybody else. The novel carries a myriad of ailments that accounts for rampant poverty and economic backwardness. The plot is mainly set in a learning center: Calabar University. It is the same as Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* which mainly happens in a boarding school.

In *Double Yoke*, precariousness reaches its highest climax. At Calabar University, students' living conditions are not conducive to learning. The university, which welcomes students from the capital and the villages from different parts of the country, is not a model of its kind. The power supply is constantly failing, due to the poor state of the wiring network. As a result, students follow the lectures in pitch darkness. One should question how learners can excel in such working conditions:

“NEPA people were at it again. NEPA people controlled the life style of many people in Nigeria. They gave and took away electricity lights whenever they felt like it. They

⁹⁴ Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, op.Cit, p.16

always gave some unheard of excuses like the cables being overloaded.”⁹⁵

The electricity supply is not the only vital thing that the students and the population decry. Presumably, the authorities have failed in insuring a decent life for the people. The telephone network is not working properly either. People who live in the capital city and village people have crucial problems of their own. Most villages lack water, which is not regularly supplied to them. Women are obliged to trudge along some distance to fetch it, simply because they have been denied the precious liquid which they do need in their daily tasks:

“(…) some of the taps in his village (Ete Kamba’s village, Mankong) stopped running. This was something of a daily occurrence- water not running in one part of the village, but running in another part.”⁹⁶

If we look at things, it seems that the authorities who ruled Nigeria after independence were confronted with countless problems that have sped up the country’s social and economic downfall. The acute living conditions Buchi Emecheta highlights in *Double Yoke* are very telling. It is in line with what we said earlier about the close relationship between poverty and women’s subjugation. In other words, the poorer people are, the more subjugated women are. At this juncture, the female protagonist, Nko, is an interesting case in point. She is different from Emecheta’s and Dangarembga’s other female protagonists in the novels considered. Although they share the same denominator that spins around poverty, exploitation, and mostly at an early age, Nko’s case is different. First, she is more mature and on top of that, she is an undergraduate student. Second, she lives in “modern days” that is to say, after independence. Yet, she is “exploited” though in a different form. Her social condition does not allow her

⁹⁵ Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, op.Cit, p.4.

⁹⁶ Ibid, p.30.

to fail in her studies because she must get herself and her family out of poverty, at any cost. Basically, this is what mainly explains her affair with one of the university lecturers, Professor Ikot. Through higher education, Emecheta and Dangarembga explain and exemplify women's bondage since the possibility of going to school is not always an escape for them.

In *The Book of Not*, poverty is at its height: most of the female characters are poor. They go to the colonial school, but there, they are victims of their poor condition too. Not only are female characters victims of poverty, but they are also victims of the war between the freedom fighters and Rhodesian armed forces. School girls are stereotyped and humiliated. Netsai, Tambu's sister, joined the freedom fighters and suffered a lot from it. This has cost her an amputated leg following an explosion that happened under Tambu's eyes. The war is informative in the novel. Truly, the war of independence is merely a result of the impoverishment of the country that the freedom fighters believe unbearable. This does not escape the American writer's notice, James Kilgore.

In his novel, *We Are All Zimbabweans Now*, Kilgore talks about Ben Dabney, an American PhD researcher, his enthusiastic visit and hope for Zimbabwe. The American researcher strongly believes that the newly appointed president, Robert Mugabe, is the ideal man for the people. As he investigates on a mysterious car accident, he discovers that the dilapidation of Rhodesia by the British colony is, in fact, the root cause of the war that has befallen Rhodesians, and that, the new leaders' social policy is flawed. In the course of his investigation, Ben Dabney holds an interview with freedom fighters, Comrade Rusununguko and Comrade Tupomaro who reveal to the young historian their disappointment and thirst for revenge:

“Mr Dabney’, says Rusununguko, ‘we want you to tell the world how the very people who fought for freedom in Zimbabwe are not yet free. We are just seated at home while

others are enjoying.’ ‘We are becoming fed up’ said Tupomaro.’”⁹⁷

Kilgore seems to say that, the poverty that has prevailed and the disparities between poor and rich people have led to the bloody war that plagued Rhodesia and is the same scenario that occurred in Nigeria with the Biafra war.

In *The Book of Not*, school girls suffer because of their inferior status and color. They have nightmarish experiences at the Young Ladies’ College of the Sacred Heart where they are mixed with White students. Their poverty causes them discriminatory treatments as their White counterparts keep themselves aloof from them. Worse, the discrimination exceeds all bounds and has a negative impact on African students’ results. Tambu is a victim of this discrimination since the school authorities have denied her of a distinction and trophy for no reason, but her status and color. She has been disappointed more than once, but never had she thought that she would lose the trophy on the grounds that she was poor and Black:

“ There must have been a mistake in the report, otherwise, as my uncle had pointed out concerning the report Sister Emmanuel once wrote, the headmistress would not have done it.... How afraid I was that in fact I was worth nothing. If I did not know, I could at least dream I should have been the rightful owner of the silver O-Level trophy. When I looked at it in the cabinet I could superimpose upon it my name instead of Tracey’s.”⁹⁸

Tambu worked hard to be “top dog”, but she has to pay for being poor and Black. She is inflicted a punishment that is unfair. Although she is young, she fights internally. She views the matter as an outrageous fraud and cannot do

⁹⁷ James Kilgore, *We are All Zimbabweans Now*, South Africa, Umuzi, 2009, p. 135.

⁹⁸ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, op.Cit, p. 157.

otherwise. She is only a poor young schoolgirl under a colonial school system that marginalizes the Black students and promotes the Whites. The trophy that lands in Tracey's hands is disappointing, arbitrary and an example of pure favoritism, which has nothing to do with pedagogy and ethics. The headmistress, Miss Plato, does not expect to see a Black girl step up and get hold of one of the beautiful trophies. Thus, she simply changes the recipient's name for another one that better fits in. Besides, she does not want to keep a low profile among her peers since on the awards ceremony, guests will be mostly Whites from the colonial authorities.

In fact, the four novels under study thus take into account the issue of poverty, but it is depicted as an outcome of colonialism tormenting males, as well as females. The acuteness of poverty goes hand in hand with the scarcity of money and it has a great value for people. Dangarembga and Emecheta lay great emphasis on this in their texts. Naturally, the quest of money has a greater impact on women's condition. More than once, the two writers have brought to light the prejudices women undergo that are motivated by people's inclinations to it. For instance, parents always look forward to marrying their daughters, not for marriage sacredness or for the sake of their daughters' happiness, but for the money they can get out of them, commonly known as dowry. From an early age, little girls' parents think about the prospective money they could generate at their marriage. But ironically, they lack everything parents owe their progenies in their quest for welfare and personal development.

Still, in the four novels, money fails to meet the female protagonists' educational needs since their ambition is hampered by poverty. In *Second-Class Citizen* and *Nervous Conditions*, the situation is approximately the same in relation to money and its impact on girls' education. Emecheta talks about Adah's and her brother's experiences in their schooling. "Boy", Adah's brother, has the good opportunity to go to school whereas she is compelled to stay at

home, on the grounds that there is not enough money to send her there. The impact of money on Adah's schooling strikes her when she is around eight years old. The Ladi-Lak School is the preparatory school her brother goes to: it is an expensive school that is not opened to everybody who wishes to go there. Adah knows that she cannot afford it. First, she belongs to a poor family, secondly because of the domestic duties that are her responsibilities. Thus she confers her choice upon the Methodist School rather than Ladi-Lak because, to her, it is more affordable, though she knows that her parents will not give her the required money. Eventually, she succeeds in attending the Methodist School since the local police threatens her parents, especially her mother and accuses her of child neglect. They have no other choice than scrape together enough money for her school fees.

Of course, Adah's stay at the Methodist School is short-lived. Following the death of her father, she has no other choice than interrupt her studies for lack of money and discrimination. Her father had left a sum of money after his death, but it is kept aside to finance her brother's education while she is withdrawn from school:

*"It was decided that the money in the family, a hundred pound or two, would be spent for Boy's education. So Boy was cut out for a bright future, with a grammar school education and all that."*⁹⁹

Once again, Adah's social experiences show her ambition with regard to poverty and money. They hamper her future as a child and through that Emecheta shows the extent to which colonialism exacerbated the subjugation of women. Adah's chance to advance in life is nipped in the bud, as the lack of financial means and patriarchy do not speed up her entrepreneurship, but rather, drag her down. At some stage, Dangarembga's heroine goes through the same

⁹⁹ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.15.

financial problems as Emecheta's female protagonist to pursue her schooling. For Dangarembga's heroine, the case is even more serious, as she cannot go there as long as her brother is alive and kicking.

The golden opportunity for Tambu arises when her brother finally dies. Then, she substitutes for him at her uncle's house as he lives and works at the mission as a headmaster. Once more, the death of Nhamo is a blessing to her, not only because she hates him naturally but because of his chauvinistic attitude towards her and the whole family. The day on he is afforded an opportunity to live with his uncle at the mission, based on a decision taken by Babamukuru, Nhamo cuts off the "umbilical cord" with his family. This explains the hypocrisy in him, his ungratefulness and selfishness which are ultimately disclosed by his sister:

"Babamukuru says that I am so bright I must be taken away to a good school and be given a good chance in life. So I shall go and live with Babamukuru at the mission. I shall no longer be Jeremiah's son He has the money."

100

Money is power and important in anybody's life for their entrepreneurship. Nhamo understands this, and conscious of Babamukuru's power, he sides with him to get more security. The lack of it nearly compromises the education of Dangarembga's heroine in the beginning. It coincided with a period of extreme poverty when farming, the family's main survival activity, did not yield enough for them to get by. So Tambu's education was interrupted the way the education of Emecheta's heroine was, for lack of money. What is more with Tambu when her family ran short of it, she was discriminated by her own mother who went beyond her limits to scrape together enough of the required money to maintain her son at school, at the expense of

¹⁰⁰ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.48.

her daughter. Of course, all this happened before Babamukuru had decided to take the boy with him at the mission. Her mother started to boil eggs. She even enlarged her plot of land to grow more crops, just to be able to keep the boy at school.

As for Tambu, she is left alone. The resultant of her family's poverty is the interruption of her education, in the mind of her people, girls' education is nonsense. To her parents, there is no need saddling them with her schooling. Being merely a girl, she cannot be compared to her brother and therefore, the lack of means is a good excuse for them to put an end to her studies:

“Although we harvested enough maize to keep us from starving, there was nothing left over to sell. This meant there was no money in the house. No money meant no school fees. Nor was there any hope of procuring money since Babamukuru had left the mission to go to England to study more about education.”¹⁰¹

Tambu can rely on nobody but herself to pursue her studies. Her father is worthless, as he always leans upon his brother's help to make ends meet and this time, he cannot resort to him since he had travelled to England. What is more, he does not want to be involved in her problem, but instead attempts to talk her into forgetting her project to go to school.

Central to Buchi Emecheta's other novels is also the issue of money. Her novel entitled *The Slave Girl* is a good case in point. Like her Zimbabwean counterpart, Emecheta pinpoints poverty, money and all the ensuing setbacks women go through. The said novel is about domestic slavery. The story is set in the early nineteenth century within the Igbo society in Nigeria. It is based on gender discrimination. What is striking is the overriding relationship between

¹⁰¹ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.13.

money and women's oppression. Ogbanje Ojebeta is a young girl who lives with her brother, Okolie. Following the death of their parents, the departure of the eldest son in the family, Owezin, and the outbreak of "Felenza" disease in the country, the family eventually disintegrates. As they live in extreme poverty, Okolie sells young Ojebeta into slavery to Ma Palagada in a secluded village.

Okolie is motivated by his own ambitions to find excuses to legitimize the sale of his sister into slavery. Emecheta's depiction of him is ridiculous. He is portrayed as a worthless person who does not lack; however, the physical strength to work. He is disappointing as he spends all his time playing music and dancing. On top of that, he is heavily in debt and wants to dress up ostentatiously before everybody. In his living time, his father was fully aware of the type of person he was: a lazy bone. After the death of his parents, he was blessed with something to get by, but he always wanted "to have his cake and eat it too". In other words, Okolie never does more than he has to:

*"(...) he was left with a big farm that he did not know how to manage. Some small children start calling 'Okolie Ujo Ugbo'- Okolie the farm truand-for when other young were out on their farms during the day he was seen working about doing nothing."*¹⁰²

On top of his laziness and lack of male dignity, Okolie thinks all the time about money:

*"So lost was he in his money dream that it took him a few seconds to realise that he was there in the biggest market in that part of the country (...) being watched scratching about the market floor looking for coins"*¹⁰³

¹⁰² Buchi Emecheta, *The Slave Girl*, New York, George Braziller, 1977, p.41.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Money has no smell for Okolie. Between money and honor, he would choose money. He goes to one of the biggest trade centers of the country to exchange his sister for it. The main reason for him to sell her into slavery is merely out of personal interest, i.e., prepare his age-group celebrations. He knows that on such occasions Igbo people give honor to the most distinguished men among their community. These occasions are always joyful gatherings for age-group members to wear expensive clothes and to show off their valor. But, he is counted out if one judges him from his achievements. Hence, to keep a high profile among them, he thinks of no other than selling Obejeta, which shows men's domination over women through domestic slavery. The "enslavement" of women is correlated with poverty as men use them as a springboard to thwart social hardships leaning upon the ideology of patriarchy as a device.

Generally speaking, Dangarembga and Emecheta show a particular concern about poverty in their novels. Colonization has slackened the economic growth of Nigeria and Rhodesia in particular and Africa in general. The two writers juxtapose colonialism with poverty as it altered the roles of women and triggered off their subjugation. This is all the more true, for in the pre-colonial era, women had more room to work and more opportunities to develop their activities. They could have their own lands and managed their own affairs. With colonialism, they were caught in a stranglehold. Economic hardships hit all families, and men are now obliged to leave their households in search for jobs. In the fields, more workforces were needed to till and plough the land.

As a result, women participated in working in the fields, while taking care of the family. Thus, impoverishment paved the way for women's entrapment. Men used the power legitimized by traditional conventions to get the best out of them. The two women writers also show that whenever girls' education is at stake, for lack of money, boys triumph over them. In analyzing Tsitsi

Dagarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, Peiman Amanolahi Baharvand and Bahman Zarrinjooee* argue that:

“Racism, poverty, and African traditional practices increase the illiteracy in African countries. Consequently, women are encouraged by males to be submissive laborers at home. The resultant illiteracy deprives women of participating in social activities. Thus, they will be ignorant of their rights and fail to organize their efforts to enjoy social rights. Females have no liberation movement in such a society and can't move towards enlightenment.”¹⁰⁴

The above statement evokes the issue of women's impotence and voicelessness regarding the different setbacks that befall them. Poverty does not promote their literacy, but rather increases their innocence and submissiveness. It hints at their assertiveness and mobilization as ways out of bondage. Literacy would appear then as a prophecy and a means for them to alter the subjugation they are victims of. But, how can women fight and be entrepreneurial while they are still illiterate and poor?

Peiman's and Bahman's alternative for the issue of gender discrimination is entirely based on women's literacy and entrepreneurship. For them, the two concepts are intertwined. This is insightful, but still, poverty remains the opium of women's "enslavement" as already described in *The Slave Girl*. Broadly speaking, the binary opposition between poverty and entrepreneurship that Emecheta and Dangarembga talk about leads us to consider Virginia Woolf's conception of women's creativity and poverty in the early twentieth century Britain.

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¹⁰⁴ Peiman Amanolahi Baharvand and Bahman Zarrinjooee: "The Formation of a Hybrid Identity in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*", *African Journal of History and Culture*, April 2012, vol. 4(3), pp.27-36.

To Virginia Woolf, poverty alienates women who are denied of creativity as long as they are poor. She posits that women need to be financially free and independent if they want to be literarily productive. She is an advocate of a room for every woman, which should enable her to concentrate on her professional project. Environment is a fundamental precondition to a woman's freedom. In her essay *A room of One's Own*, she depicts the Elizabethan woman as "oppressed":

*"In the first place, to have a room of her own, let alone a quiet room or a sound-proof room, was out of the question, unless her parents were exceptionally rich or very noble, even up to the beginning of the nineteenth century."*¹⁰⁵

From an environmentalist point of view, human beings' lives are intrinsically related to their environment as it contributes in people's mind-set, balance and ingenuity. If applied to women, colonialism and gender violence deprive them of an appropriate cosmos conducive to their development. Defining the concept of *environmentalism*, theorists Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin insist on the determining factor of environment on mankind:

*"History, Anthropology, Philosophy, Literature and Cultural Studies have begun to reclaim the 'natural' environment as crucial to the understanding of human 'being' (both past and present) and as an intrinsic worth."*¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, op.Cit, p.53.

¹⁰⁶ Bill Ashcroft and others, *Post-Colonial Studies*, Second Edition, London, Routledge, 2008, p.71. (First published in 2000)

This is congruent with Emecheta's and Dangarembga's view on the issue. For them, colonialism has created an antagonistic atmosphere to human dignity especially for women. Worse, the context of poverty remains a far cry from being helpful to their development.

II.2 Illiteracy and personal fulfillment

Before delving in the subject, it is essential to acknowledge women's place in Africa in relation to entrepreneurship and social commitment so as to leave no doubt as to our intentions. Scholars are controversial about the true position of women in the pre-colonial and colonial context, but some theorists argue that women had a key role in the history and development of mankind in particular and the emergence of African nationhood in general. In pre-colonial Africa, ordinary women, say, illiterate, were not lagging behind; they, too, were at the forefront of development and leadership. They were entitled to have assets, like land, and even held key positions in some kingdoms. Basically, it is colonialism that brought about the adversity and austerity measures that induced women to lose ground and see their status degraded. In the light of this, we can deduce that, given the historical context prior to colonialism in Africa, the ambitious and entrepreneurial woman is not necessarily one who enjoyed a good level of formal education. In other words, countless women got prestige and respect before the advent of colonialism without acquiring a formal training.

In fact, modern African literature has always acknowledged and retained the history of glorious women, who, through perseverance and entrepreneurship, have succeeded in distinguishing themselves in the socio-economic fabric. A good example is *Ambiguous Adventure*. Cheikh Amidou Kane's novel may be an epic, but it partly shows the place of women in African history. The Most Royal Lady is a symbolic woman, an icon in the Diallobé family lineage, thus totally opposed to the oppression and marginalization of women. She is empowered by tradition, because she belongs to the noble lineage and is

involved in the Diallobé's council of elders, her decision to accept and sending children to school is central in the future and cultural survival of her people. The conversation between her and the "Master of the Glowing Hearth" about the issue of joining the Western school is very telling: "*The whole country lies under your great shadow.*"¹⁰⁷

The passage reveals the woman's authority, though she is illiterate. This shows once again that, in pre-colonial Africa, women had a say on social, political and economic affairs.

However, with the climax of colonization and the new trend of globalization or internationalism, the position of women deteriorated. If we agree that women as wives, housewives and nurturers had better opportunities in pre-colonial Africa, we need to ask then what were the impacts of illiteracy on their self-development in the postcolonial context.

In all the novels concerned, illiteracy is central. They deal with illiterate women, as well as illiterate men. In fact, an illiterate person is: "*someone who has not learnt to read or write.*" For a person to be able to read or write he/she must have been educated or gifted to acquire such abilities. But, we have already mentioned that with patriarchy and the impact of poverty, girls' education is generally compromised. This actual fact accounts for the overwhelming number of illiterate women in postcolonial Africa, which does not escape the two women writers' notice. Besides, they depict some female characters that are denied of knowledge acquisition and undergo a double oppression: not only are they deprived their basic human rights, but are subjugated to domesticity.

More often than not, illiteracy is associated with domesticity, for countless women who are considered as housewives are identified as illiterate. Thus, illiteracy has a negative impact on women's subjugation. The two

¹⁰⁷ Cheikh Amidou Kane, *Ambiguous Adventure*, op. Cit, p. 33.

concepts rebound in Emecheta's and Dangarembga's fiction in particular and among women writers' in general. It is a great literary feat for them to fight their social injustice. In their novels, the two female writers show through characterization, how women's ambition is hampered by illiteracy. They describe women caught between domesticity and illiteracy, as between the hammer and the anvil. To some extent, illiteracy shortens women's outlook on the world as it makes them more submissive and less entrepreneurial.

In *Double Yoke*, although the focus is on literacy as a means to self-fulfillment, Emecheta gives a particular attention to illiteracy as a counterpoint that handicaps women's progress. Ete Kamba's mother, for example, is illiterate, opposed to the other characters in the novel. Presumably, she is portrayed like an ordinary and model woman. She is seen as exotic, yet fragile. As a woman who lives in a sophisticated and emerging country, this accentuates her entrapment. This is to say that, although the main protagonists, Ete Kamba and Nko, are trapped in various shackles, his mother seems more prejudiced, since her illiteracy lies on ignorance and induces her to be more lenient towards gender-oppression.

Ete Kamba's mother is a typical subjugated woman. She has no spare time for herself. Servitude never leaves her as it takes most of her time. Emecheta hints at her exploitation, but through her character, it also encompasses the exploitation of all the village women. They devoted themselves to domestic work and farming, which takes them three quarters of their time and energy. These women do not have a full grasp of the value of time, to say nothing of their own lives and future. Engrossed in their different tasks, they can hardly branch out into a lucrative business that could enrich them. On top of that, they are illiterate. In fact, their lack of basic education facilitates their submission and drowns any hope of entrepreneurship in them. Instead, they seem to accept their lot as second-class people. By dint of working and serving men, women

generally forget themselves. They become totally tolerant towards them. For instance, little does it occur to Ete Kamba's mother to challenge her husband and think of her own professional development, for a change. She is always ready and keen on serving and servicing men:

“His mother (Ete Kamba's) would serve them, the men of the house on a special collapsible table they had bought from a carpenter in Calabar. She would then spread on it her one clean table cloth. Then she would bring their food, mainly garri and soup, in very clean but plain imported plates and a metal bowl of water to wash their hands with. She usually left the room after saying, ‘Please enjoy your dinner.’”¹⁰⁸

Ete Kamba's mother treats her husband like a real king, and goes beyond her limits to please him. She meticulously chooses the plates she serves him with. She is like a butler on duty in his master's house. The only difference is that she serves willingly and joyfully, and expects nothing in return. Everything seems natural to her as she is blinded by her joy as a mother, though muted in innocence by her husband's chauvinistic character. She accepts his dominance without resistance. However, Emecheta questions some traditional women's attitudes about their lives. They do not think of changing their sordid living conditions, but rather, take their secondary status as a normal situation. They accept the stereotypes that are enforced upon them by men and society without daring to claim their rights for themselves. The neutrality and quiescence of such women is clearly perceivable in the concept of *liminality*.

From a psychological point of view, *liminality* means the threshold between the *sybaritic* and the *subliminal*. It is the *limit zone* where sensation is no longer active. It is mitigated by a barrier commonly known as the threshold

¹⁰⁸ Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, op. cit, p.18.

area. If we apply it to the women's lot and their personal endeavor, we infer that women's sensation is always overtaken or mitigated by man's supreme power. In *Double Yoke*, Emecheta sees the fidgety character of Ete Kamba's mother as a result of her illiteracy. In the woman's cognitive perception, there is no room for her to undertake any kind of action that might bring about controversies with her male counterpart, though purely psychological. In such a situation, her ignorance, which is a resultant of her illiteracy, should not be discarded as it has a big impact on her fragile character.

Visibly, illiterate women in African women writers' works are generally portrayed as ignorant. They lack initiative and are prone to show less commitment to their low status. This justifies the "oppression" they undergo and it compromises their ambitions. Such an attitude is pure stoicism which goes hand in hand with pacifism. It is man's ability to accept misfortune and all the evils that befall him as his fate or a divine decree. It does not advocate action or resistance of any kind; be it verbal or physical. But, although stoicism is a quality in a harmonious society, it does not enhance women's promotion but paves the way for totalitarianism. In fact, it is this stoic nature of most traditional women that ultimately leads to their alienation and social degradation.

In *Double Yoke*, Ete Kamba's mother is the prototype of the ordinary and submissive woman. This is awkward as she accepts her lot without questioning male superpower. The consequence of her lenient attitude regarding her condition entails her entrapment. This is plainly expressed through the opposition Emecheta uses to portray her. She juxtaposes submissiveness with violence. The paradox that lies therein leads us to ask how an obedient and submissive person of her stature can be a victim of humiliation or emotional and physical violence. The woman is always busy preparing meals for her husband, with all that it requires in terms of time and energy; yet, he flings words at her. He gives a sarcastic judgment on her food. She toils and moils in the kitchen

only to see herself humiliated from the way he appreciates the meals she glides under his nose. The whole situation is what Emecheta embodies in the binary opposition whereby there is a dominant and a dominated or simply a “Master” and a “slave” in which Ete Kamba’s mother plays the role of the “slave”:

*“Ete Kamba’s father never answered. He would frown and look at the food from side to side in a boring way as if he was being forced to eat sick.”*¹⁰⁹

The relationship between Ete Kamba’s mother and his father is not a good and exemplary one. On the one hand, her husband’s poor social status does not enable him to meet the family’s needs. Naturally, she is the one who bears the brunt of the austere situation. Not only does this situation prevent her from concentrating on her own farming activities, but it shackles her and slows down her entrepreneurship. This is all the more true as she uses what she earns from the farming activities to cover the family’s basic needs. The sacrifice she makes is far from being rewarded and Ete Kamba does not ignore it. From an adolescent’s point of view, he seems to pity his mother and lays the blame on his father. To him, he does not value his mother’s own efforts to please him. Through observation, Ete Kamba can judge the way his parents interact. He believes she deserves the world, but to his father she is merely a woman whose role is to serve and please. This is understandable since he has always carried misogynist attitudes towards his wife, as opposed to Ete Kamba’s worship of her:

“His mother, to him, had been the epitome of womanhood, the type whose price was above the biblical rubies. The type who took pride not in herself but in her man. The type who will always obey her man, no matter what, even if he commanded her to walk through fire, the

¹⁰⁹ Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, op. Cit, p. 18.

type that never questions. He had thought all women were like that, and should be like that."¹¹⁰

Ete Kamba's above description uses hallmarks that feature woman as Mother Nature. But we know that illiteracy is one of the characteristics that better fit his ideal mother. This is to say that, even though he secretly admits his mother's merits and sacrifices, he is as possessive and adamant towards women, just like his father. His attitude with Nko tells a lot about his chauvinistic character. In actual fact, to Eke Kamba, a traditional and illiterate woman is much easier to dominate than a sophisticated one. That is why he is torn between his mother's submissive nature and Nko's sophisticated and exotic manners. The passage above also reveals his true understanding of his mother's condition. It justifies her "enslavement" and absolute submission to her husband. By the same token, it reveals the young man's naïveté. To him, his mother is the ideal woman for any type of man. This explains why he is bemused by the way his father treats her, because he feels deep down his heart that she is not a happy woman.

On the whole, the main reason why Ete Kamba venerates his mother is her flexibility. This amounts to saying that she is not a daring woman who can challenge her man. She is an illiterate whose eyes are shattered on the world that surrounds her. She was brought up by tradition to carry such attitudes before men, contrary to Nko who benefitted from a formal education.

In fact, Nko has more chance than most women who were trained directly under colonial rule. She belongs to the generation after independence. In other words, many indigenous people, especially girls who were lucky to go to school under colonial rule, did not have a high literacy level since they seldom went beyond General Certificate of Secondary Education.

¹¹⁰ Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, op.Cit, p.37.

Education makes the difference then, between Nko and the ordinary women. For instance, in contrast to Ete Kamba's mother, not only does Nko have the opportunity to obtain her G.C.S.E, but she also managed to be admitted at Calabar University as an undergraduate student. This means she has acquired a certain level of literacy that ultimately opens up her eyes on the world. Therefore, she does not apprehend the issue of gender the way Ete Kamba's mother and the other illiterate women do. She is candid and daring vis à vis Ete Kamba and men in general.

Beside her education, Nko is blinded by ambition: any man can't talk her into changing the ambitious spirit in her. The several occasions she has had some disputes with Ete Kamba have been very harsh. Many a time, he refers to his mother as an exemplary woman whenever he wants to patronize and hector Nko, but the latter never rises to the bait. Because, she cannot stand the fact that Ete Kamba wants her to think and behave exactly the way his mother does in some situations. Rather, she calls her man pathetic and selfish, someone who is merely attempting to take advantage of her situation as a woman: “*To hell with your mother!*”¹¹¹ This reaction following the rape case embodies the young lady's unwavering personality and the perception she has for men. On that score, she is the antagonist of Ete Kamba's mother who was beaten more than twice by her husband, but nobody ever knew about it.

Presumably, Ete Kamba's family is conformist, contrary to Arit's, one of Nko's friends. Arit lives in the same village as Ete Kamba, but her family seems to be more conscious of the impact of illiteracy on people's lives, which explains the reason why he lives on bad terms with both her and her family.

More interestingly, the two families do not have the same inclinations and vision for life. Arit's family is more open and ambitious than Ete Kamba's. The heads of both families are farmers, but, Arit's father is by far more prosperous

¹¹¹ Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, op. Cit, p.59.

than Eke Kamba's. The latter lives from hand to mouth, whereas Arit's father succeeds in developing his farming. He combines it with new machinery to boost his output. The outcome of such a vision owes him a high profile and jealousy among his people. In this respect, he symbolizes modernity. For, modernity means first, a rupture between the ancient and the contemporary worlds. Modernity also implies a form of social organization that started in Europe in the past to expand to the rest of the other world, especially in European colonies. Anthony Giddens, the British sociologist renowned for his research on contemporary societies, structures modernity through three dimensions:

“... the space of change, the scope of change and the nature of modern institutions. The advent of various technologies initiated an ever accelerating pace of change, and the scope of this change came to affect the entire globe.”¹¹²

The advent of technology goes with modernity in postcolonial literature. Arit's father is a Luddite and future-oriented person and he tries his best to part with ignorance. To some extent, he is different from many other farmers and ordinary people of his community, to say nothing of Eke Kamba's father. The common denominator they share is farming but they are thoroughly opposed. While Ete Kamba's father sticks to the old methods of farming with obsolete equipment, he associates it with new technology. The little amount of knowledge he has got from his schooling has changed his mentality and perception of the way he tackles life. He sees it from a modernistic point of view, in the sense that he is conscious of the predicaments inherent in illiteracy and therefore, he adapts his farming to the new trends of technology. In other

¹¹² Anthony Giddens in *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, Second Edition by Bill Ashcroft and others, op. Cit, p. 131.

words, he is aware of the fact that illiteracy handicaps his farming activity and self-fulfillment. Therefore, he calls upon the White man's craftsmanship and expertise by "joining wood to wood", as The Most Royal Lady puts it in *Ambiguous Adventure*:

*"They (Arit and her brother) were always smartly dressed and always had the air of people who had everything; yet their father was only a farmer but a farmer with a difference. At one time all the people in Mankong would not buy his yams because they said he used so much fertilizer on his soil that the yams were wont to become overblown. At another time he was bold enough to engage a young man on what to do. The young man (...) brought in (...) a kind of machine called caterpillar."*¹¹³

The passage shows the intricacy of modernity. Partly, it implies that the people who lag behind are likely to be illiterate. Illiteracy hinders their advancement in their activities. Whatever their activities might be, if they do not adapt, they are likely to vanish. On the other hand, it infers another facet of modernity and industrialization or postmodernism. That is to say, although the invention of machines is of paramount importance for economic growth in general and farming in particular, it has its side-effects. Arit's father hires a caterpillar, a symbol of technical advancement and uses fertilizers to boost production, but at the end of the day, his yams are oversize. In fact, this is a vindication of industrialization and modernity in postcolonial period. Modernity deprives Africa of its genuine forms of social and economic organization. The colonized have substituted their skills and talents for the colonizer's art, which only results in alienating them.

¹¹³ Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, op .Cit, p .20.

Through the vision of Arit's father and entrepreneurship, Emecheta urges the reader to read between the lines so as to see the discrepancy that lies therein it. It hides rampant imperialist policies, which are implicitly suffocating emerging countries of Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. In *Double Yoke*, Emecheta partly reveals that, with African emergence, illiterate people will always be lagging behind, particularly women; and that, illiteracy does not generally raise women's awareness of their condition. Worse, it makes them more subjugated and resigned.

Likewise, in *Second-Class Citizen*, Emecheta describes illiteracy and its impacts on ordinary women's lives and ambitions. Like in *Double Yoke* where the Nigerian writer mainly focuses on the illiteracy of the protagonist's mother and its relationship with her social status, in *Second-Class Citizen* too, she chooses the same pretext to show that, illiteracy and women's entrapment are closely interlocked.

Adah's mother is an ordinary woman who lives in the midst of a society that does not promote women, particularly, illiterate ones. Her life does not lead her far beyond the domestic sphere. Then, as a woman and an individual, she sees her personal activities compromised by her society's limited expectations from her. In fact, she does not have much more room to manoeuvre being an ordinary woman whose lot is already set once and for all by people and society.

More importantly, the context of the novel is partly the seventies, after Nigeria gained national sovereignty from the British Empire. That is to say a period during which Africa should count on its own people to lift the continent from poverty. In actual fact, during such a context, eligibility to emancipation was based upon literacy and know-how, and this situation did not favor illiterate women; uneligible and discriminated against, because of their low intellectual status. This is precisely the situation in which Adah's mother is depicted in *Second-Class Citizen*: an illiterate woman in the midst of a rapidly- changing

country. Her background does not promote her to the top of the social ladder, but on the contrary drags her down. She is trapped in a web that impedes her progress. She is portrayed like a woman who is bonded to man and cannot see beyond that ready-set environment. Besides, Adah discovers her mother's misery through her sharp observation that reveals a woman who has shared her life with two men, i.e., her own father and his elder brother she calls "new Pa" who inherited her mother.

Through women's experiences and their commitment to resist oppression, Emecheta unveils a link between their intellectual background and the extent to which they are trapped. In other words, the peaceful resignation I have already noted in ordinary women in *Double Yoke* echoes in *Second-Class Citizen* with Adah's mother and the other women of her age. They accept life as it is and never question the prejudices patriarchy has crafted for them. They simply identify themselves with the stereotypes people associate them with. Her mother's quiescence regarding her subjugation beats Adah. In other words, she fails to understand her blind submissiveness. For instance, following the death of her father, her mother accepted the betrothal proposed by her in-laws' family without any kind of objection or rebellion, which is in full contrast with Mariama Bâ's depiction of the issue in *So Long a Letter*. Where Adah's mother placidly accepts to be betrothed, Mariama's heroine, Ramatoulaye, candidly refuses to do so. Following the death of her husband, Maodo, she receives many marriage proposals from her late husband's family and friends, but does not swallow the bait or give in. Instead, she is categorical towards Daouda, one "suitor":

“*My conscience is not accommodating enough to enable me to marry you I can offer you nothing else, even though you deserve everything.*”¹¹⁴

Mariama Bâ's heroine is different from Emecheta's on this score, but what seems to alienate Nko's mother even more is her illiteracy, the basis of her ignorance and submission to tradition. It is frustrating for Adah, and it kindles the young girl's attention to her mother's "innocence". Besides, she admits that she is angry with her for accepting such an awkward custom, as the betrothal would erase her late father's memory forever. On top of that, it symbolizes one of the countless hurdles of a woman's life she must fight, rather than accept it as a divine decree: "*She hated Ma for marrying again, thinking it was a betrayal for Pa.*"¹¹⁵

Adah's contempt surely imparts her mother's innocence, but also tells more about the close relationship between her and her father. She was his favorite daughter, even though masculinity reigns supreme in the Igbo community. Her pet name "Nne nna", which means "Father's mother", explains the kind of love he had for her. But, the perception Emecheta's heroine has for her mother, shows how much she misunderstands her attitude and this has nothing to do with the unquestionable "love" she feels for her father. Through her heroine's mouthpiece, Emecheta speaks from a realistic and socially committed point of view.

Moreover, the mother's innocence gives way to her utter submission to her husband. It hampers her development as well, as she cannot be a prosperous seamstress in her business, being too engrossed in taking care of her husband and children, to say nothing of the family homestead. The little money she gets

¹¹⁴ Mariama Bâ, *So Long a Letter*, Translated by Modupé Bodé-Thomas, London, A.W.S, Heinemann, 1980, p.68.

¹¹⁵ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op. Cit, p. 18.

from her small job is spent to meet the family's demands and in spite of all this, she does not raise the slightest protest against the situation.

Presumably, Adah sees her mother's entrapment as intolerable. Although she loves her father, she is aware of his domination over her mother. She fully knows that the sacrifices her mother endures in the house are beyond her capacity. Even if she does so for her family, it does not promote her personal activities nor can it improve her social condition. The paradox that beats Adah is the innocence that is coupled with her entrapment. For instance, she cannot put up with the money her mother and friends have wasted on the homecoming day of one of the village future lawyers who had been to England to pursue his studies. That money was spent on buying the fabric to make uniforms for everybody together with the accessories for the welcoming ceremony. But, what really strikes Emecheta's heroine is the enthusiasm of the women on the welcoming day and the amount of time it cost them:

“They went in their uniform. Adah still remembered its color. It had a dark velvety background with pale blue drawings of feathers on it. The headscarf was red, and it was tied in such a way that it displayed their straightened hair. The shoes they wore were of black patent leather called ‘nine-nine’ (...) bought new gourds which they covered with colorful beads.”¹¹⁶

The women dressed ostentatiously. But beyond the money and time they had invested, Adah deplors their naivety over the welcoming, which shows the way they prepared the event and the importance it held in their eyes. Even if the focus of the story is their subjugation, the way events are celebrated evidences the complexity of their character. They may be oppressed and exploited, yet, they never play down one of the most important assets of their community:

¹¹⁶ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op. Cit, p.15.

honoring a guest. This illustrates the reverence and passion Emecheta has for African heritage and folklore. These women may be living in poverty, relegated to a life of child-bearing and “enslavement”, but when it comes to welcoming one of their kith and kin, they behave in a grandiose way!

Furthermore, Adah’s observation reveals the two different homesteads her mother lived in. In her father’s lifetime, her living conditions seemed relatively better than after she was betrothed by her father’s elder brother. In her second home, she suffered more. Even though she was able to find little time to concentrate on her business as a seamstress in Adah’s father’s home, the family politics in her second homestead robbed her of everything: her business, her freedom and her happiness. At all events, Adah’s mother was caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. Her story is that of an ordinary woman who tries to fend for herself, but eventually gets trapped by the men she lives for.

In fact, in *Second-Class Citizen*, Emecheta denounces through the entrapment of Adah’s mother, the extent to which male-dominance can hamper women’s personal activities and development. Her example is seen from a young girl’s perspective as the heroine recalls her mother’s handicap while she is still young. Emecheta uses psychoanalysis, one of the fundamentals of feminist literary criticism to talk about women’s oppression. Psychoanalysis departs from the mother’s exploitation that occurs under the daughter’s very eyes that is engraved on her memory she can call into question and blame her “oppressor” for her trauma. As Judith Kegan Gardiner states in her essay, “*Mind mother: Psychoanalysis and Feminism*”:

“Within a cultural context, psychoanalysis aims to understand individuals by uncovering desires hidden deep within our minds and revealing their connections with the conscious surface.”¹¹⁷

Gardiner’s viewpoint fits the frame of mind that haunts Adah when she recollects the past to depict her mother’s entrapment. The same concept is perceivable in Dangarembga’s text. In her work, she uses the same feminist concept to talk about the entrapment of women.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga’s heroine talks about the same oppression women are faced with. She ultimately focuses on their living conditions in and around her own family. Her childhood memory is full of women whose lives had deeply been shattered by tradition and colonialism. Most of the women depicted by the narrator are eventually trapped.

Besides, Dangarembga’s heroine announces the female characters’ subjugation in the beginning of her novel: “(...) *my story is not after all about death, but ...; about my mother’s and Maiguru’s entrapment; and about Nyasha’s rebellion*”¹¹⁸ She shows the discrepancy between her brother’s death and the other events that occur in the novel. To her, the death of Nhamo is not the central point of the story. Rather, she wants to channel the reader’s mindset, right from the beginning, into the sad experiences her mother, her aunt, Maiguru and her cousin, Nyasha, have undergone. Even though the focal point at this stage of our analysis is the entrapment of illiterate women, nonetheless it is of paramount importance to mention here that literate women are no exception; they are trapped. In fact, the mixture of the Western and African cultures has resulted in alienating somehow some literate characters like Maiguru and Nyasha. But still, for the sake of coherence, we ultimately focus on

¹¹⁷ Judith Kegan Gardiner, “*Mind mother: Psychoanalysis and Feminism*” in *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, op. cit, p .114.

¹¹⁸ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op. Cit, p .1.

the extent to which the entrapment of illiterate women like Tambu's mother hampers their happiness and development.

Most illiterate women find it hard to achieve their personal fulfilment in colonial Africa. In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga gives a detailed account of two different types of women: the literate and the illiterate. She shows that either type can be a victim. Tambu's mother falls into men's trap from an early age. In fact, she was impregnated by Jeremiah, Tambu's father, when she was fifteen years old. This boils down to saying that her future as a young girl was compromised by her pregnancy. Even if Jeremiah had accepted to marry her, he did not give the entire bride-price to his in-laws, which is an economic handicap for them, since they live below the poverty line, to say nothing of the disgrace.

Worse still, when she joins her husband her life as an ordinary woman does not improve. She has a small farm, but cannot go further. Her husband is a lazy man who fails to protect his family. Thus, the little revenue she gets from her farming and the little money she obtains from the selling of vegetables are re-used to meet the family's needs. Eventually, she finishes like all the ordinary women of her age: she goes backward everyday. Her entrapment denies her of a voice in her family politics, and all the decisions are taken by her husband's elder brother, Babamukuru. On top of that, she talks her daughter into accepting women's back luck. She warns her to be not too demanding in life, because of her sex: "*Let her see for herself that some things cannot be done.*"¹¹⁹ These words impart the extent to which she is trapped. She is a victim of a double colonization: she suffers from the double weight of traditional norms and colonial rule.

Tambu's mother is antagonist to her sister, Lucia, who is more daring towards men, though illiterate. When Babamukuru holds a second family meeting after Nhamo's death during which the family patriarchal order discusses

¹¹⁹ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op. Cit, p .17.

serious matters, Lucia marches into the room where the meeting is held without being invited. This is noteworthy, for it shows her determination and courage. She cannot stand a sentence without a trial, because after all, the subject matter under review concerns her. None of the men who attended the meeting reacted, even the adamant Babamukuru:

“They wanted to talk to her. They wanted her to sit down and be calm and discuss the matter rationally, but Lucia had had enough and came out to join us. The patriarchy put its heads together and conferred in low voices because now they knew we were listening.”¹²⁰

This passage is a good example of patriarchal challenge. Patriarchy is synonymous with authority and rigidity, which Lucia calls into question. The members of the council are aware of the impact the infringement may have on children and the other women, so they do not want her to have such an attitude vis à vis the council. This is all the more uncomfortable for them as Lucia has been very truculent towards her man, Takesure, who represents a threat to her, and everybody. She sets herself as a good example of an ordinary assertive woman. This is to say that, however illiterate and poor she is, she vows to be not bonded to any man. She knows that illiteracy is a plague for women since it prevents them from having personal achievements, which is why she starts to change the situation. First, she has succeeded in parting with her husband when she realizes that she can survive without him. Second, she dares tell off the members of the patriarchal order with her intrusion in the meeting. She may be suspicious of having an affair with Tambu's father, but her commitment to social equity and justice owes her respect in a male-dominated society that is far from lenient with women.

¹²⁰ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.cit, p.145.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga acutely describes the subjugation of women and its relationship to illiteracy and literacy through her different characters. In fact, illiteracy is interpreted as a double-edged problem: it does not foster women's outlook on the world, nor does it prevent them from achieving self-realization and esteem. Literacy is also a good advantage for women, but male hegemony hampers their development. Therefore Dangarembga highlights the impasse in which women find themselves.

Similarly, in *The Book of Not*, she insists on the intricacy of women's literacy. Indeed, her concern about the issue accounts for the pervasiveness of education in the novel through various events that happen within the premises of the Young Ladies' College of The Sacred Heart. The author's interest in literacy shows the extent to which illiteracy is seen as detrimental for women in general. The social context coincides with the emergence of Rhodesia into independence. Worse, the rebellion prejudices children and women with the social living conditions that are coupled with the ravaging war making women's existence unbearable, as the country's undercurrent instability has an impact on their lives and future.

In a colonial context with war in full swing, the indigenous people have to choose what is good for them for the sake of nationhood and personal development. They have to choose between colonial school and the liberation struggle led by the freedom fighters. If those who have chosen to follow the white minority in their schools can take some advantages of the situation, the unschooled ones, especially women, are left on their own: they cannot prosper. This explains Tambu's and her younger sister's dilemma. The former follows her uncle to study and have a good career, whereas Netsai sides with the freedom fighters. Through Netsai's commitment to the freedom fighters, Dangarembga turns the spotlight on the absurdity of war. It ruins people's ambition, especially women's. Netsai feels vulnerable: her father, Jeremiah, is

irresponsible and her mother is at a loss. So, she chooses to join the old siblings in the rebellion. Through her experience, Dangarembga epitomizes war as a noble cause which is often perilous to man, especially woman:

“I could not make her (Netsai) out. I had not seen her since she left some months ago, and before that, because of school, I had seen her rarely. What did a woman who fought look like? Did she look the same as before, now as one who bore the arms of death, who planted landmines in the roads that connected vast farms so that farmers’ wives in their jeeps exploded?”¹²¹

In the beginning of the novel, Tambu does not join the old siblings in ruling out the white minority in Rhodesia. It does not even occur to her to do such a thing: it is out of her cognitive thinking. She has set her eyes on her goal to achieve a good education. As noted above, she tries to figure out the motive force of her sister’s alliance with the rebel forces. If Tambu can barely understand her sister’s commitment to the struggle, Netsai feels the same for her. They are not on the same wavelength. Neither Tambu, nor Netsai can comprehend each other’s commitment. This explains why the freedom fighters suspect Babamukuru of betrayal. To Babamukuru, illiteracy is an obstacle to man’s development, whereas the freedom fighters think otherwise. For them, the fact that Tambu goes to a mostly-all-white school is a pure act of felony and irresponsibility on Babamukuru’s part. As a result, they talked him into bearing the blame for his “whitish” inclinations before he was severely lynched.

Generally speaking, Buchi Emecheta and Tsitsi Dangarembga are congruent in the way they consider illiteracy. They have shown that the more illiterate women are, the more likely they are to accept their subjugation. It shuts their eyes on the urgent setbacks that hinder their development, for it deprives

¹²¹ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, op.Cit, p .13.

them of a voice to fight for their personal and collective advancement. As an instrument in African women's emancipation and freedom in the postcolonial context, their texts are a cry for literacy. Besides, this ties them up with African-American history. In fact, in the nineteenth century, slaves and former slaves were through sordid living conditions due to the prejudice of their color, but especially to their ignorance. As a result, countless slaves resorted to literacy, not only to free themselves from the "oppressors", but to achieve their personal fulfilments as individuals. AS Ronald E. Butchart points it out in "*Schooling the Freed People: Teaching Learning and The Struggle for Black Freedom 1861-1876*":

*"Slavery's great failure lay in its inability to crush the black longing to read and write Literacy opened the possibility of encountering ideas opposed to human bondage and carried the potential of written communication between black conspirators."*¹²²

Butcart insists on the crucial need for education and its relationship to freedom. But his main focus is the urgent demand of literacy and its impact on African-Americans' survival strategies in a totally segregated continent.

II.3 Survival strategies

Everyday, across the world, children and women are victims of different forms of gender-based discrimination. It concerns literate and ordinary women to waver from moral to physical violence. The different forms of oppression they experience have a great impact on women from all walks of life, whether schooled or unschooled. In this chapter, emphasis is mainly laid on the case of illiterate women and children regarding their own development. Given that illiteracy is, professionally, an impediment for them, they eventually find

¹²² Ronald E. Butchart, *Schooling the free People : Teaching, Learning and Struggle for Black Freedom*, United States, The University of North Carolina Press, 2010, p .2.

themselves excluded from the social fabric. Their “subaltern” status does, in no way, meet professional eligibility. This ultimately leads us to ask, to what extent illiteracy and literacy represent prerequisites and alternatives for women’s emancipation.

Women’s writings provide us with exemplified remarkable female figures, among whom ordinary women who have illustrated themselves, through their endeavours and social commitment. These women use daily violence, society and customs inflict on them to react against the same violence through different ways. More often than not, they do not allow their second nature or prejudices to overtake the humanistic force in them. Instead, they deeply embed in their social commitment to fight against the obstacles they face daily. History has reckoned countless African-American women and second-class citizens in the struggle for social equity, Black people’s freedom and emancipation in America and mankind across the world: Harriet Tubman, Rosa Park, Sojourner Truth, and more recently, Angela Davis, to name but a few, are good examples. These figures have hugely contributed in establishing a Black identity by fully defending women’s rights. They have shown that gender is not, and should not be a barometer in the struggle for human rights and social equity. Sojourner Truth, one of the pre-cited renowned women whose commitment remain unquestioned in the survival of the Black community in the United States of America, is a good reference for women fighters.

Indeed, Truth was in the forefront of the nineteenth century *Abolitionist Movement* in the United States. Her commitment led her to give one of the most canonical speeches in the history of African-American women, yet, she was illiterate. More importantly, she spoke Dutch until the age of nine. This means that she was not privileged by her background as a slave, but never gave up. She fought to protest against racial segregation and gender-based discrimination. In her speech, “*Ain’t I a woman?*” She argues that gender cannot hamper women’s

development. Thus, she set herself as an example to her peers and other women around the world. As a hard-working woman gifted with broad shoulders, her stamina was comparable to that of a man:

“Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman ...?”¹²³

Truth's words are an invitation to all oppressed women to be committed to fighting social injustice. She attempts to raise awareness among them, to master themselves and participate in the struggle for the emancipation of mankind in general and women in particular. Women of such a stature can be found in African saga. Aline Sitoë Diatta, Ndaté Yalla Mbodj and the Amazons of Benin, to name but a few, are good examples of heroic ordinary women who played a major role in the resistance against colonial rule in the nineteenth century. Aline Sitoë Diatta and Ndaté Yalla Mbodj are emblematic figures in the history of Senegal; not just for their social commitment, but for the self-sacrifice they showed to defend a righteous cause against colonialism. Fully aware of the extent of the crisis during colonial era, they displayed survival strategies to stop the social subjugation of their people.

¹²³ An extract of Sojourner Truth's speech: "Ain't I a woman?" first delivered on a lecture tour at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio on May 29th 1851.

Aline Sitoë Diatta was haunted by the same vigour that was in Sojourner Truth and other iconic women and she believed in social equity. To her, under no circumstance should gender be a predicament to women's progress in spite of the oppression colonialism and unusual customs brought about. She led a resistance movement against colonization and urged her people in the South of Senegal, Casamance, to stop cultivating commercial crops as dictated by the French colonizer, and to return to the traditional food crops for the sake of economic autonomy.

Likewise, Queen Ndaté Yalla Mbodj's contribution to the resistance against colonial rule is immeasurable. She was profusely committed to fighting her people's oppression in her native land, Walo, Saint Louis of Senegal. She never yielded ground in her struggle, but, rather, faced up the situation with bold spirit: never did she give in when the colonial occupation became intolerable.

*“One of her attitudes was her courageous stand to defend her territory, and stop the advance of General Faidherbe's colonial army from advancing further into African territories, and setting up proxy states. A true resistant revolutionary freedom fighter, and one of Africa's heroines who will be always remembered for her gallant role and contributions for emancipation.”*¹²⁴

All these women had been fully aware of the stakes for their people. Their merit had been their promptness to get involved in the fight against the current injustices their people faced during their lifetime. Their fight for equal justice incorporated in its agenda the social and political stakes of their communities. The extent of the colonial crisis urged them to unfold survival strategies, which enabled them to resist colonialism. Besides, the saga of these heroines is largely

¹²⁴ Sainey Faye, “Ndate Yalla Mbogé: The Last Linguere (Queen/Empress) of the Kingdom of Waalo” (Web). (<http://gainako.com/?p=4913>).

amplified in African orature. Similarly, through fiction, the two women writers, Buchi Emecheta and Tsitsi Dangarembga, have drawn particular attention to the various forms of subjugation their female characters faced and the fighting spirit that prompted their reaction.

Even though the focus for the emblematic figures is laid on the resistance against colonialism through social commitment, in the novels under study, we shall ultimately center our analysis on ordinary women's survival strategies and resistance through their entrepreneurial spirit to ensure economic independence. This will allow us to tackle the feat through which literate women attempt to shift for themselves in the next chapter. This is of paramount importance as Dangarembga and Emecheta draft the portraits of some ordinary women who are held back by traditional conventions and colonialism, but attempt to "rise from their ashes". They even exemplified some of them who have gone from rags to riches and whose spirit of entrepreneurship helped in fostering nationhood for a good and harmonious society.

From the outset of her novel, *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga introduces the reader to the busy life and exotic beauty of her native land, *Umtali*. Through the mouthpiece of her heroine, Tambu, she underlines the entrepreneurial spirit of her people. She recollects the bus terminus, which is situated two miles away from their home, as the hub of trade for her people. The rare occasion she leaves home for the terminus was an occasion for her to contemplate the fields and the small businesses that start thriving all around the area. The poverty that plagues people does not prevent some of them to invest. They fend for themselves through various activities that could generate a little amount of money for them to get by. The bus terminus is the place that hosts all sorts of business men and women. All the people who were exiled in town reach out the bus terminus for home. Whenever Tambu's brother, Nhamo, returns home from the mission, he dreads it, because of the smell and heat on the bus.

But this shows their commitment to survive. Besides, Tambu fails to understand her brother's antipathetic stance with all the brave people on the buses or in the working fields alongside the bus terminus to their home:

“The bus terminus – which is also the market place, with pale dirty tuckshops, dark and dingy inside, which we call magrosa, and women under msasa trees selling hard-boiled eggs, vegetables, seasonal fruit, boiled chicken which is sometimes curried and sometimes not, and anything else that the villagers or travellers might like to buy – is at least two miles distance from our homesteads.”¹²⁵

The dirty smell Tambu's elder brother complains about foretells his lack of respect towards the traders. His sister seems to be more sensitive to the sacrifices they make. It is only natural to smell after a hard-day's work with all the busy life at the market. To Tambu, the perspirations that ooze from their body and the smell they let go account for the fighting spirit that haunts them. The different commercial activities some women do are merely a way for them to ensure economic survival.

Dangarembga insists on the entrepreneurial spirit and vision of the Shona people, especially women. In other words, they know how to grasp a good opportunity when it arises. For instance, when the local authorities built the *District Council Houses* near the *Ryamarira River* where they wash and do their laundry, some of them saw it as a good opportunity, even though it robs them of their privacy. Since the district was becoming a gathering place for people, the most ambitious ones started to build up shops, because they knew that where there are people, they will ultimately need to buy basic things:

¹²⁵ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op. Cit, p. 2.

“It was long before the entrepreneurial among us, noticing that there were always more people gathered at the Council Houses than anywhere else in the village (...) built their little tuckshops which sold the groceries we needed – bread, tea, sugar, jam, salt, cooking oil, matches, candles, paraffin and soap – there beside the Council Houses.”¹²⁶

Dangarembga postulates that some Shona people have always been daring and adventurous in business. With the exacerbation of living conditions and the advent of colonialism, they still hold on to their activities in order to survive. She does not stop there, but goes even further in her analysis by implying that the entrepreneurship of her people, especially illiterate women, has an impact on their survival. As individuals, their status is secondary, i.e., their freedom and identity are flouted by their people instead of urging them to act as fully-fledged participants in their own social development. Thus, the people need to develop strategies that will not only guarantee them economic independence, but also freedom and happiness. Indeed, this appears as a challenge to ordinary women, since their illiteracy will always be seen as a handicap for them.

But even though, the novel is cast with many ordinary women who eventually end up being trapped by men, there are some who have not given up hope. They do not take their lot as an end in itself. Lucia is a good case in point. She is a central character in embodying assertiveness and freedom. She is completely illiterate, yet, she is far away from being trapped. She is one of the few characters in the novel who have succeeded in outfoxing men, say patriarchy, namely the traditional conventions which do not promote them. She is also the one who dares stand before Babamukuru, the archetype of patriarchy in the Sigauke family, and tell him the plain and unvarnished truth. The character of Lucia acts as a foil for Dangarembga to show that, even though

¹²⁶ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, Op.Cit, p. 3.

many ordinary women are subjugated, some still resist their bondage to men and all sorts of prejudices that are likely to drag them down.

In fact, Dangarembga sets Lucia as a role model. This is all the more true as she displayed courage, so as to keep a good image of herself among her people. Even Nyasha admires her for her uncompromising attitude towards despotic men. For instance, Nyasha was very impressed with Lucia's assertiveness when Tambu reported to her how she challenged the patriarchal council: "*She (Nyasha) was pleased with Lucia, which surprised me, because when Lucia was around, Nyasha reserved herself, said little.*"¹²⁷

There are two prejudices Lucia has managed to overcome: first, her ignorance and second her economic dependence. She is aware of her ignorance and the impact of literacy on native people under colonial rule. Even if literacy is not for her a pathway to fulfilment, she deeply thinks that it is a good asset for people, especially women, to get emancipated. She has the same stamina and zeal regarding knowledge and education. She is like all African legendary heroines, former African-American freedom fighters like Malcolm X, and former slaves who learnt to read and write in private to enlighten their look on the world beyond and fight for basic human rights.

In fact, Lucia symbolizes the good ordinary woman. She is impressive and daring, but still, her illiteracy mitigates her power towards some types of people, like Babamukuru who holds a Master's degree and had a chance to travel to Western countries like England. The narrator's soliloquy reveals Lucia's impressive character and some tropes of her weakness, which is merely a result of her illiteracy:

¹²⁷ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op. Cit, p .147.

“Those men! They never realised that Lucia was a serious person. Her laughter, like her temper, was hearty and quick but never superficial. And she thought a lot, (...) although she laughed at herself, thinking was a slow painful process for her because her mind had not been trained by schooling to do it quickly.”¹²⁸

In fact, illiteracy does not prevent Lucia from thinking about the patronising way men treat her. She does not talk like a trained or sophisticated woman, but is very careful about what people do, say and decide for her. She does understand that the likes of Babamukuru take a good advantage of their people’s illiteracy to dominate them. What is more, she knows that if she had been trained to think and speak like him, he would surely have had a different attitude towards her. But, once again, this does not mean that she lets herself be ill-treated or humiliated by him or any other man. She does not mince words when it comes to set the score right with men in general because she knows what she wants and how to get it. Nonetheless, she takes her illiteracy as a challenge. She never gives up, but always tries to see ways and means to overcome the obstacles that come over her way to move forwards.

For instance, following the childbirth of her elder sister, Tambu’s mother, Lucia joined her at Babamukuru’s where she stayed for a few days. This occasion was an opportunity for her to expose her problems and her sister’s to him, the family’s benefactor, as she wants to be a respectful woman. She wants him to find her a job since her illiteracy should not disqualify her professionally:

“‘Do you know what I was thinking, Babamukuru?’ She continued (...) ‘I was thinking that I could find work, any little job in this area, if I could find a little job here in

¹²⁸ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op. Cit, p. 153.

Mutasa's kraal, there would be no more of these problems.”¹²⁹

Lucia does not want to be a dependent woman. She just wants to be responsible of herself and take care of her sister. She understands that, to some extent, women will be bonded to men as long as they financially depend on them. She is poor but keeps her pride. The job will ultimately discharge her of Babamukuru's daily help, for she does not want her poverty to pave the way for her entrapment.

Through the character of Lucia, Dangarembga shows that women may face many social hardships but can still resist by resorting to some strategies that insure their survival. In Lucia's case, her strategies were to sensitize Babamukuru and urge him to find her a job and enrol her to school. She eventually succeeds in achieving both. She works as a cook at *the girls' hostel* while following the courses in Grade one. Her merit has been her survival and the ability to combine work and school to lift herself up from the poverty line and to challenge patriarchy, to say nothing of her sympathy with her sister. Her ambition and spirit of entrepreneurship beat Babamukuru: “(...) *that Lucia had passed her Grade One so well that they were moving her into Grade Three....*”¹³⁰

Contrary to the way she depicts women's survival in *Nervous Conditions*, in *The Book of Not*, Dangarembga presents her female characters' survival through a different paradigm. Rhodesia is a military occupied zone: the British colonists have dispossessed the natives of their best lands to oblige them to settle down in the peripheries with their families, leaving their ancestors' graves unattended. Since they were left with the poorest lands, they could not naturally

¹²⁹ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op. Cit, p.157.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p.196.

develop their farming activities. In short, the White man's presence sorely impoverished them.

But if we agree that the colonization of the African continent did not occur non-militarily, we will easily understand the survival strategies the Rhodesians have conceived to respond to the situation. In *The Book of Not*, Dangarembga comes up with a more radical form of resistance: people start to organize themselves as militia to defend their rights under the basis of what they have in common, i.e., their national integrity. The freedom fighters are socially committed and it is understandable, for the stake is at national level. This explains the dimension of the Resistance Movement and all the secrecy around, as it involves, men, women, boys and girls, and old people.

The stake and the dimension of the fight give tension to the text. In *The Book of Not*, the reader does not need to read between the lines to perceive the looming civil war: it is in the air. Everybody thinks about it, but does not talk about it openly. Naturally, there are many other Rhodesians who do not caution the fight, out of fear. But White people are as insecure as natives during the transitional period, which explains the ambivalence of women's commitment to the fight. Some women and school girls, out of fear, do not side openly with any fighter, whereas others like Netsai, Tambu's younger sister, opt for the elder siblings, commonly known as freedom fighters.

Besides, Dangarembga does not legitimize violence or war to solve problems, but insists on the social commitment that lies beneath it. Women, as well as children, take chances by joining the freedom fighters or the government soldiers. When they join the movement for freedom, they act as real participants in strengthening it. The cause is noble, as it vows to liberate the nation. On the one hand, the war of independence totally disables Netsai, compelled to walk on crutches.

More importantly, the war of independence deepens hatred and racism between Whites and Rhodesians. The Rhodesian girls who attend the Young Ladies' College of Sacred Heart feel the tension in their bones. At the psychological level, it totally frustrates Tambu. Her mind constantly wanders about the war beyond the mountains when she has to concentrate on the current questions asked by her teacher in class. This has a negative impact on her school results and psychological balance. Besides, it is the same commitment that fuelled the freedom fighters that fuelled the partisans of the Mau Mau movement and other radical movements, such as the Algerian National Front (F.N.L), to name but a few, in the struggle for independence. These methods and strategies are by a far cry different from the strategies Dangarembga epitomizes in *Nervous Conditions*, though the stories are the same, to some extent. This leads to say that, in *The Book of Not*, some characters' commitment to the war of independence is ultimately in line with the spirit of nationhood and cultural freedom.

Therefore, Dangarembga's depiction of women's survival strategies is related to the Nigerian writer, Buchi Emecheta, once examined through the lens of the concept of entrepreneurship in a patriarchal and postcolonial context. The depiction of Lucia's survival impregnates Emecheta's fiction.

The survival spirit that haunts Lucia in Dangarembga's *Nervous conditions* is traceable in Emecheta's *Double Yoke*. Arit, the heroine's cousin, tells a lot about the relationship between women's constraints and their urge for struggle. Her experience is grounded in her commitment and conviction to succeed. It is a pretext for Emecheta to invite women, particularly those who have not benefitted from any type of education, to participate in their country's emergence through creativity and entrepreneurship. She is different from many girls of her age group. While almost all of them are entangled in the pursuit of materialism and dashing madly to school, she chooses another medium:

hairdressing. What is interesting with Arit is that she chooses an activity which almost all ordinary African women know and practice. The icing on the cake is that, not only does she choose hairdressing as a springboard, but had undergone a training to excel in this domain. She combines her African craftsmanship with professionalism while using a blend of tradition with modernity, which permits her to retain her African culture and be professionally eligible in the job market.

Besides, the hairstyles Arit creates reflect her own African identity and the Western one. Even though Ete Kamba is in familiar terms with her, he is dumbfounded at her shrewdness:

“Arit had changed into another dress. She had changed her hairdo. Ete Kamba wondered how she managed that. In the morning her hair had been straightened like that of Europeans Now she had something that looked like African raffia.”¹³¹

As a result of her ingenuity, Arit can keep a high profile among her people. She managed in finding a way out by choosing a profession that opens all doors for her. In fact, her profession empowers her as a female individual, since she has, professionally, retained her cultural identity mingled with the trendy hairstyles she creates. Her workplace will be undoubtedly the meeting place for people from all walks of life. This is all the more true as hairdressing has always played a major role in African and African-American history. As Lisa Clayton Robison points out in her article, “Hair and Beauty Culture”:

“After Emancipation, the demand for professional hair and beauty care within the black community began to grow. Some hairdressers worked out of their own homes, either full-time or in their spare time as a means of earning extra

¹³¹ Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, op. Cit, p.23.

*income (...) beauty salons and barber shops came to provide a unique social function. Because their workplaces were gathering points in many black communities, many salons owners and hairdressers became well-known community leaders.*¹³²

Arit is gaining a lot of consideration and prestige among her people. Her parents have invited all the villagers to the event organized to celebrate her success and give thanks to the Lord. The ceremony has a good impact on the community and even one of the most influential authorities of the church came all the way from Calabar to give blessings to her.

In fact, Arit is a role model, like Lucia in *Nervous Conditions*. Setting an example to all her people for fending for herself to get rid of man's bondage, her job will not only grant her a "silent" power before men, but her workplace will surely be, as Robinson puts it, a gathering place for women's immersion, to say nothing of the prospective jobs it will provide for them. In other words, ordinary women or illiterate women can improve their status by devising strategies that help them get free, create jobs and strongly participate in their countries' economic growth.

Similarly, in *Second-Class Citizen*, Emecheta comes up with the same fighting spirit instilled in some of her female characters in the patriarchal and colonial contexts. The only difference here is that the survival strategies deployed by women are transferred to the children. Emecheta made many portrayals of survival strategies, but for the sake of coherence, we shall focus here on the female child. This is understandable, as the protagonist, Adah, is a young and powerless innocent girl who fights to overcome the injustice she is subject to. The text opens on the female child's struggle, in a country

¹³² Lisa Clayton Robinson, "Hair and Beauty Culture, the e traditions that have evolved around African American hair and skin care and style", In *AFRICANA: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience*, op.Cit, p.903.

impoverished by colonialism and her thirst for her most natural right: education. The crux of the story is Adah's struggle, her determination and stubbornness show the extent of her ambition. She wants to be different, not be subjugated to anybody, like her mother and the other Ibuza women. That is why her fight has no limit: it is a matter of life or death.

To Adah, poverty is not an excuse for man's backwardness, even if it has a great impact on women's subjugation. Her poverty and the low treatment meted on women in general are for her good sources of motivation to struggle. Her personality has an impact on the way she interacts with men. From an early age, she already knows that marriage is an appendage to women's bondage and she will not accept to be bonded to any man: "(...) *her obstinacy gained her a very bad reputation...*"¹³³ Her determination is a response to the subjugation of all children and women typical of the Igbo people, and that is why she wants to escape from the trials of her oppressive society. Therefore, she has to struggle tooth and nail to achieve her goal. Since her mother cannot finance her entrance examination fees following the death of her father, she will manoeuvre to find the money. The strong will she has to sit for the exam shows her ambition, and nothing can stop her.

For instance, when Adah is sent to the market place to buy meat for the meal, after long procrastination, she eventually keeps the two shillings, the exact amount of money she needs to pay her entrance examination tuition:

*"Didn't Jesus say that one should not steal? But (...) Adah buried the money and went back home in tears, without the meat."*¹³⁴

¹³³ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op. Cit, p.19.

¹³⁴ Ibid, p.21.

The author's incursion reminds the reader of the extent to which the protagonist is committed. Adah knows the chance she runs by keeping the money, but willingly takes it upon herself. She develops a stoic attitude as a strategy to get what she wants. To punish her severely, Cousin Vincent gives her "a *hundred and three strokes*" but she cannot expect more: "*She was, in fact very happy.*"¹³⁵

In *Second-Class Citizen*, Emecheta provides another story. She shows a little girl's struggle to get her independence within a society hostile to women's development. The efforts the little girl makes to improve her life are salutary in the sense that, in traditional Africa, women are likely to take their lot as a divine decree. On that score, the two women writers' standpoints are similar. In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu is confronted with the same problem of funding for her schooling and she finds her way out like Emecheta's heroine. The medium through which Tambu manoeuvres to solve her problem may be different, but still, it accounts for her tenacity to survive. She has been able to find the means to finance her school fees by ploughing the land. As a young girl, she gets a small plot of land, not far from her own family's. She works strenuously in order to have good crops to sell. What is more, she always makes sure that the task that is cut out for her at home is properly done before she heads for the field:

*"While the cocks were crowing and the hens were shaking the sleep out of their feathers, I made the fire, swept the kitchen and boiled water for tea. By the time the sun rose I was in my field, in the first days hoeing and clearing; then digging holes thirty inches apart, with a single swing of the hoe At about ten o'clock, (...) I would go to the family field"*¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.22.

¹³⁶ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.20.

Tambu might appear like “workaholic”, but she cannot do otherwise. She has to find the money if she wants to stay at school. Like the Igbo people, Shona people believe in hard-work, but, very often than not, they silence women’s efforts and merits. For Tambu, it is a matter of survival to find the means to stay at school. Eventually, when her crops grow, her teacher, Mr Matimba proposes her to sell the maize her brother starts to steal downtown. Ironically, at the market place, a white woman, Doris, donates ten pounds for the girl’s school fees after she accused the teacher of child exploitation and after she was explained the little girl’s living conditions and her determination to learn. Tambu did not find a customer for the maize, but she had secured ten pounds to pay for the current year’s school fees and enough money for a few years ahead.

The survival strategies children and ordinary women resort to are focal points in African women’s writings in modern African literature. Flora Nwapa’s work is a good example of women’s entrepreneurship. Very often than not, the Nigerian writer sets her female protagonist in the midst of an oppressive and male-dominated society where she ends up as the only link in the chain left on her own peril. But, her novels also narrate the beginnings of ordinary transitional protagonists. Her two novels, *One is Enough* and *Idu* are good inferences of unschooled women who strive successfully for their own development.

In *Idu*, Nwapa’s plot is about the weight of barrenness on the main female protagonist, Idu. In fact, barrenness is one of the main causes of most women’s marital failure in the Igbo society in particular and in Africa in general. There are two subplots among many others that center on the ways and means ordinary women try to improve their living conditions. For instance, Idu stayed four good years before she had her first baby. Although her husband, Adiewere, is very sensitive to her “unproductivity”, her barrenness weighs heavy on her shoulders. But, this never prevented her from struggling on. Instead, she remained a very entrepreneurial woman trader, one of the most prosperous among her people, to

the extent that she became the only benefactor of her family: she takes care of her sister, Anamadi, and her irresponsible brother, Ishiodu, to say nothing of her financial responsibilities in her own homestead. She needs to be industrious because it is a way out of survival and of re-gaining dignity. Idu is very different from her sister, Anamadi, who does not know her way about: they are antipodes. Besides, one of the women traders beautifully puts it to remind of Anamadi's worthlessness: "A woman who does not know how to trade in town is a senseless woman. She is not a woman at all."¹³⁷

In *Idu*, the heroine is very different from the other ordinary women, who generally lack determination, courage and choose to stay at home to nurture their children, she chooses to fight and advance in life. Her barrenness and responsibility to support her brother and sister are heavy impediments for her, but she struggles to keep her dignity among her people. This hails her as an ambitious woman, one who is always ready to earn her living as ordinary men do to meet the family needs. By struggling the way she does, she somehow plays a role that is very often reserved to the men as heads of families. She is as committed as her husband to building a house as a family project. She ultimately appears as a bold transition in traditional African society where women usually played a secondary role with the advent of colonialism.

Flora Nwapa's fiction sets the beginnings of some Igbo traditional women's emancipation through their commitment to fight for a living. Her novel, *One is Enough*, exposes some traits of entrepreneurship developed by women. Once again, the female protagonist, Amaka, remains six good years without bearing children. After several years of marriage with Obiora, she is coldly informed that her husband had secretly two children out of wedlock. This revelation knocks her down so much so that she decides to leave him and start life anew in Lagos in order to devote herself to her own trade. Through Amaka's

¹³⁷ Flora Nwapa, *Idu*, London, A.W.S, Heinemann, 1970, p.29.

story, Nwapa draws a new portrayal of the African woman who does not accept bondage and poverty as an end in itself. But to Nwapa, the quest for freedom and self-fulfilment has a hidden counterpoint: the corruption of society. The Nigerian writer gives a good illustration of social corruption through the heroine's mother who lacks moral values. She talks her daughter into having her bread buttered on both sides. In other words, she advises her to be a respectable business woman and to have children out of wedlock, if need be:

*“In spite of all these misfortunes, Amaka was doing marvellously well in her business. Soon she bought a plot of land and began planning a house for her own. Her mother welcomed this move. And she it was who encouraged her to go on. ‘The richer you are,’ she told her, ‘the better your husband will be and he will really appreciate you as well Marriage or no have children. Your children will take care of you.”*¹³⁸

The words of Amaka's mother are somewhat disappointing. She promotes women's development through ambition and entrepreneurship, but leaves no room for morality which should be one of the cardinal values of any society. Her attitude is the culmination of what she has endured with men. She seems to be someone who had constantly been used by men to the point that she eventually became pessimistic about them. Consequently, material acquisition becomes the prerequisite for being free from man's tyranny and bondage. Unfortunately, she does not inscribe ethics in her pursuit of happiness. Amaka is very different from her mother as they do not have the same vision of life. Through this oppression of her female characters, Flora Nwapa suggests that some “real” African women's struggle may be praiseworthy, but there still exist some survival strategies that are beyond ethical mores which impinge on humanism.

¹³⁸ Flora Nwapa, *One is Enough*, Trenton, New Jersey, Africa World Press, 1992, pp .10-11.

The two Nigerian women writers, Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta, are quite in line. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta beautifies the heroine's sense of survival and creativity, though her suicidal death is synonymous with pessimism. She undergoes dire living conditions, but does not fold her arms and desperately tries to fend for herself by starting small businesses to get by: she sells firewood, one of the most strenuous trades, "garri" and other foodstuffs. Nonetheless, she lives from hand to mouth with her family while her husband is not around to help. If we consider the situation faced by such a heroine and the efforts she makes to remedy her lot, we will easily rate her among the fighting spirits of her age group.

Contrary to Nnu Ego, her younger co-spouse, Aduka, resorts to prostitution, an immoral alternative to free oneself from bondage and poverty. With her new job as a prostitute, she is certainly well off and independent, but her method is not popular among the Igbo people. Ironically, the day she starts leading a loose life, her social status apparently improves. This leads us to say that the issue of prostitution is a double-edged sword as almost all the women who do it are desperate. It is a way out of poverty, and appears like their last resort and economic survival. African women writers incorporate the issue in their agenda to query its legitimacy. Thus, they parallel the ignominy of prostitution with morality. For instance, Aduka's inclination to prostitution is immoral, yet she ultimately succeeds in lifting her family up from the poverty line. When all is said and done, she succeeds where her husband failed, though she will still be remembered as a whore: "*I am going to be thrown away when I am dead ...*"¹³⁹

Likewise, Amma Darko, the Ghanaian female writer, presents prostitution as an immoral survival strategy in her novel, *Beyond The Horizon*. Her female protagonist, Mara, works as a professional *whore* in Germany. She is a

¹³⁹ Buchi Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood*, op. cit, p.169.

benefactor for her family, for she regularly sends money to cover the monthly expenses, but a feeling of guiltiness gnaws at her heart. The ignominy of her profession overlaps with her self-respect. The following soliloquy unveils the heroine's sharp awareness and confession:

“Yes! I’ve used myself and I have allowed myself to be too used to care any longer. But that does not render me emotionless. I’ve still got lots of feelings in me, though sometimes I am not sure if they are not the wrong ones.”¹⁴⁰

Mara's words simply impart self-deception. She is overused by people and men in particular, but, as an individual, this does not rob her of her sense of humanity. In other words, the end does not justify the means she has used to be rated among the most illustrious ones in her society.

The above chapter sheds light on the entrapment of women. They are very often hit by poverty as the scarcity of money induces men to become more oppressive towards them. Wives combine domesticity with working in the fields and girls are assets for their parents and hope for their brothers, because of the money they would fetch when they get married. Girls' education is not a priority for parents, but they have always tried to find a way out to attend school. Illiteracy is a great handicap for the “real” African women as it is a fundamental prerequisite for their eligibility to their development in the emerging countries, but they have never folded their arms. Instead, they often tried to survive the traditional and colonial oppressive systems through entrepreneurship. They struggled by starting and running small businesses to liberate themselves and claim self-respect. Even though some women yield to immoral ways out like prostitution, women writers do not adhere to, nor promote such anti-humanistic or unethical inclinations. The two writers show that, in spite of countless

¹⁴⁰ Ama Darko, *Beyond the Horizon*, London, Heinemann, 1988, p.1.

prejudices against children and ordinary African women, there are still some ambitious ones who hold high the spirit of freedom and self-fulfilment.

**Chapter three: Education and Migration
as Pathways to Social Mobility**

Education and migration are central issues in Postcolonial Studies in Africa. They are instrumental in the enlightenment of gender issue. In fact, they are the means through which men as well as women lean upon to fight the social, economic and cultural prejudices they inherited from colonialism and tradition. Since colonialism had mainly been embedded in the evangelization of indigenous Africans with missionaries, still, its project incorporated education into its agenda. The term education is very often used to refer to school, but it is more than that since it is defined as “*the process of teaching*” and “*the instruction received*”. Therefore, there are different forms of education, which leads us to investigate the operating theatres of colonial education. Naturally, it is school, religion or the church. But in this chapter, we shall specifically insist on school and scrutinize the concept of elitism regarding education, emigration and rural exodus. In other words, we shall try to bring to light how the triptych, school, personal sacrifices and displacement are used in relationship to social mobility, while drawing particular attention to the illusion and disillusionment women encounter in their quest of happiness and more social equity.

III.1 School as a medium for a better life

In postcolonial Africa, although there had been some unschooled indigenous people who had made it through entrepreneurship, still, the literate ones remained, and still are more eligible for self-fulfilment, professionally speaking. Literacy could be seen as a fundamental instrument for the most entrepreneurial ones as there is a close relationship between elitism and entrepreneurship. One cannot feature among the elites without being entrepreneurial, and both are intertwined. This is all the more true as elitism is defined as: “*Behaviour based on the belief that there should be elites and that they deserve power, influence, special treatment*”¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English-New edition, Great Britain, printed in Great Britain by The Bath Press, Avon, 1987, p.330.

This definition is in line with feminist mainstream. From a feminist point of view, women are looked down upon by men who impose their masculinity upon them and block their personal development. As Herbert Marcuse points out:

“In patriarchal civilization, women have been subject to a specific kind of repression, and their mental and physical development has been channeled in specific direction.”¹⁴²

Women are part and parcel of the social fabric, they deserve equal rights and should be treated as fully-fledged members of societies. They need to be empowered psychologically in order to resist patriarchy and colonial rule.

In fact, colonialism brought about so many setbacks to Africans that each one tried to survive through the means within their reach as defined by the colonial rulers. School was one of the means which the white missionary used to “tame” Africans’ psychology in order to facilitate their indoctrination. It was also, and still is, one of the pillars Africans leaned upon to reach a decent standard of life, though they had some misgivings about it. Professionally speaking, on the outset, the first Africans who went to school under colonialism got the ice of the cream. Those African literate, of sorts, used to be the most privileged and fortunate ones among their people. This could explain, later on, the mad rush towards school as a new trend. In fact, one should agree that the white man had found it very difficult to conquer and rule, at the same time, indigenous Africans. Therefore, he resorted to some strategic policies to lure those who utterly rejected enrolment to Western education.

¹⁴² Herbert Marcuse : « *Marxism and Feminism* » in Women’s Studies, Great Britain, Gordon and Breach Science Publisher Ltd., 1974, vol.2, pp.279-288.

However new and promising school might have been during the colonial era, never did Africans welcome it blindly. In the beginning, they viewed it with resentment and aloofness. That is why only minority groups like slaves and descendants of slaves were first sent there. Surprisingly enough, when the first group made the best of it, then the majority became converted and lenient towards the implementation of colonial schools. As Emecheta insightfully puts it in *The Bride Price*:

*“Most of the slaves whom the missionaries took in were to become the first teachers, headmasters, and later their children became the first doctors and lawyers in many Ibo towns.”*¹⁴³

The rush towards school was all the more important during the last decades of colonialism as this period coincided with African countries' access to sovereignty. Therefore, the colonial system needed a new class of intellectuals that fully grasped Western science and know-how. This led to the emergence of new elites. Consequently, to many Africans, Western education meant two things: modernity and a pathway to social mobility. Thus, learning turned out to be the only prerequisite for the most ambitious ones. More interestingly, in the literary tradition, school holds a seemingly prophetic dimension. It is a way through which Africans excel themselves, not only to achieve their personal fulfilment, but also to be used as a pathway to retrieve what the white man had already dispossessed them of: their land and cultural identity.

¹⁴³ Buchi Emecheta, *The Bride Price*, op.Cit, p.83

Nguigi Wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child*, is a good example which shows the importance of education in its connection with cultural revival and identity. For the Guikuyu people, it is only when people acquire a good education that they live in harmony with their ancestors. This is relevant since to inherit the land British colonizers withdrew from their ancestors, education remains the best alternative to retrieve the lost land. As Nguni says:

“Education is everything. Nguni said. Yet he doubted this because he knew inside that land was everything. Education was only good because it would lead to the recovery of the lost land.”¹⁴⁴

To Nguni, education is important as long as it makes the natives socially and politically committed to the land issue. Otherwise, it is solely a waste of time, money and energy. This highlights the fact that education must play a fundamental role in any society under the yoke of social oppression. Those who are educated have the moral obligation to use their knowledge for the good of their people. It is a fundamental factor in the quest for freedom, while the lack of it could be a severe encumbrance. As the charismatic Black nationalist Malcolm X puts it:

¹⁴⁴ Nguigi Wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child*, Ibandan, London, Heinman, p.43. 1964.

*“For the freedom of my 22 million brothers and sisters here in America, I do believe that I have fought the best that I knew how, and the best that I could, with the shortcoming that I have had. I know that my shortcomings are many-I don’t have the kind of academic education I wish I had been able to get.... If I had the time right now, I would not be one bit ashamed to go back into any New York City public school and start where I left off at the ninth grade.”*¹⁴⁵

This is illustrative of education as a cornerstone in the fight for freedom and equity. The prophetic dimension of school in the literary tradition, mainly dominated by male writers, is also noticeable in women’s writings. For instance, African women writers use the same device to overthrow *double colonization*, i.e., tradition and colonial power. For the coherence of our analysis in this chapter we shall seek to explore the extent to which school facilitates the achievement of women’s dreams in Dangarembga’s and Emecheta’s texts.

Both writers center their novels on young girls, whose passion for education is unquestioned. They show the resilience and personal determination of their main protagonists to get educated. The question of education echoes in their novels under study from cover to cover: it ticks over and energizes the female protagonists’ lives from the cradle to the grave.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga’s heroine, Tambu, understands at a very early age the stakes of schooling and the impact it has on her future life. Through her mouthpiece, the author maintains that children, especially girls, are discriminated against education: boys are the unique profiteers, at the expense of girls. The preferential treatment Tambu’s brother benefitted from his schooling is a perfect example of such a discrimination. In Shona as well as Igbo

¹⁴⁵ Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, New York, Grove Press, 1965, pp, 379-380.

traditions, boys' education is of utmost importance, and is given top priority. More interestingly, they benefit from females' position to secure their education. For instance, customs and tradition see to it that a portion of women's money including even their bride-price be kept aside to guarantee the boy's schooling. This explains why, following the death of Tambu's elder brother, Babamukuru reminds her of her duty and responsibility towards her youngest brother. Therefore, when she is granted a scholarship at the Young Ladies' College of the Sacred Heart, her uncle volunteers to keep aside some amount of the money for her younger brother's future enrolment to school:

“Although there would still be a lot expense on my part, you have your scholarship, so the major financial burden would be lifted... there is now the small boy at home. Every month I put away a little bit, a very little bit every month, so that when he is of school-going age everything will be provided for. As you know, he is the only boy in your family, he must be provided for.”¹⁴⁶

This customary arrangement is debatable. On the one hand, it seems to impart a sense of responsibility to the female, but in actual fact it underrates her. On the other hand, it shows clearly the cultural discrimination of the Shona against women. Girls' discrimination in education compromises their development. Worse, it does not contribute to the promotion of children as it hampers their development as individuals and mankind as a whole, though they are seen as the pillars and hope of society. Nguigi Wa Thiong'o beautifully puts it:

¹⁴⁶ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.180.

“Children are the future of any society. If you want to know the future of a society look at the eyes of the children. If you want to maim the future of any society, you simply maim the children. Thus the struggle for the survival of our children is the struggle for the survival of our future. The quantity and quality of that survival is the measurement of the development of our society. Enslave the children and you enslave parents. Enslave the parents and you enslave children. Thus if you enslave children, you are enslaving the survival and development of the entire society - its present and its future.”¹⁴⁷

If we consider the way children in general and girls in particular are treated, one is sorely disappointed. Nguigi totally rejects child abuse and promotes his education. This is where popular art is quite helpful through music, especially. It can be used as a device to raise people’s awareness on some forms of exploitation that slacken children’s human development. Music, if socially and politically committed, can better human condition. In African and American history, popular music is instrumental in great social changes. The Negro Spirituals, Jazz, Rhythm and Blues (R&B) and Pop music have had a great impact on African-American cultural identity and revival. To some extent, popular music has helped fight racism and many forms of oppression. Singers and musicians like James Brown, Miles Davis, Stevie Wonder, Aretha Franklin and Eta James, to name but a few, are good examples of committed artists whose music is deeply rooted in the defense and promotion of progressive, social and political causes.

¹⁴⁷ Nguigi Wa Tiong’o, *Moving The Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedom*, London, James Currey, 1993, p.94.

One of the most illustrative examples is the African-American singer, Ray Charles Robinson, professionally known as Ray Charles, who, on March 15, 1961, cancelled his show at Paine College in Georgia after learning from students that the dance floor auditorium would be restricted to white people while Blacks would be compelled to sit in the music hall balcony. This evidences the singer's social commitment who uses his talent and fame to defend the Black cause. Likewise, the Senegalese singer, Youssou Ndour's song, *My Hope is in You*, is in perfect harmony with Nguigi Wa Thiong'o's view on child's education and development and although they do not seem to give a particular concern about gender, they get their message across:

"[...]My hope is in you

I wanna watch your spirit then

Touch the sky

So much more we can do

My hope is in you

If you take your love and fly away

I know you'll make it through

You'll make it through

Drop your guns and go to school

Do you hear me my brother?

Some day you'll know

*Just how far you can go (...)*¹⁴⁸

The singer's text is an invitation to children to act as participants in the strenuous task of nation building. It is a vibrant criticism of abuse by warmongers and raises awareness on the importance of education as a positive alternative for children. In short, he makes a plea to children, across the world, for peace, particularly to those who are in war zones to turn to education rather than war, to achieve self- development and foster a strong nationhood.

Similarly, women writers are strongly committed to the issue of children's education. They give special concern about the various prejudices they suffer to defy their oppressors. Thus their discourses reflect the oppression and throes of masculinity on female children regarding education. Since girls are highly vulnerable, women writers insist on the crucial need for education to be accessible for every child.

In Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, the heroine is aware of the effect of gender discrimination on education. Thus she falls back on it as a tool for her emancipation and a way out of poverty and social entrapment. This is elicited through the heroine's final confession: "... *I loved going to school and I am good at it.*"¹⁴⁹

Tambu's motivation for education is intrinsically related to her uncle's "success". Babamukuru is a role model among the members of his family. He has a lot of merit, he belongs to a poor family and succeeds in improving his social status through his own endeavours. He blindly grabs at education to feature among the elitist members of his society. Basically, he is a good example which proves that people can come in on the ground floor and move very far up the social ladder if they believe in themselves and get a good education. This has

¹⁴⁸ This is an extract of Youssou Ndour song *My Hope is in You*, of his album *Joko-From Village to Town*, released by Columbia, U.S in 1999, number 5 in the tracklist.

¹⁴⁹ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op. Cit, p.15.

given him the silent power he is enjoying now. One might think that this power is the result of his patriarchal status, but he also chiefly owes it to his perseverance and hard-work.

As we have seen, the last decades that preceded African independence had given rise to new intellectuals. Many Africans joined school in order to be professionally eligible for appointment under the colonial rule. These new intellectuals had been very useful to the colonial system as they served as their direct collaborators. Since the British colonizers had opted for indirect rule, they involved the natives, at least those with a certain level of intellectual background, in the administrative affairs of the colonies. Besides, the historic context of Dangarembga's work is mostly the pre-independence period of Rhodesia. So Babamukuru is among the few who had the White man under his sleeves. In fact, he had some advantages many people did not enjoy at that time. Dangarembga does not disregard this oddity concerning her uncle:

“At the time that I arrived at the mission, missionaries were living in white houses, and in the pale painted houses, but not in the red brick ones. My uncle was the only African living in a white house. We were all very proud of this fact.”¹⁵⁰

This passage reveals the dispossession colonialism had brought about. The white man had chosen the best land and devised a segregationist policy which separated him from the colonized. It also connotes the naïveté of the narrator's milieu: they are more impressed by the ostentatious character of the house than by the social subjugation it reflects. But beyond all, it brings into sharp relief the peculiar favour Babamukuru benefits from his educational status.

¹⁵⁰ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op. Cit, p.65.

To Bababumuku, education is fundamental in every individual's life. It is a tool to fight poverty. That is why children's education should be taken into consideration. Although he symbolizes patriarchy, he strongly believes that education, particularly boys' education, is the best investment one can make to fight poverty. He uses his patriarchal power and social position to convince the family, particularly his younger brother, Tambu's father, to send the children to school in due course. As he is fully conscious of Tambu's father's irresponsibility and social status, he voluntarily decides to be the guardian angel of his eldest son, Nhamo, in order to give the boy an opportunity to get educated.

Babamukuru's deep faith in children's education explains his involvement. Besides, he thinks that parents should send their children early, when their minds are malleable. The opportunity he offers Tambu's brother is one way of helping the boy and his family improve their condition. His epistemological point of view on the issue of education prompts him to fish the boy out of the suffocating family environment to assure him guardianship:

“What I have been thinking is this: providing money for school fees is good but it is not all that must be done to ensure a child's success in school. A child must also be provided with the correct atmosphere which will encourage his mind to develop even when he is not in the classroom.”¹⁵¹

Generally speaking, Babamukuru believes in two prerequisites for the child to succeed in his studies. Beyond the financial dimension, the social environment in which he lives is paramount. He staunchly believes that money and a safe environment are the two pillars on which success is built. To him, the

¹⁵¹ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op. Cit, p.46

child's success depends partly on his parents' involvements, and this is where his brother unfortunately fails.

On the other hand, Babamukuru does not rule out the child's responsibility towards his family. To him, the social dimension should be a real source of motivation before he is given the chance to get educated. He must use his education as a springboard to be socially liberated. Basically, he considers his own experience of school as a good example to all children: "*These children who can go to school today are the ones whose families will prosper tomorrow.*"¹⁵²

As the head of the family, Babamukuru embodies the concept of leadership. He appears as a visionary. To him, Rhodesia is under colonial rule, and the psychology of the British colonizer is a participative approach based on the integration of those who have the required standard level of education to work in the administration. Most interestingly, he bears in mind that the prerequisite is only education. From a leader's perspective, he has the same vision as many traditional leaders depicted in African literary production. For, many of them have the same ambivalent attitude regarding the White settler's education. Cheikh Amidou Kane depicts this in *Ambiguous Adventure* through the character of The Most Royal Lady, and Chinua Achebe does the same in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*.

Therefore, for Babamukuru, the present determines the future. After due consideration, he eventually volunteers to support Nhamo, Tambu's brother, by offering him the fundamentals he needs for his education, because he sees in the boy the pre-cited criteria to succeed in life. This is what accounts for Nhamo's stay at the mission. Babamukuru succeeds where almost all family members fail, especially Jeremiah. He takes good advantage of his education. He lives at the

¹⁵² Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op. Cit, p.45.

mission with his two children where he works as headmaster of the school. His social status enables him to help his sister and brothers. In fact, he is the benefactor of the whole Sigauke family, to say nothing of his patriarchal power. Whenever there is a financial problem, he is the one to solve it because of his double status. The social position he enjoys now is a result of his own endeavours and merit. His motivation has been the challenge he had to keep up for himself and his family. Because of their poor living conditions, he had no other choice than turn to education to change the situation, and his family is indebted to him for this.

Naturally, Babamukuru is a source of inspiration for his nephew, Nhamo. He sees his uncle like a demiurge and identifies himself more with him than with his own father. The counterpart of this attitude is the *complex of inferiority* it develops in the boy's personality, which really irritates his sister, Tambu.

At any rate, it is unquestionable that Babamukuru's intention to support the boy is out of compassion for his parents, but it also shows some degree of partiality and gender discrimination. For, he does not think of Tambu's education and guardianship, until Nhamo's death. However, in her brother's lifetime, Tambu has been as motivated as him, as far as education is concerned. Babamukuru's strong belief in education induces him to grant the same favour to Tambu, following the death of Nhamo. This owes him once more another feather in his cap as his family welcomes the news with joy and gratitude:

“My father (Jeremiah) went on one knee. Bo-bo-bo. ‘We thank you, Chirandu, we thank you Muera bonga, Chihwa’ he intoned. ‘Truly, we would not survive without you. Our children would not survive without you. Head of the family, princeling, we thank you.’”¹⁵³

¹⁵³ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.183.

It is absolutely true that Africans are generally very grateful towards their benefactors, duly praised in recognition of their generosity. But the way Jeremiah thanks his brother is quite dramatizing. Babamukuru remains a role model for Tambu as he helps her to fulfil her dream. The day she comes to live at the mission, her dream starts to come true. She cannot expect more. She is set on the straight and narrow way to succeed in life, the way her uncle has done. She is conscious of the opportunity that is offered to her. It is a way to escape from poverty as education also offers a good opportunity for her to escape female subjugation:

“I was to take another step upwards in the direction of my freedom. Another step away from the flies, the smells, the fields and the rags; from stomachs which were seldom full, from dirt and disease, from my father’s abject obeisance to Babamukuru and my mother’s chronic lethargy. Also from Nyamarira that I loved.”¹⁵⁴

The most important thing for Tambu is to get educated. The passage has a tinge of sarcasm and lament, but she is far from being ungrateful like her brother. She is only a victim of patriarchy who intends to change her lot through education, the only alternative left to her. The opportunity she has to live with her uncle at the mission will ultimately enable her to forget her family’s precarious living conditions. It is also a way for her to keep at arm’s length from her father, not out of loathe, but rather on account of the latter’s flatness and lack of ambition, to say nothing of her mother’s.

Dangarembga depicts education as something instrumental in the struggle against social disparities under colonialism. She insists on the political context of Rhodesia, a country under the full control of the White man, fighting

¹⁵⁴ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p. 183.

everyday to wrench independence from the colonizer. Education is, thus, the main road for survival, especially for the most ambitious ones. She gives particular attention to girls' education, since they are victims of a *double colonization*.

Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* gives the reader more information about the heroine's future life. Her first novel revolves around the coming of age of the heroine, Tambu. It stresses her ambition about education, but does not go beyond that, whereas *The Book of Not* offers the reader more details concerning the heroine's future. In fact, this enables him/her to get the gist of the main story developed by Dangarembga in *Nervous Conditions* concerning her struggle and education. In *The Book of Not*, the writer essentially focuses the story on the heroine's tenacity in the midst of an almost all-White school, with education as her only ally. It shows various episodes of her endurance but also portrays the outcome of the heroine's struggle.

At the Young Ladies' College of the Sacred Heart, Tambu has to overcome the daily racial discrimination emanating from some of the school authorities and white students, while coping with her studies. Since her childhood, she tried to work hard at school. Her presence at the Young Ladies' College of the Sacred Heart is the result of her personal efforts, owing her to be among the "privileged" Black Rhodesian students there. It is the combination of her perseverance and her uncle's "help" that enables her to study at the convent school. The above-mentioned factors and poverty have urged her to believe in education, more than ever, as the only way out of endemic misery, the best opportunity that can facilitate her entrance in the circle of the élites:

"In my case, I was a pupil at the Young Ladies' College of the Sacred Heart, which made me a member of specific educational elite, but apart from that leap of intellectual

upward mobility, I was a disaffected member of the 'povo' (lower classes).''¹⁵⁵

With poverty hanging over her, like a “sword of Damocles”, Tambu is undoubtedly right in clarifying her passion for education. The passage above shows her awareness of her duty because, as a young lady, she is set to be among the most illustrious Rhodesians of her generation, a chance that countless other Rhodesian girls do not have. The disaffection she refers to is merely her reluctance to join the struggle for freedom which the old siblings had just launched. Presumably, to Tambu, education is more important than joining the activists, as it is a great risk to take sides overtly with the freedom fighters under colonial rule. In actual fact, she does not want to ease herself into siding with them, as she seems less committed than her younger sister to the liberation war of her country. On top of that, her family record is no encouragement to the cause: because of her commitment to the struggle for independence, her younger sister, Netsai, lost a leg which was amputated, and Babamukuru is suspected of siding with the white man. In the light of all this, Tambu feels a bit guilty in her pursuit of personal fulfilment.

To some extent, these facts account for the narrator’s ambiguity when it comes to side taking. Sometimes she is so obsessed by her personal ambitions. She seems to give some value judgments about other people’s real inclinations to the war of independence as the goal she sets on school blurs her position on other people’s social commitment. The narration uses two voices that call for the readers’ attention and critical view on the issue of education and war, which discards the author’s ambivalence. The voice that confesses the narrator’s desire for education and the one that legitimates war overlap to echo accusation and betrayal. War connotes violence, Dangarembga exemplifies it through Netsai’s amputation and Babamukuru’s lynching, two hitches that have a psychological

¹⁵⁵ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, op.Cit, p.95.

impact on the heroine's consciousness, to say nothing on the writer's, who uses her heroine as a mouthpiece.

Tambu's eagerness to succeed is plain as she works hard to be among the best, and she does not want to spoil it at all. This explains her attitude towards school. At the Young Ladies' College of The Sacred Heart, she encounters many obstacles: she has to be very careful about the way she interacts with her white classmates, her schoolmates, the teachers and the personnel of the convent. This is depressing, since they do not always make her feel comfortable. More often than not, she feels like a fish out of water. Although she is implicitly and constantly reminded of her colour and class, she remains ambitious. She strongly believes that her faith in school will liberate her from her dismay. She makes a vow to herself and decides to devote herself to learning for her personal survival:

“I grew red-eyed and irritable, reading through the night in the little room on St Sophie's corridor, until the letters trooped off the page like small black ants, and I stooped to pick them up, only to find I was in a dozen without hope of any real sleep, and I forced myself back to learning.”¹⁵⁶

Tambu is driven with the same stamina in her learning as previously described in *Nervous Conditions*. She is still hard working at school, but more determined than ever. Her devotion to learning is depressing the same way as colonialism depresses her people's lives. She is not psychologically well balanced because of the sleepless nights she spends reading books in order to broaden her mind. As earlier said, *The Book of Not* is the continuation of *Nervous Conditions*, so, the text should be leading up to the heroine's story ending. The chronology of the two books is ascending. *Nervous Conditions*

¹⁵⁶ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, op.Cit, p.165.

revolves around the effect of gender on education and Tambu's struggle as a young girl with the overpowering masculinity of her brother, uncle and father, whereas *The Book of Not* pinpoints Tambu's childhood, maturity and her future professional life. That is why, in *The Book of Not*, after a series of ups and downs at school, she finally leaves the convent with an A level degree, considered as unsatisfactory and humiliating by Babamukuru. After few years of teaching in a craft and a colonial school without a professional degree, Dangarembga's heroine starts higher studies at Harare University where she later earns her bachelor's degree in Art in sociology. She eventually works permanently as a scriptwriter in an advertising agency. Tambu's education permits her to live like an ordinary individual in a rented-room hostel surrounded once more with sophisticated white ladies.

Similarly, Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* follows the same discursive pattern as Dangarembga. The issue of education is central and the Igbo people strongly believe in its importance in individuals' future:

*“School – the Igbo never played with that! They were realising fast that one's saviour from poverty and disease was education. Every Igbo family saw to it that their children attended school. Boys were usually given preference, though.”*¹⁵⁷

The historical background always sheds light on the writer's motivation. *Second-Class Citizen* is partly set under colonial rule. This period has impoverished Africans. Emecheta tells the story of a young girl discriminated against by her society, and like Dangarembga, she promotes children's education to fight poverty and female submission to alienating customs. Analysing Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*, Oumar Sougou points out that:

¹⁵⁷ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.9.

*“Western education appears to be the key to success in the changing Africa of the late 1940s and early 1950s. But women and girls are excluded from it because of the combined factors of money and discriminatory gender practices.”*¹⁵⁸

Sougou is surely right. Obviously, the heavy bucket that women have been trying to pick up was “kicked down” the road prior to independent Africa. The duality of oppression, both financial and patriarchal, has been encumbering them ever since. Even though girls are discriminated as it is commonly highlighted in women’s writings, they still cling to education to assert and define a new identity. In Adah’s case, only education can set her free and she vows to use it as a pathway to join the budding elites. Emecheta’s female protagonist is inspired by the number of people who have used education as a tool and found themselves among the most illustrious people of their community. This has a great impact on Adah’s motivation. It betokens her need to struggle, because these people feature as role models to her. It is essential to say here that, there is no discrepancy between men and women about the conception of education. Men as well as women take it as a springboard to change their social statuses. In other words, if education is the ultimate means which men lean upon to join the élites, females too attempt to grasp the same opportunity to see their dream come true.

The only difference between men and females about their education is the smaller amount of time allocated to women. Tradition has a negative impact on girls’ education. In an alienating and oppressive culture, like the Igbo’s, which leaves them little room and spare time to concentrate on their studies and future

¹⁵⁸ Omar Sougou, *Writing Across Culture: Gender Politics and Difference in the Fiction of Buchi Emecheta*, New York, Rodopi, 2002, p.41.

development, their education is doomed to be a failure. But Adah is conscious of the unfavourable environment for her development:

*“To read for a degree, to read for the entrance examination, or even for more ‘A’ levels, one needed a home. Not just any home where there would be trouble today and fights tomorrow, but a good, quiet atmosphere where you could study in peace.... In Lagos, at that time, teenagers were not allowed to live by themselves, and if the teenagers happened to be a girl as well, living alone would be asking for trouble.”*¹⁵⁹

Emecheta reveals here another aspect of Igbo culture. It is a protectionist culture. It also tells the impact of conformism in a global world. Igbo people do their best to retain their cultural values while the wind of change is blowing everywhere. Environment is a fundamental factor in education: it must be quiet, uplifting and motivating for the learner. In her essay, *A Room of One's Own*, the nineteenth century British woman writer, Charles Brontë deplores the lack of life commodities and hostile environment as severe constraints weighing down women's advancement.

Similarly, the Zimbabwean woman writer, Yvonne Vera convenes with her female counterparts on the impact of environment on girls' development. In her book, *Butterfly Burning*, Vera tells the story of her heroine, Phephelaphi, a young orphan who struggles to get her freedom in the big town of Makokoba, Zimbabwe. Following the death of her mother, she lives with her mother's friend, Zandile, in a one-room house. The atmosphere in the house becomes daily unbearable and suffocating for her. She eventually decides to leave her. Her life then becomes an endless series of disappointments since Fumbatha, the

¹⁵⁹ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.23.

man that would seem to rescue her from poverty, makes her life even more miserable:

“One room. Solid brick walls. Asbestos and cement. Phephelaphi and Fumbatha had a bed though it creaked and sagged and scraped down the floor. A paraffin stove. A wire running diagonally across above the bed where they placed their clothing and let it hang down to partition the room; the bed was split in two, the top half on one side, the bottom on the other.”¹⁶⁰

Environment determines individuals' lives. In girls' education, a good environment is the prime prerequisite for success. Emecheta's protagonist has to face this obstacle to achieve her goal. Adah is conscious of the prejudice she suffers within her community, but she does not abandon; she wants to step over the limits in order to be someone someday and nothing can stop her.

There are many people in her surrounding who distinguished themselves through their education and merit: Lawyer Nweze is one of them. Thanks to his education, he has become a lawyer. Even though he ends up being a turncoat later on, Adah owes him respect and recognition, for he is one of the persons who inspired her a lot in her life. People like Lawyer Nweze have a great influence on their people for various reasons. With their Western education they manage at least to speak the White man's language, which was a new trend. In fact, the mere fact of speaking English, French or any Western language had been a big privilege for native Africans during this period. This was the same with the introduction of Christianity in Africa, a new and very attractive phenomenon for the natives.

¹⁶⁰ Yvonne Vera, *Butterfly Burning*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000, p.46.

Moreover, Christianity had been the indispensable pathway to salvation and freedom, together with school. Once again, this explained partly the mad rush of native people into Christianity. This is true, as the new religion had been implicitly introduced to defy traditional African divinities. The charm of Christianity for Africans had rested mostly in its novelty and modernity. Indeed, the new religion presented to them associated songs and dances that were relatively new in traditional African religion and which they found very attractive and appealing. But, for Adah, the social dimension of education prevails over the aesthetic nature and communicative efficiency of the English language. In fact, it was a matter of survival for her. As Emecheta puts it: “*She had to go to the Methodist Girls’ High School or die.*”¹⁶¹

If we consider Adah’s situation, we can say that she has made good use of her education. She has succeeded in pursuing her studies in librarianship. Besides, her training is somehow beneficial to her since she is hired at the American Consulate with a relatively good salary. Where the shoe pinches is, with all her education and professional position, few months following her marriage with Francis, one is still perplex regarding her status as a female individual.

In *Double Yoke*, the same importance is given to education. The main protagonists, and even minor characters, hold their education like the apple of their eyes. Ete Kamba and Nko have a common denominator: they depend on their studies to change their living conditions and status. With the rapidly-changing post-independence period, women’s social condition now exasperates. Since colonialism has brought about modernity, women have more chances than ever regarding their education, though they encounter difficulties. Nko is a good case in point.

¹⁶¹ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.21.

Ete Kamba's lover, Nko, does not belong to a rich family. Her mother is a traditional obedient housewife. Although she was brought up in a traditional way, this does not mean that she wants to live exactly the way her mother does: she wants to be different and the best of both worlds in a Nigeria where the job market is very competitive, where only the very best and the most ambitious ones survive. She is conscious of such prerequisites and sets her heart at education as a social ladder against poverty. Already a freshman student, she dreams of how far she can get on with her education:

*“Nothing could beat the excitement and hope with which girls like Nko looked at university life. It was one thing to go to secondary school and get good certificates, but to be really admitted into one of the highest institutions of the land She would work hard at her studies and she was going to get not just a degree, but a good one. Then she would marry Ete Kamba”*¹⁶²

Like Dangarembga's heroine, once again, Emecheta's female protagonist has great hope in her education. From childhood to adulthood, the two writers' heroines resist and maintain themselves in the educational institutions, not only to acquire knowledge but also to avoid being trapped by customary beliefs, patriarchy and poverty. Surprisingly enough, they never give up hope, they make sacrifices to push back the limits to see other places.

III.2 Self-displacement and personal sacrifices

Life is very often associated with movement. The term movement involves various paradigms. It concerns here the displacement of people. Besides, displacement means *“to put or take something or someone out of the usual place”*. But in the framework of this study, it is more than that. It is the

¹⁶² Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, op.Cit, p.92.

decision people make to move from one place to another within the same country or from one country to another. It is *per se* related to the movement of people into big cities, rural exodus or overseas. From a postcolonial perspective, displacement is seen as a “dislocation” closely related to imperialism. In “*Post-Colonial Studies*”, Bill Ashcroft and others postulate that:

*“The term is used to describe the experience of those who have willingly moved from the imperial ‘Home’ to the colonial margin, but it affects all those, who, as a result of colonialism have been placed in a location that, because of colonial hegemonic practices, needs, in a sense, to be ‘reinvented’ in language in narrative and myth.”*¹⁶³

The concept ascribes resistance in its definition. It is a quest for cultural revival through language, knowledge or self-definition in reaction to the dispossession and exploitation of all colonized people. The history of the world has shown that men are not static. In their quest for cultural identity, social and economic equilibrium, they often displace themselves. The White man did not colonize Africa while staying in his country. He left his continent for Africa with a specific purpose. Likewise, Arabs came to Africa in the early centuries for economic purposes. This is to say that, the movement of people has always been done deliberately. In an attempt to improve their living conditions, some groups of people may be triggered to dominate “minor groups” for their own interests and decide to migrate from one state to another or from one continent to another. History has also revealed that such migrations based upon economic interests, are merely exploitation of men by men, since there is binary opposition between the oppressed and the oppressors. Good examples that could be cited in this respect are Apartheid and colonialism:

¹⁶³ Bill Ashcroft and others, *Post-Colonial Studies*, op.Cit, p.65.

*“It has been observed that one hour of work of a cotton peasant in Chad was equivalent to less than one centimetre of cotton cloth, and he needed to work fifty days to earn what was needed to buy three meters of the cloth made from his own cotton in France.”*¹⁶⁴

If we stick to the movement of people, it is obvious that the migration that has driven Europeans to leave their continent for Africa rests on economic exploitation. But, if we focus on an elitist perspective and consider people not as a community but as individuals, we will find out that some might be compelled to leave their countries for personal interests. This quest for a better life, as far as African people are concerned, stems from the impoverishment brought about by colonialism. Worse, the socio-economic context of the continent fails to meet their expectations, which is very often coupled with unusual customs. Consequently, they sacrifice themselves to start life anew in other places.

Africans had foreseen the decline of colonialism with great hope. Its side-effects are visible everywhere on the continent. The white man succeeded in setting up his churches and schools while implementing his policies and exploiting people. This period is transitional, for after years of colonial rule, the colonized countries were now ruled by Africans.

In fact, the post-independence period had led countless Africans to leave their country for Europe, for higher education. Emigration was seen as an alternative to change the social and political problems. Consequently, in order to be distinguished among their people and by the White man, they opened up to his language and civilization just to have the best of both worlds.

¹⁶⁴ Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, op.Cit, p.221.

In Achebe's *Arrow of God*, Ezulu's fear is noticeable. The White man's power makes the local chief uncomfortable. His ambivalence is due to the fact that the colonizer has not only disrupted the social fabric of the Igbo people, but has also imposed his culture and civilization. All this is coupled with a rapidly-changing country where people have started to embrace the Western culture and education, which leads to an insecure social balance. The chief authority's reluctance is imputable more to his own interests than those of his community's. He wants to send his son to get initiated into the White man's religion, so that he can have an eye on him and safeguard his position as chief:

*"I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eyes there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. If there is something there you will bring home my share.... My spirit tells me those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying 'had I known' tomorrow."*¹⁶⁵

Traditional African leaders feared the White man's power, his culture and civilization. They dreaded his wealth and impacts on social stability. This induced them to be incredulous about the future. Naturally, they started losing ground. They eventually yielded to his pressure for the sake of their own interests and those of their progenies. Achebe's protagonist sees the future with the same eye as Cheikh Amidou Kane's female protagonist, The Most Royal Lady. She has shown the same attitude towards the devastating presence of the White man and his culture in *Ambiguous Adventure*. She believes that the charm of the White man resides in his mastery of language and his science. To her, those who do not side with him or go to learn and unveil the secret behind his power will bitterly regret it someday:

¹⁶⁵ Chinua Achebe, *Arrow of God*, op.Cit, pp, 45-46.

“(…) we must go to learn from them (the White men) the art of conquering without being in the right The foreign school is the new form of which those who have come here are waging, and we must send our élite there....”¹⁶⁶

The Most Royal Lady is aware of the cataclysm that is hanging by a thread to befall her community. She cannot wait any more to witness the destruction of her people. Consequently, to her, the only alternative is to interact and immerse with the White man to get his knowledge, even if it requires immigrating to his country, as the end will always justify the means. Therefore, the one heir in the family lineage, Samba Diallo, is sent to sojourn in France to be ‘westernized’.

Thus, emigration is seen with a glare of optimism for the Africans. During the pre-independence period and after independence, there was a mad rush of native Africans to Europe. These Africans had especially decided to immigrate to the White man’s country in order to get the degrees that would make them professionally eligible for appointment once back in their own countries.

It is from this perspective Buchi Emecheta and Tsitsi Dangarembga talk about emigration in their works. In *Second-Class Citizen*, Emecheta draws inspiration from her own life, as she bases her text from what she experienced and observed in her Igbo community in Nigeria. Therefore, there is no clear cut detachment between her childhood and her heroine’s narration. Regarding emigration, she merely notices, at a time in her childhood when it became possible to travel to the White man’s country, that the most important objective for people was to further their training. She also notices that those “been-to” represented the largest group among the elites in her community after independence:

¹⁶⁶ Cheikh Amidou Kane, *Ambiguous Adventure*, op.Cit, pp, 33-34.

*“Men calculated that with independence would come prosperity, the opportunity for self-rule, poshy vacant jobs, and more money, plenty of it. One had to be eligible for these jobs, though, thought these men. The only place to secure this eligibility, this passport to prosperity, was England.”*¹⁶⁷

Emecheta sheds light on the real motivation of social mobility regarding her people before and after independence. She puts emphasis on hope, and England is the pinnacle of hope for them, the country of the White man who symbolizes omnipotence. It is the White man with his rifle and bible who had come to dispossess them of their land and imposed his culture and civilization. More interestingly, from a psychoanalyst’s perspective on colonialism, the White man has nurtured the supremacy of the Western culture and civilization while looking down upon the indigeneous people’s civilization as backward and primitive. Consequently, this brought about a *complex of inferiority* that strengthened the colonizer racially and culturally, at the expense of the colonized.

Naturally, with the decline of colonialism and the rise of nationalism, Africans wanted to be at the forefront of their countries’ leadership. This required a minimum intellectual capacity, whereas countless indigenous people’s background knowledge was still in the making. The consideration that Africans had always held for the White man and their burning desire to pursue their studies had a strong impact on their desire for adventure abroad. This is all the more true as the journey to the Western world during the pre-independence period was not done at random. In other words, Africans preferred to immigrate respectively to the colonizers’ native countries to earn their degrees, rather than choosing a country at random. This explains why many Nigerians and Southern

¹⁶⁷ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.79.

Africans deliberately chose to immigrate to England during the pre-independence period.

Regarding emigration, Emecheta and Dangarembga refer to England as the principal destination. The United Kingdom is the targeted metropolitan country Igbo and Shona people dream of as it is the pinnacle of hope for them. Considering all the prevailing social pressure and the new political context, England is the only place that can live up their expectations. In *Second-Class Citizen*, Emecheta talks about the social effects and the importance Nigerians give to the country's first emigrants. It is always vivid in her heroine's childhood memories.

Adah still remembers all the merriments around the departure and arrival of Nigeria's present day elites. For instance, Lawyer Nweze, the country's most notorious lawyer's return from England was celebrated joyfully and with great hope. His return had been the village talk. Women had made up new dresses to welcome the hero who had been to England to study law. In fact, his welcoming from England was just the return of the prodigal child:

*“They danced happily at the wharf, shaking their colourful gourds in the air. The European arrivals gaped at them. They had never seen anything like it before.”*¹⁶⁸

The lawyer's welcome is depicted like that of an authoritative person. People show him all the hospitality and love he deserves on his arrival. But the passage also reveals their attitude towards everything Western. They have a tendency to play down themselves, for the “been to” is treated like a “king”.

In fact, the movement of people to the Western countries does not only concern men. There have been some women, too, who displaced themselves overseas to pursue their studies. Those women also feature among the country's

¹⁶⁸ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.55.

members of the elites. Apart from Lawyer Nweze's own case, Adah retells another fascinating example of the first emigrants to England. It is the story of a woman, owner of one of the most prestigious preparatory schools in Lagos, the *Ladi-lak* private school. She had sojourned in England for several years of training. She can be counted among the most notorious persons among the community, because of her status. Her training in England had been instrumental in implementing a school that hosted Igbo people as well as White settlers:

*“Ladi-Lak Institute was then, and still is, a small preparatory school.... The proprietress was trained in the United Kingdom. At that time, more than half of the children in the school were Igbo....”*¹⁶⁹

It is clear enough that the owner of the school had displaced herself to achieve her goal. But the other side of her story tells more about her mixed values, as it is always hard to sojourn in the White man's country without being hooked by his way of life and culture. The owner of the school is no exception, beyond her success, she embodies an ambivalent character. She does not allow the children she educates to have a full cultural exchange and immersion in Western civilization since they are forbidden to speak Igbo. On top of that, the place is, culturally, a mixture of White and Black people, which easily leads the vulnerable young children astray. Above all, she has remained a model, as long as her training in the United Kingdom has placed her among the elites of her community. At least, she has managed to get above the poverty line, because her displacement abroad has been a springboard to her social liberation. It is from this perspective that Emecheta's heroine, Adah, is utterly impressed by the owner of the school who inspires her in her daily endeavours and encourages her in her life project:

¹⁶⁹ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.9.

“(…) she made a secret vow to herself that she would go to the United Kingdom one day. Her arrival there would be the pinnacle of her ambition.”¹⁷⁰

Once in her life time, Adah was obliged to displace herself from her native country to immigrate to the United Kingdom. Her displacement was not fortuitous since it was a way for her to improve her social life. In general, the majority of Africans who leave their countries for abroad are stirred by wishful feelings to change their living conditions.

Although she works as a permanent worker at the American Consulate, Adah is victim of social injustice. The money she earns does not make her happy. Since her husband is still reading to be an accountant, she re-uses all the money she earns to cover the family expenses. She is trapped as a woman, though she has a decent job. Her mother-in-law is a pure conformist and she interferes in the way she runs her own family. Besides, by right of tradition, African women have a reputation for being obedient and submissive. Consequently, not to disappoint her in-laws, she is compelled to respect these norms. The new African woman she is tempted to be, does not meet her demanding husband's and her in-laws' expectations. The only alternative left to her is to travel to England if she wants to fulfill her childhood dream.

In *Second-Class Citizen*, Emecheta postulates through Adah that, tradition and the impact of colonialism compromise women's development, to an extent that they are obliged to displace themselves for a better life. In *Nervous Conditions*, too, emigration is a central theme in the story.

¹⁷⁰ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.16.

In her novel, Dangarembga evokes self-displacement in two dimensions. She insists on emigration as a displacement that leads characters to leave Rhodesia for another country and another type of displacement that occurs within the same country, which she calls *transplantation*.

Actually, the first form of displacement is emigration. As Emecheta explains in *Second-Class Citizen*, the movement of Africans to the White man's country during and after the pre-independence period was done with a good purpose. Those Africans went there with great optimism since the White colonizer has always "encouraged" the most loyal and hard-working people among indigenous Africans. Consequently, the decline of colonialism inspired many of them to acquire professional skills in order to overtake the White aristocracy that ruled colonies. Thus, emigration represented a springboard to have a better social position.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga characterizes Babamukuru as one of the most deserving and ambitious people in his community. He owes his success to the different displacements he made from childhood to adulthood for his training. His life is marked with episodic events that happened during his childhood. His meeting with the White man dates back to a long time. It has something to do with his family's trajectory through history. Through oral tradition, the narrator recalls the past through the family's various displacements. Tambu's grandmother insists on Babamukuru's life, since he has been highly instrumental in improving the family's living conditions through his endeavours and loyalty to the White man. Tambu's grandmother explains to her, how they came down to live in *Umtali*.

Contrary to what her grandchildren had always believed, Tambu's grandmother specifies that their arrival to *Umtali* was intrinsically related to the history of the country. They had lived in 'Chipinge' where the land was fertile. But following the White man's arrival in Rhodesia, they had been victims of

land dispossession. Naturally, they had been obliged to displace themselves to *Umtali*, the place where the family settles now. This type of displacement can be qualified as ‘forced-displacement’ since it is the sole resultant of the White man’s imposed power, which the author calls *transplantation*.

The ‘forced’ displacement of African indigenous people during colonization goes hand in hand with the impoverishment of the continent. When Tambu’s grandmother was ‘transplanted’ to *Umtali*, not only was she poor, but she was also abandoned by her husband with six children to feed and take care of, among whom Babamukuru. This was the latter’s first contact with the White man.

Since it was not easy for Tambu’s grandmother to fully take in charge of her children, the White missionaries decided to care for Babamukuru, who was only nine years old at that time. Naturally, this means that she had to sacrifice himself to allow her son to settle down in the mission in order to have a good education that would save the family from poverty.

The privilege missionaries granted Babamukuru was a turning point in his life. He had to make personal sacrifices to help his mother and siblings. The missionaries agreed to give him formal education while he would work for them in return. This was the pinnacle of hope for him, partly because the small amount of money he earned enabled him to pay for his own school fees and also helped him support financially his poor mother. In fact, he has always impressed the missionaries through hard-work, perseverance and loyalty. This has not been fruitless since his devotion to the White man permitted him to earn a scholarship that enabled him to displace himself to South Africa, which shared the border line with Rhodesia.

Once again, Babamukuru exemplifies the fact that, during the pre-independence period, immigration was a means and common practice for Africans to acquire the training that would make them eligible for membership in their countries' élites. As a matter of course, Africans who went into exile did not have too much to choose from; they faced acute social problems that urged them to uproot themselves. This is all the more true as emigration always carries a ray of hope. Like many indigenous people who benefitted from some training abroad during colonial era, Babamukuru was offered a job: he started a career in teaching. Given that his first displacement to South Africa was very rewarding and that the missionaries appreciated him well, they granted him another scholarship to England, where he spent five good years to study:

“Babamukuru did not want to leave the mission. He did not want to go far from home again because he had already left his mother once, to go to South Africa, and had not been back long enough to see that she was settled and comfortable in her old age. In addition to this, he now has a family of his own.”¹⁷¹

Colonial administration is a double-edged sword. The White man always sides with native Africans who swear fealty to him, but he also casts great attention to training. Babamukuru may have some sentiments of regret when he leaves his family once more for England, but he could not do otherwise. He had to displace himself and continue his training in the Science of Education, so as to keep his position as head teacher at the mission school and to be promoted when he came back from England. He was aware of the current context of Rhodesia, that is to say an implicit but raging competition within a rapidly-changing country. He also knew that the White man could impede his progress if

¹⁷¹ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.14.

he failed to grasp the only opportunity that was given to him to pursue his studies.

On top of all the stakes, Babamukuru did not want to disappoint his mother. He had to leave everything he held dear of to go to England, even if his departure might affect his mother. His family counted on him to improve their condition. This is understandable, since, for his people, England is the key to success. In fact, he found himself in a delicate situation where he was compelled to broaden his cognitive competence to *reinvent* himself because of *colonial hegemonic practices*, as Bill Ashcroft and others argue from their own conception of the issue of displacement in relation to post-colonial theory. But once again, the myth that lay there in emigration is not of little impact on people's willingness to travel: it is a way out of poverty.

In this respect, Dangarembga and Emecheta converge once more. Emecheta has talked about the issue of emigration with the same impact on Igbo people's minds. In fact, Babamukuru's return from England is depicted by Dangarembga with the same degree of interest as Emecheta has described Lawyer Nweze's return from England in *Second-Class Citizen*. For Babamukuru's people, one cannot go overseas and come back empty-handed. To them, his return should mean opulence and joy. He has spent five years in England to study hard in order to save them from poverty. They think so, because, after all, he is the eldest son in the Sigauke family, and tradition wants him to take in charge of his brothers once he starts to be financially independent.

On that score, Dangarembga queries the complexity of the Shona tradition in particular and in Africa in general. She parallels masculinity and cultural prevalence or simply the individual and his community. In other words, the eldest son is burdened with the impending charges in the family lineage. Once he has a good social status, it is for his advantage and that of his brothers, and sisters, to some extent. It is the same for women, they are responsible for

insuring their brothers' school fees at marriage-age with a portion of the bride-wealth that they are apt to win. The same responsibilities rest on Babamukuru. Although his brothers and sisters now have their own families, he owes them support by right of tradition. This explains, somehow, all the merriments and enthusiasm over his return:

*“Babamukuru came home in a cavalcade of motor vehicles, [...] Slowly the cavalcade progressed towards the yard, which by now was full of rejoicing relatives. My father jumped out of Babamukuru’s car and, brandishing a staff like a victory spear... [h]e cried do you see him ‘Do you see him?’ Our returning prince. Do you see him? Observe him well. He has returned. Our father and benefactor has returned appeased, having devoured English letters with a ferocious appetite.”*¹⁷²

Dangarembga describes Babamukuru’s return similarly as Emecheta evokes Lawyer Nweze’s welcome home from England. Through both returns, the two writers dissect the misgivings the colonized hold towards the colonizer. This is understandable as the White man really succeeded in indoctrinating the indigenous Africans. To these, the White man’s culture, civilization, religion and science are above and beyond any other one. Therefore all those who have had the chance to interact with the White man are seen as the blessed ones. This amounts to saying that the first Africans who had the chance to displace themselves to the White man’s country were purely revered by their peers who were proud of their achievement.

Beyond the mythical value of Babamukuru and Lawyer Nweze’s travel to the White man’s land, Dangarembga and Emecheta postulate that, during the transitional period, emigration was seen as a means for self-development. Those

¹⁷² Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, pp, 35-36.

who had the possibility to travel to the Western countries grasped an opportunity to get educated overseas in order to be more eligible once back in their native countries: it was, for them, a displacement with a purpose.

Babamukuru's and Lawyer Nweze's sojourn in the White man's country has an impact on Dangarembga's and Emecheta's female protagonists' displacement. Emecheta's heroine was impressed and inspired by the lawyer's quest for knowledge in the White man's country. In fact, judging from the lawyer's experience abroad, Adah has come to the conclusion that, the only way to improve her situation is through traveling. She keeps it as a secret and eventually moves to England when she gathers enough money to afford the ticket.

Likewise, Dangarembga's heroine followed one of the first Rhodesian elites who inspired and paved the way for her. Her uncle, Babamukuru is a reference for her. But, if Babamukuru used emigration as a pathway to feature among the most respectful persons in his community, Dangarembga's heroine does not have the same opportunity. Although, there is *dislocation*, the movement is within Rhodesia. She had not sojourned in the White man's country to enlighten herself, but still, there is displacement. Her self-development is almost impossible in her father's homestead as the environment is not favourable. She needs to see some other places, even though she does not have the choice. The mission is the only place where she can hope to realize her dream. At a certain period in her life, Dangarembga, herself, immigrated to Germany and England to pursue her training to *reinvent* herself, which explains her heroine's inclination to displacement.

Tambu's displacement is very different from her uncle's. It is a way for her to get educated and be a respectful member of her family and community, but it is also a way of escaping and fighting gender discrimination. Her 'transplantation' offers her what life deprives her of. It is something related to

gender equity and poverty. She has risen to the bait, as she has willingly accepted to leave the homestead to settle down at the mission, but somehow, she will be always indebted to Babamukuru for his support.

In other words, even if she has made a vow to make good use of the opportunity, her uncle will always have an eye on her. That is to say, he will have a say on her life, because of his investment in her and his patriarchal status. But beyond all, what chiefly matters for Tambu, is to make her childhood dream come true and pursue a good education without major disruption. Besides, Babamukuru's wife, Maiguru, maintains that Tambu has to take her uncle like a role model and work very hard to please him. Moreover, a few days following her settlement at the mission, Babamukuru notifies her of her duties, responsibilities and personal challenges towards herself, him, her own parents and siblings.

*“As it turned out, Babamukuru had summoned me to make sure that I knew how lucky I was to have been given this opportunity for mental and eventually, through it, material emancipation. He pointed out the blessing I had received was not an individual blessing but one that extended to all members of my less fortunate family, who would be able to depend on me in the future as they were now depending on him.”*¹⁷³

By *mental emancipation*, Babamukuru means the uplifting environment of the mission. The good conditions the little girl finds herself in now should enable her to yield satisfactory results. At school, by *material emancipation*, he anticipates the future. To him, Tambu's 'transplantation' will bear fruit. In other words, once she receives a good education, she will be financially free. This will naturally discharge him of his duty towards Tambu's father. The emancipation

¹⁷³ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, pp, 87-88.

Babamukuru talks about is only skin-deep: he does not believe in woman's emancipation in its broadest sense, for he is chauvinistic through and through. But, once again, Tambu knows her prerogatives; she knows the opportunity the displacement can offer her, such as a chance to live decently.

On the whole, in *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga explains how Tambu has been 'transplanted' from her father's homestead to the mission. She insists on the death of Nhamo as the main event that makes the displacement possible. Since the little girl's social environment does not allow her to get normally educated, the displacement is a blessing for her: it is a new start in her life. At the convent, she has no other duty than excel in her studies. In *The Book of Not*, Dangarembga sets her heroine in a macrocosm represented by the convent school where the heroine has to *reinvent* herself among a population of students who are nearly all shere racists.

Similarly, in *Double Yoke*, Emecheta's main female protagonist displaced herself, to an extent to leave her native land as Dangarembga's heroine does now. Here too, the displacement is at local level: within the country, say, rural exodus and it is closely related to her education.

In *Double Yoke*, displacement does not lead the protagonists to leave their native country for the United Kindom, as in *Second-Class Citizen* and *Nervous Conditions*. Ete Kamba and Nko have just finished their schooling and have sat for the entrance examination that would allow them to be freshmen-year students at Calabar University. Since they are both from the village and have done their schooling there, their success will undoubtedly induce them to leave their native villages for the city. For most Africans, the city represents hope, because they leave the rural area for it hoping to have a better life.

As earlier said, some Africans preferred to seek better living conditions overseas to pursue their studies and come back to join the elites with their new status of “been-to”. But in *Double Yoke*, the main protagonists have to displace themselves to the city in order to improve their social conditions. For Ete Kamba, as well as Nko, displacement is almost an obligation. He is faced with a social problem in his family that he has to solve. Since he is the eldest son of his father, he is thus responsible for himself and his parents, to say nothing of his siblings. Being his father’s hope and future heir, he cannot allow himself to back down.

This is noticeable as Ete Kamba and his father are anxious about the results of the entrance examination. The period has been lethargic for him as he joins his father to the field to while away time, but the latter is not oblivious for the fact that his son is not prepared to work the land. He must pass the entrance examination to start life anew on the university campus. He is aware that his success will inevitably lead him to study at Calabar, the only one university, something he dearly yearns for. Such a responsibility weighs heavily on his shoulders. Beyond the obligation to succeed, Ete Kamba also needs a scholarship as well. But if things come to the worst, it is axiomatic that his alternative would be to lower his sight and forget all about his dream of joining his country’s elites. If ever he fails his entrance examination, he would take it upon himself and end up a teacher:

“If all failed and he could not gain a scholarship admission, he would have to break it gently to his parents, that he would consider going into the teaching profession. He would like to study further and maybe do a retake for the entrance, but all this he could combine with teaching job, as

the long holidays would offer him the opportunity to study.”¹⁷⁴

Even though Ete Kamba does not say it explicitly, the hypothesis of a failure at his entrance examination would maintain him in his native village, *Mankong*. In other words, this would be a real disappointment for him, since a possibility of a displacement to Calabar would have offered him the opportunity to experience what life looks like in the city. This would ultimately open up a new outlook on the world, though he is tied to his traditional values. The stakes are high for him, as the entrance examination is a personal, family and societal affair for him. This is all the more true as his success has been a relief for the whole community. Even Arit, who was not a great friend of his, is very touched: “*Ete Kamba, thank you for putting our little village on the map of knowledge.*”¹⁷⁵ Presumably, people have been waiting for the results impatiently, which, once again, shows the high hopes they put in education.

Similarly to the boys, girls too make personal sacrifices at a certain stage in their lives. Ete Kamba’s friend, Nko, is a good example. She finished her schooling and passed the entrance examination. Naturally, she is compelled to leave her native village for the city to pursue her studies at the university. If Ete Kamba’s displacement is an obligation for him to improve his family’s living conditions, for Nko, it means even more. She needs to make some sacrifices in her life, not only to improve her family’s living conditions, but also her status as a woman. She admires her mother more than anything, but she is more ambitious than her. Although she wants to retain her mother’s values, she aspires to be a new African woman through the way she tackles life and her future.

¹⁷⁴ Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, op.Cit, p.44.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, p.48.

Nko strongly believes that she has to make some sacrifices someday if she does not want to be trapped. The moment she has longed for is now. To fulfil her dream, she must displace herself to another place, at Calabar University, to read more and get her degrees. Her ambition comes first. Besides, this explains, partly, why her relationship with Ete Kamba has been difficult in the beginning.

Regarding the issue of displacement, Emecheta and Dangarembga postulate that, the emergence of African countries in self-rule has had a strong impact on people's mobility. The first Africans who have travelled overseas have inspired females to also cross the Rubicon. Thus women, as well as men, see emigration as one of the means of joining the circle of the elites. Boys and girls move to big cities hoping to pursue their studies and be professionally eligible.

In actual fact, the history of mankind goes hand in hand with displacements or movements of people. Movement has always fuelled people's lives, positively or negatively. But, in the feminist literature, displacement carries hope for women in general, as it permits them to *reinvest* themselves. Besides, during slavery, Black people in the South of America dreamt of displacing themselves to the North of the continent for more social equity and self-identity.

In her essay, "*Black Women Writers: Taking a Critical Perspective*", Susan Willis sees a correlation between women's experience and the literary production. In analyzing African-American women writers' works, Willis highlights three major themes that echo in their discourse: journey, community and sexuality. She comes to the conclusion that the pioneers of Black women writers, from Toni Morrison, Alice Walker to Zora Neale Hurston, they all use the theme of journey in their texts to recall the past, rather than reinventing themselves culturally, which, focusing of the novels under review detaches from

Emecheta's and Dangarembga's perspectives on the issue in particular and African women writers' in general, to some extent:

*"(...) they (Black writers) treat journey as a means of self-knowledge through re-entry into collective historical experience, itself defined by the journeys from Africa into slavery, and from the rural south to the urban north."*¹⁷⁶

Generally speaking, feminist literary tradition holds the same perspective regarding *journey* or *dislocation* but with a social tinge. Because, it is ultimately the rhetoric device female characters generally lean upon to gain a social equilibrium. But, one should avoid engaging a simplistic and naïve analysis and leap to conclusions, such as believing that the female protagonists always meet their expectations in their quest for elitism through emigration and self-displacement.

III.3 Illusion and predicaments

Illusion is: *"something seen wrongly, not as it really is or a false idea, especially about oneself."*¹⁷⁷ The definition is noteworthy, since it helps elicit the relationship between the two concepts: illusion and elitism. The existence of a *false* image suggests that there has been a prior and "perfect" image or understanding one has had, which does not reflect reality. This is more what psychologists call *eidetic imaginary*:

*"[i]t is used to refer to what is often commonly called 'photographic memory'; the ability to retain nearly-perfect images of what they have seen and even scan them for details not consciously at the time."*¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Susan Willis, "Black Women Writers: "Taking A Critical Perspective" in *Making A Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, op.Cit, p.211.

¹⁷⁷ The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, op.Cit, p.521.

¹⁷⁸ Graham Richards, *Psychology, The Key Concepts*, London, Routledge, p.103.2009.

It is clear that illusion is the image of the memory, but it does not mean that it is basically a perfect match with reality. It has something to do with *dream imagery*: it is likely the fact of defining one's world through dreams. The image and vision the colonized has on the world has always related to Europe as the centre of universe. In postcolonial theory, discourse sheds light on the centeredness of Europe vis à vis Africans. Colonial discourse, as Foucault defines it:

“(...) is the system by which dominant groups in society constitute the field of truth by imposing, specific knowledges, disciplines and values upon dominated groups It is greatly implicated within ideas of the centrality of Europe: and thus in assumptions that have become characteristic of modernity: assumption about history, language, and ‘technology’.”¹⁷⁹

Thus, colonial discourse induces the native Africans to idealize Europe and modernity symbolized by urbanization. They generally take Europe as a place where everything is idyllic and achievable. In other words, the displacement of people through rural exodus or emigration is intrinsically related to hope, enthusiasm and the mythification of Europe. The village man or woman, who leaves the countryside for the city or immigrates to Europe, views this option as the best alternative for a living. Surprisingly enough, once there, reality does not always meet their expectations. They encounter myriads of predicaments in their quest for knowledge, technology and fortune, say, in their pursuit of happiness.

Even though the first native Africans who had been abroad to pursue their studies became the most illustrious members of their community, still, the idea most people have on emigration is a far cry from reality. Likewise, those who

¹⁷⁹ Bill Ashcroft *and others*, *Post-colonial Studies : The Key Concepts*, op.Cit, p. 37

choose to displace themselves to big cities in search of freedom and better living conditions are no exception. More often than not, they are disappointed as they fall victims of the illusion of big cities and immigration.

In African women's writings, the movement of female individuals is always a cause and effect relationship. It is instrumental in fostering a cultural identity and freedom. Women's displacement abroad or to big cities, is closely related to their condition. Hence in African women's literary work, women's displacement is a central concern, which is especially an outcome of their low status. Their subjugation triggers them off to move out of their place and broaden their mind to universities or abroad.

Buchi Emecheta and Tsitsi Dangarembga talk about the displacement of women through emigration or displacement to big cities with the advent of urbanisation as an effect of colonialism. The quest for a better social status for men as well as women, urges them to move from one place to another. But, once more, women fall victims of many prejudices in the midst of their pursuit of self-development. They feel disappointed with the new social context of colonial rule and post-independence in Africa. As the Ghanaian Professor of history, Albert Kwadwo Adu Boahen, puts it, analyzing the impact of colonialism:

*“The colonial system, (...) emphasized individual merit and achievement rather than birth, and this greatly facilitated social mobility. Moreover, as a result of Western education, employment opportunities, the production of cash crops, the abolition of slavery and many other new avenues of advancement, all introduced by colonialism, a new social structure emerged.”*¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ Albert Kwadwo Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism*, op.Cit, p.103.

Once more, traditional African societies have always been well-structured, especially the Igbo and the Shona; Achebe has expatiated this peculiarity on through the figure of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, yet there are practices to question. But, for the Ghanaian historian, the culture of merit and personal achievement has been more enforced under colonial rule through education, especially.

Nonetheless, it appears that the retribution based on merit concerns only a certain category of men, i.e., those who best fit the colonial prerequisites. In other words, if men are primarily rewarded, it is at the expense of women. The educated women still lag behind and they experience many prejudices regarding their colour, class and gender legitimized by patriarchy. Emecheta's and Dangarembga's heroines find themselves trapped in a Western macrocosm with more ordeals that befall them. It is likely the same with those females who have displaced themselves to big cities. The negative side-effects of urbanisation and emigration mitigate their optimism as they are victims of big town and emigration mirages.

In *Second-Class Citizen*, the protagonist, Adah, "scrapes the bottom of the barrel" to fund her husband's trip to England. She worked hard at the American Consulate in Lagos in Nigeria to get enough money to pay for her husband's ticket to England where she would join him later, hoping for a better life. But, once there, she encounters a host of predicaments. As a female immigrant, the cultural difference has a great impact on her condition. For, many a time she was thrown a monkey wrench into the work by White people and Black people she found in there. The impeding context leads us to ponder over the various predicaments that hamper her promotion.

Indeed, Adah's disappointment is noticeable when she first sets foot on English soil. This is noteworthy since when she departs from Nigeria for England, she was overjoyed and very enthusiastic. But, just as she arrives at the

airport, the abruptness of people's behaviour startles her. The more she looks around her, the more her displacement is shock to her.

The author refers to this in the episode entitled, *A Cold Welcome*. The protagonist is struck by the dullness and coyness of the weather and people's strange aloofness and reluctant stance: "*Liverpool was grey, smoky and looked uninhabited by humans*"¹⁸¹. Emecheta puts it in a metaphorical way; through the *grey and smoky* she associates England, in particular or the host's country in general, with a lifeless environment which does not comfort the immigrant. On top of that, Adah is accustomed to a totally different country, very often tropical and ambient where socialization is in full swing. What is more, through her reaction, Emecheta suggests an analogy between the dullness of the white man and his lack of hospitality.

Consequently, Adah finds herself a bit cheated. A mere look at people's behaviour gives an idea of the kind of life that is awaiting her as a female immigrant. The kind of ambiance and atmosphere she had thought of England is by far different from what she sees now. She has always thought of it as a "wonderland", where almost everything was beautiful and affordable. Now that she is in a real life situation with the White people, she cannot imagine the sophisticated life style they lead and their indifference:

*"But if, as people said, there was plenty of money in England, why then did the natives give their visitors this poor cold welcome? Well, it was too late to mourn, it was too late to change her mind. She could not have changed it even if she had wanted to. Her children must have an English education...."*¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, 36

¹⁸² Ibid.

When Adah left Nigeria, she was already enjoying her new status that she hoped to gain once in England. On the plane, she found herself in the *first-class section*, in the middle of White collars that were leaving Nigeria for Europe. To her, the best is yet to come: when she arrives in England her life will considerably improve. This is of Adah, as she has always been hopeful about emigration. As she once told her mother-in-law, all the “been to” women drive at least their own cars. However, the dream world she finds herself in when she leaves Lagos is short-lived. She deludes herself, for the caesura is brutal at Liverpool airport.

At first sight, Adah is flabbergasted by the White man’s culture. People’s indifference and carelessness seem awkward to her. The Western way of life has nothing to do with her African culture: where the White man shows indifference; the African sees offence to decency. But, the behavioural change of her husband at the airport is a catalyst. When Francis comes to collect his wife at the airport, he carries with him the same indifference and lack of decency she suspected in the White men. Even though the ways White people behave seem natural to Francis, Adah is shocked by this abrupt change in her husband’s overall behaviour:

*“The Francis that came to meet them (Adah and her baby boy, Vicky) was a new Francis. There was something very, very different about him. Adah was stunned when he kissed in public, with everybody looking. Oh, my God, she thought; if her mother-in-law could see them, she would go and make sacrifices to Oboshi for forgiveness.”*¹⁸³

For Adah, her husband’s lack of decency is outrageous. It is an offence to their African cultural values. The fact that the recollection of her mind goes to her mother-in-law is not fortuitous. She queries what Francis’s mother would

¹⁸³ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.36.

think of her if she could picture them living their romance in public in the White man's country. After all, her mother-in-law was the one who gave her blessings to join her husband in the United Kingdom. Likewise, the reminiscence of her about this obscenity infers the rigidity of African cultural values under the vigilance of elders.

Adah's reaction and disappointment on her husband's attitude is depicted with the same amount of interest by the Ghanaian woman writer, Amma Darko in *Beyond the Horizon*. Darko's heroine, Mara, went through the same experience as Emecheta's protagonist. She left her native village to join her husband, Akobi, in Germany. Mara had always dreamt of traveling to Europe to bring her family out of poverty and change her inferior social status of a female and emancipate herself from the bondage of men. This is all the more true as she had yielded to her father's supreme will over her. He was in debt up to his ears and consequently, forced his daughter into marrying his creditor's son. In short, Mara had been "sold" to Akobi by his father. The event was still vivid in her mind:

*"Akobi's father bought me off very handsomely (...), the customs and traditional rites were got over and done with on his behalf. Three days later he came straight from work...left for the city on the same Saturday with me as his wife (...) and property."*¹⁸⁴

Following this event, she realizes how the status of women is undervalued in her community. Worse, her marriage with Akobi does not change much in her lot. Europe is seen as the pinnacle of hope but surprisingly enough, she is disappointed from the first days she starts off a new life in Germany. Western culture has profoundly corrupted her husband's image. The Western society does not do any favour to the African immigrants. When Mara arrived in

¹⁸⁴ Amma Darko, *Beyond The Horizon*, op.Cit, pp.6-7.

Germany, her husband was not in a position to welcome her. He had delegated one of his friends, Osey, to collect her from the airport. The latter has no faith in friendship and moral values. On their way home, Osey invites her to watch an “action film”, which actually was a pornographic movie. At first, she did not realize what type of movie it was but as the film rolled on, she eventually saw its obscenity. What really frustrated her in the film was the women of ‘colored’ who acted like real professional pornographic actresses:

“What I saw was not the kind of action I expected (...). The people on the screen, they were (...) that is to say, they were several men and women all together; about fifteen or so, among them, black women, Africans; and they were doing it there(...) there on the screen! They were actually doing the thing plain plain there on the screen before everybody.”¹⁸⁵

Mara was stunned by what she saw, through her experience Darko lays the emphasis on African cultural dharma, which digs deep in decency. She believes in the sacredness of woman who is seen as Mother Universe. Her heroine is embarrassed, words fail her. Instead of expressing objectively what is presented before her, she eschews the fact. The use of the metaphorical phrase *they were doing it there* infers her evasiveness, but it reverberates echoes of sex as taboo in African culture. This amounts to saying that, before the first contact with the White man in his country, the African was not corrupt. It is following his immersion in the White man’s culture and society that, he starts to shake off his cultural identity and opt for the western. In fact, through the invitation to what he calls *action film*, Osey merely prepares Mara to the type of life that is awaiting her in Germany: a corrupt and compromising society regarding women

¹⁸⁵ Amma Darko, *Beyond The Horizon*, op.Cit, p.6.

in general and immigrants in particular. In reality, Osey wants to encourage Mara to become a professional prostitute.

Like Emecheta's heroine in *Second-Class Citizen*, Darko's heroine also experiences the same disappointment. They have chosen immigration as a way to escape from poverty, but once in Europe they realize that the Western world has other forms of ordeals that are even worse than the predicaments that handicap their development in their own countries. Darko's and Emecheta's heroines can experience this through interactions with the White men around them.

Adah's childhood dream has come true, since England is for her the only country where she can pursue her studies and live a better life. Surprisingly enough, she seems to be disappointed. The White people she has seen at the airport and her husband's sudden change do not really appeal much to her.

The second disappointment Adah experiences in England on her first day is related to accommodation since her husband had never told her about it. When she was in Lagos, she imagines herself and her family in a comfortable house where they can all live together in. Once again, she is taken aback: the only place her husband has found for them is a one-room house without a toilet and a kitchen. Not only is the place decrepit, but it is unhealthy for her children and she has no other choice than to accept.

Basically, Adah and her husband are not the only African immigrants who face accommodation problems. In fact, housing is one of the major problems African immigrants are faced with in their quest for happiness abroad. It still is a scourge for them. Through Adah, Emecheta lets the world know about the saddest experiences she has gone through as an African immigrant in England and a mother. Her characteristics do not often meet the criteria upon which Western people give credence to Africans regarding housing. What her husband

ignores is that, even though African immigrants, especially women, are held back by the tripod axes of race, class and gender, it should not be a handicap for them. What is more, race and class acquire prominence in the way immigrants are treated in general and Africans in particular. Francis is aware of this fact. When Adah reacts against the insane accommodation he proposes them, he reminds her of the vile treatment that awaits her, as a Black woman and a mother:

*“Well, I know you will not like it, this is the best I can do. You see, accommodation is very short in London, especially for Black people with children. Everybody is coming to England. The West Indians, the Pakistanis, and even the Indians, so that African students are usually grouped together with them. We are all blacks, all coloured, and the only houses we can get are horrors like these.”*¹⁸⁶

Actually, through Francis, Emecheta evokes some of the social problems that befall the immigrants in housing. Since England has been one of the most outstanding metropolitan countries, with adjacent austerity, especially in colonized countries, this induces Nigerians, in particular, to immigrate to England. The one-room house the British administrators grant Francis is related to his status as a student, but it is also due to his colour, which is the scornful treatment White people reserve for “minority groups”.

If the interactions between White people and immigrants are oppressing, there is still a great deterioration of the social fabric among Africans, themselves, abroad. Adah’s reaction is a good illustration. Following her arrival in England, her husband invites some Nigerian immigrants to introduce them to her. She is sorely disappointed by her husband’s new status. In Lagos Adah started to be seen differently: her job at the American Consulate ranked her

¹⁸⁶ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.38.

among the emerging élites. Therefore, her status as a literate and professional woman did not allow her to confide in any type of person in her country. Surprisingly enough, the life standard she had in Lagos is by far different from that she enjoys in London now. Naturally, she cannot believe her eyes when her husband introduces to her some type of Nigerian nationals who have the same social status as her own “servants” in Lagos. Francis reminds her of her secondary status as an immigrant:

“ ‘ You must know , my dear young ‘lady’, that in Lagos you may be a million publicity officers for the Americans; you may be earning a million pounds a day; you may have hundreds of servants: you may be living like an élite, but the day you land in England, you are a second-class citizen. So you can’t discriminate against your own people, because we are all second-class. ’”¹⁸⁷

Visibly, Francis accuses Adah of looking down upon the Black community in England. But, she cannot still figure out how naïve she was about the niceties that her husband told her about England and how she is cheated by life now. Never in her life did she imagine that in England, she would hang around with hopeless people like those her husband associates with now. But beyond her disappointment, Emecheta hits the nail on the head: through Francis, the Nigerian writer indeed castigates immigration and Western society as a whole. She hints at life’s adversity in the metropolitan countries and its ruthlessness on immigrants, especially women. Whatever the title or status someone may enjoy in their own country, they become second-class the day on they become immigrants.

¹⁸⁷ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.39.

Indeed, the common denominator of these African immigrants is the colour of their skin and gender. They are victimized by their colour, their status of motherhood and inferior class. This is understandable, since the commitment that is prominent in the struggle for more equity regarding African women, as well as men, is void in Western feminism. This has a great impact on the way Black women are treated in the Western world. The feminist literary tradition does not ascribe the issue of African women to its project. To some extent, this explains why women writers like Buchi Emecheta are too outspoken in their remarks concerning White feminism. As she puts it in a speech at George Town University: “*I have never called myself a feminist. Now if you choose to call me a feminist, that is your business*”¹⁸⁸

In deciphering African women writers’ categorical refusal to adhere to orthodox feminism, one should ask the principal cause of their objection. This is due to the fact that, Western feminism is not open to African women’s social setbacks: it is an exclusive movement that seeks to improve, *per se*, the condition of White women in the Western world.

This situation can theoretically explain why Adah and the African people Emecheta depicts in *Second-Class Citizen* are disappointed with Western social policy. But, Emecheta does not single out Western society as the only constraint to women’s development in Europe, she also talks about Francis’s imposed masculinity, patriarchy and tradition. More than once, her husband has been deceitful to her and often tempted to ruin her life in England. He even burnt the first manuscript she had written, just to remind her that as a female individual, her cognitive capacity is subaltern and that she had no title intelligence to do creative writing. Her depiction of immigration is marked by a series of sad

¹⁸⁸ Gwendolyn Mikell, “*African Feminism: Towards a new Politics of Representation*”, *Feminist Studies*, 1995, p. 21.

experiences and disappointments related to the White people's xenophobic inclinations, her own community's lack of compassion and men's power.

On the other hand, Tsitsi Dangarembga comes up with the same discursive analysis on self-displacement. In *Nervous Conditions*, she does not eschew the side-effects of emigration. Rather, she talks about the impact of *dislocation* on her heroine, Tambu. Babamukuru is a good example in the book. He had been to South Africa and England to pursue his studies in order to live like an élite in Rhodesia. But, there is a discrepancy between Emecheta and Dangarembga about the issue. The former insists on the pre-cited predicaments that befall the immigrants, whereas Dangarembga lays more emphasis on the subordination of women from rural exodus to their self-displacement abroad while cutting deep in the psychological aspects the displacement brings about, to say nothing of the impacts of colonialism.

Babamukuru stayed in the White man's country for five years with his wife, Maiguru and his two children, Chido and Nyasha. Dangarembga does not give much information concerning Babamukuru's stay and his family in England, apart from the rare occasions his brother, Jeremiah, writes that she needs support from him. But, before their departure, Babamukuru was skeptical about taking his children with him to England. He knows the little consideration of White people towards Black people, given that he has been interacting with them since he was nine years old.

To the Zimbabwean writer, emigration can change individuals' lives in many ways. It can change the social status of men and women with the education and experience they acquire in the Western world, which, indeed, never leaves them unscathed. It is very ambivalent and delicate. Babamukuru and his family are surely victims of the most humiliating experiences Emecheta's characters have undergone during their stay in England, but

Dangarembga eschews them. Rather, she focuses on the side-effects their sojourn has on the *self* and their social life.

Babamukuru's sojourn in England has a great impact on his family. Before his travel to Europe, he was very optimistic: little did he think about the cultural difference and the extent to which it can distort his children's psychological balance, to say nothing of his wife, Maiguru. Prior to his departure to England, he was apprehensive about leaving his children in Rhodesia, but he eventually decides to travel with them. For him, there is no better place than England as far as the education of his children is concerned. Paradoxically, he does not trust his people for their upbringing. He was naïve on that score, because the children are now psychologically affected by the displacement.

The fact that Babamukuru chose to take the children with him suggests that he is an ambivalent character. As the eldest member of the Sigauke family, he has always mixed with White people at the mission while he tries to retain his cultural values and standards. It can also be accounted for by the fact that he experienced such dire situations in his family and does not want his own children to do the same. The choice he made shows his preference for White culture:

“My grandmother thought the children would be better off at home, where our ways were familiar and they would be at ease in the family environment. But Babamukuru (...) did not want his children to experience the want and hardship that he had experienced as a young child. In addition, he preferred to have his children with him so he

*could supervise essential things such as their education and their development.”*¹⁸⁹

It is true that everybody's dream is to see their progenies succeed and have a better social status. But, once again one has to bear in mind that the community always prevails over the individual for Africans, for “*Africa never spared those who did what they liked instead of what they had to do*”. The duality between Babamukuru and his mother is in fact the beginning of the conflict between traditional values and the Western ones. But the choice he made on the latter entails the decline of the former, and also tells more about the outcome of the cultural conflict that awaits his children and Maiguru, later on, when they have imbibed Western culture.

As a result of their immigration to England, Babamukuru and his wife obtained a Master's degree in education. It allowed them to advance in life, but conversely it has shown that, no matter how educated and enlightened women are, they can always be bonded to men. With all the experience Maiguru gained in England and the five good years her daughter spent there, they are still under the yoke of a tyrant man, Babamukuru. Their stay to the White man's country brings them subjugation, dismay and it explains why Nyasha is shunned by her schoolmates.

In fact, Tambu's mother has always suspected Babamukuru's Western inclinations: his sojourn abroad, his “upbringing” by the missionaries and his education. To Mai'Shingayi, even though Babamukuru offered her children (Tambu and her late brother, Nhamo) a good opportunity in life, he symbolizes the *Other*. From a psychoanalytical point of view, Jacques Lacan refers to this as the *symbolic other*; the “*grande autre*”, which refers to the existence of an unreal speaker that can correspond to the father figure. It can refer to him unconsciously, the way language is distant from the speaker's language. Lacan

¹⁸⁹ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.14.

goes further to maintain that the first desire of the subject is the desire to exist in the gaze of the *Other*. He postulates that the *symbolic other* is comparable to the imperial power and discourse or even the empire itself, in the sense that it can be represented by the father through masculinity.

In African American literary, Toni Morrison calls it the *white gaze*, a serious problem for African American writers in so far as that the centrality of their works tend to portray white man as nemesis, and because of the *white gaze*, they have a narrow view of the open world facing them. To Mai, Babamukuru symbolizes the imperial power, whose education and white manners are cancerous to her children's social equilibrium:

*“Tell me my daughter, what will I, your mother say to you when you come home a stranger full of white ways and ideas? True that man (Babamukuru) is calling down a curse of bad luck on my head I have had enough of that man dividing me from my children. Dividing me from my children and ruling my life. He says this and we jump.”*¹⁹⁰

If Babamukuru's sojourn in the White man's country is not totally beneficial, socially speaking, the same holds for Tambu. Her *transplantation* to the mission is not successful either. She apprehended her stay there with great hope, but she was eventually disappointed by her uncle's overwhelming power and, later on, by White people's discrimination at the Young Ladies' College of the Sacred Heart. Babamukuru had given Tambu the chance to pursue her education by accepting the offer he made to take her at the mission. This is an opportunity she saw as a transition from the precarious life she had led in her father's homestead. But once at the mission she encounters a series of disappointments, like gender-based domination. She believed that she would

¹⁹⁰ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.184.

never experience the tension that exists between the females that surround her and Babamukuru, but she was wrong.

Following the baccalaureate results which Babamukuru judged unsatisfactory, Tambu is compelled to leave the place she had taken as a springboard to her freedom and emancipation. As Babamukuru reveals: “[...] ‘*But I must tell you, you are a disappointment, my child, especially when I kept you in spite of everything*’.”¹⁹¹

In fact, the poor school results were the straw that broke the camel’s back, and Tambu is a victim of the “cold war” between her mother and uncle. The former had always accused him of being an intruder who had come to mess up her life with his “mad” education and power. Consequently, it was only when she denounced him to the freedom fighters that she found peace and harmony with her *self*.

Worse still, Dangarembga amplifies the tension between the two characters in the *The Book of Not*. It opens with a severe lynching inflicted by the freedom fighters on Babamukuru following the information Tambu’s mother had given that he was a sell-out and accomplice of the White man. By so doing, she merely avenges the death of her son, Nhamo. To Mai, her daughter’s stay at the mission will surely have a negative impact on her self-identity under Babamukuru’s supervision. She had never agreed on the displacement of her children. To her, the mission is the lion’s den, synonymous with fatalism and corruption, similarly as Babamukuru symbolizes evil. But she cannot take action, because of her status as a woman. Tambu is as disappointed as her mother, for she has always considered her uncle as a role model and a benefactor. More interestingly, her displacement has been a good opportunity for her, but much to her surprise, everything fizzles out. As her uncle reminds her:

¹⁹¹ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, op.Cit, p.186.

“You will have to take what comes and not choose too much! [...] Even if you qualify for university with what you have, you will not qualify for a decent profession.”¹⁹²

It is clear that Tambu is far from achieving her objective if we refer to her vow when she moves from her village to the city. The image she has had for the mission and city life is an illusion, just as Emecheta depicts her heroine in *Double Yoke*.

By leaving their village to come to Calabar University, Ete Kamba and his fiancé think they will lead an easy life. Surprisingly enough, they find themselves entangled with the double-yoke of Western social system and tradition. Both characters experience a series of disappointments and dismay that make their lives miserable. Nko thinks that the opportunity given to her to get educated at Calabar University will turn out to be a pathway to a better social position. But, at no time does she think that the university would be corrupt to an extent that she would need a love affair with an academic authority to be able to get through.

Chapter three of our work reveals that Buchi Emecheta and Tsitsi Dangarembga converge on many issues regarding women's struggles and development. Through characterization, they postulate that colonialism has impoverished the African continent. Endemic and rampant poverty hamper economic growth, which naturally has an impact on the degradation of the status of women.

The illiterate woman, that is the unschooled one, seems more prejudiced than the literate to fulfil herself, yet, the former resorts to survival strategies through her spirit of entrepreneurship to live decently as an individual. Actually, school has been the tool which women lean upon to “reinvest” themselves to be

¹⁹² Tsitsi Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, op.Cit, pp. 192-193.

as eligible as men in the job market. In spite of all this, they are discriminated. The two women writers' discourses are concentric on the issue of emigration and education, the media women seize to defeat the *double colonization*, tradition and colonialism, they are victims of. With the emergence of African countries, they immigrate to the Western world to pursue their studies in order to both help their family and ensure social mobility. Unfortunately, the Western society does not always meet their expectations and hopes. Once there, women experience more vile treatments they have ever been subject to. They become victims of the three axes: race, class and sexism. Worse, the experiences they live do not change much when they move to big towns within the new context of their rapidly-changing countries, which alienate them more than ever, so much so that they end up being easy preys to people's demagoguery and the Western social system.

Chapter four: The Construction of Females' Self-identity

As earlier said, Chapter four offers a more optimistic perspective about women's condition. It is ultimately grounded in their attempt to acquire a new self-identity. Women's construction of self-identity is a protest against the series of trials they go through ranging from popular fundamentalism like patriarchy, "primitive" cultures, masculinity, sexual violence, discrimination, to the impacts of colonialism. In fact, their reconstruction is in perfect line with women's writings. In other words, it consists of the spur of feminist literary criticism in general and African feminism in particular. This is all the more true as feminist literary criticism vows to shake off the chains that impede women's development through *re-evaluation*, *de-construction* and *construction*. These concepts are noteworthy at this stage, because of the different dimensions they hold. The first dimension is that, through *re-evaluation*, women writers put male writers at the altar to assess the efficiency and the rationality of their works on their condition with interdisciplinary methods of feminist literary criticism. The second dimension involves the actions or responsive methods feminist literary criticism undertakes to overcome the impeding predicaments that befall women.

Presumably, there is a close relationship between the *de-constructionist* and *constructionist* concepts of women's self-identity. The *constructionist* theory is the outcome of the theoretical one. This amounts to saying that the theory would be incomplete if feminist scholars did not come with a constructive project that consists in empowering women beneath the prejudices they encounter. In studying the feminist approach, John W. Creswell summarizes Stewart theory as following:

“(...) Stewart views women as having agency, the ability to make choices and resist oppression, and she suggested that researchers need to enquire into how a woman understands her gender, acknowledging that gender is a social contract that differs from each individual.(...) Stewart highlights the importance of studying power relationships and individuals’ social position and how they impact women.”¹⁹³

Beyond the construction of self-identity, there lies the social dimension, because women writers attempt to give a voice to their female protagonists through different perspectives. Dangarembga’s and Emecheta’s writings can be seen through a lens that brings into focus the empowerment of the female protagonist.

In the previous chapters, we have seen the main prejudices women experience; and we insisted on the various root causes of their predicaments. We have also explained how women are bonded to men and how patriarchal societies ostracize them from the community’s leading body. This boils down to saying that men’s supremacy mitigates women’s power and development. In other words, women will be always looked down upon by men, as long as they ignore their basic rights and the fundamentals that account for male-supremacy and gender-based discrimination. Only when they are fully aware of their condition, will they lead a better life. They need to understand the psychology and philosophy of the oppressor, his/her utmost motivations, before they can mount a protest against it for social change. To reach such a mental elevation and maturity, they need to reconcile with themselves, their families and communities in their interactions, which ultimately revolves around: personhood, tolerance, parental love, friendship and group-solidarity.

¹⁹³ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, California, Sage Publication, 2007, p.26.

IV.1. Personhood and tolerance

Before we delve into the subject's raw nerve, it is essential to give the context and definition of the term *personhood*, its relationship to tolerance and the point under study. If we agree that women are bonded to men and that, in some cases, they are victims of mental and physical violence, one has to ask the question, what kind of moral attitude do these very women need to put forward to live harmoniously in a patriarchal society.

In defining *personhood* in his book entitled *Social Identity*, Richard Jenkins distinguishes it from pure *sciolism* which is based on superficial interpretations of knowledge. He advocates a distinction between *selfhood* and *personhood*. The two concepts are, more often than not, used to mean the same, but, to him, there is still discrepancy between them:

*“The self is the individual’s private experience of herself or himself; the person is what appears publicly in and to the outside world. Some distinction between the internal and the external is unavoidable. Not everything going on in our heads or hearts is obvious to others, nor is there always harmony between how we see ourselves and how others see us.”*¹⁹⁴

Jenkins draws a clear relationship between *selfhood* and *personhood* and identification. He points out that at all costs, the two concepts are related to man's quest for self-identity. He goes further in his analysis:

¹⁹⁴ Richard Jenkins, *Social Identification* : Third Edition, op.Cit, p. 50.

*“Selfhood and personhood are aspects of individual identification, and in each the internal and the external cohabit in an ongoing process of identification.”*¹⁹⁵

In this study, the concept of *selfhood* and *personhood* are central, they help understand the discursive analysis of the two writers’s works, but our analysis will be ultimately based on the concept of *personhood*, for it gives more useful details on the psychological nature of the characters and tolerance. It reveals the social condition the writers depict in their works. If applied to women’s condition, it appears as a psychological strategy oppressed women fall back to overthrow their subjugation, but in a pure philosophical way.

In other words, since in most African societies, patriarchy rules supreme, oppressed women are aware of the violence and partiality of cultural laws. They do know that extreme resistance will lead them nowhere, but to sexual violence. Consequently, through *personhood*, seen as a form of psychological astuteness which consists in showing a positive image and open attitude, they should be able to live harmoniously, beyond the double yoke of patriarchy related to tradition and colonialism.

The psychological survival strategies women lean upon to fight oppression does not exclude men. This is relevant, as the colonization of Africa is associated with violence; and that its side-effects befall women. The colonized had been under real pressure during the colonial and the pre-independence periods. To safeguard security, the most rebellious Africans were lynched or even killed. Any suspected attempt at conspiracy or disloyalty towards the White colonizer was seen as a trick and betrayal.

¹⁹⁵ Richard Jerkins, *Social Identification* : Third Edition, op.Cit, p.50.

With regard to all these predicaments and aggressions mentioned earlier, women's hegemony does not exclude African women's stoicism; yet personhood includes a great sense of tolerance. In actual fact, it is because women understand men's power lust and colonial power that they need to resort to tolerance in some situations in order to avoid widening the gap between them.

Women's writing is not wholly grounded in a battle between men and women over power. Rather, it should be humanistic and advocate complementarity, as some African women writers do. In the novels under study, Tsitsi Dangarembga and Buchi Emecheta imbue their characters with a great sense of tolerance that, in no way, shows cowardice or resignation from their part, but a behavioral attitude they resort to, to circumvent female subjugation through personhood for the construction of their self-identity.

Dangarembga talks about women's attitude regarding their subjugation in her works. In *The book of Not*, most of the female characters are victims of the psychological torment of the war of independence, they suffer under the yoke of colonization. The Young Ladies' College of the Sacred Heart symbolizes a colonial institution where a minority group of indigenous girls attempt to survive.

Living in such a racist environment, Tambu and the other African schoolmates have no other choice than adopt a code of conduct that would help them co-exist with their White schoolmates. Since the teachers and the administration do not show any kind of leniency towards them, they have to display a good sense of personhood and tolerance in order to survive. In other words, their powerlessness leads them to develop some psychological strategies that consist in showing a good image of themselves to the White settlers. This includes tolerating some of the most violent experiences they are subject to. This state of mind does not mean total submissiveness, but a wise attitude for them to

play down the aggressor's power over them. This is understandable as the female victims Dangarembga talks about are coming of age.

In *The Book of Not*, after a myriad of sad episodes, Dangarembga's main protagonist eventually changes the way she interacts with people: she confesses her attempt to understand men's deceptive nature and obtuseness. As a female individual, she starts to develop a public image through personhood that matches with patriarchal values and the White settlers' ideology. Thus Tambu defines a new attitude that permits her to survive in an oppressing environment.

Actually, Tambu is in a "nervous condition", as Jean Paul Sarte defines the victim's state of mind in colonial context. By dint of living among the White people, she is constantly disappointed. The discrimination she is a victim of shatters her vision and optimism on mankind, and leads her to start being "racist":

*"(...) living with them was making me as bad as they were... I was myself metamorphosing into a racist! Of course, I had not heard then that I could not be this, but only a reverse variety.... It annihilated my very thought process to imagine how anyone could make a better world when you reproduced the very things that in this one caused so much pain and anxiety to so many, when you recreated the forms that were so reprehensible."*¹⁹⁶

It is sure that the "racist" inclinations Tambu has now for White people are the outcome of the contact she has had with them, and the humiliation she has been through. But given the power the White man incarnates, she cannot stretch out her inmost feelings. Deep down herself, she disdains the White oppressors the way the latter do. Yet, she cannot give free reign to her

¹⁹⁶ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, op.Cit, pp, 101-102.

frustration. This does not match the philosophy of personhood she calls *unhu*, and which consists in reflecting a “wrong” public image to the world around herself to resist pervasive aggression.

The passage also illustrates the sense of responsibility and maturity that Dangarembga’s heroine is gaining. In the convent school where she is, Tambu and the other African school girls are subject to all kinds of humiliation from the matron, the teachers to the administration, but they have no other choice than tolerate it. To her, only through tolerance and loyalty can she achieve the goals she has set from the beginning. The aggression she suffers as a human being will ultimately breed violence if she responds with hostility like her aggressors. On that score, through Tambu’s attitude, Dangarembga advocates Mahatma Gandhi’s concept of *non-violence* in the fight for basic rights for all human beings.

This is all the more true as Gandhi is referred to as one of the pioneers in the fight for women’s civil rights in India. Thanks to his social commitment, Hindu women gained more freedom that tradition had denied them. He gave them a voice and fought to ban some oppressive cultural practices; like, early marriage and mistreatment of widows. Besides, through the concept of non-violence, he puts women in the forefront, since they played an active role in the boycott movement the Indian leader initiated to free his people from British rule. As he humorously puts it: “[t]he women have come to look upon me as one of themselves.”¹⁹⁷

Tambu has not gone as far as boycotting food, or whatever element that empowers the White settlers, for she grounds her struggle in a psychological strategy that will surely allow her to survive, in order to live harmoniously with the oppressive people around her. What really matters for her, is to see her dream come true:

¹⁹⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahatma_Gandhi

“An aim could move you further. I cherished mine and nurtured it (...) to facilitate everything taking place according to strategy.”¹⁹⁸

In order to have a peaceful mind that enables her to concentrate on her studies and get out of poverty, Tambu is ready to tolerate any offence and acquiesce any woe. If she ventures to retaliate any time that she is looked down upon or humiliated, her life would be impossible in the convent. On top of that, her uncle has always been grateful and loyal towards the White settlers. So, he would never comprehend that his niece should misbehave in a school all ruled by these very White people. The spirit of personhood in Dangarembga's heroine obliges her to be careful about the way she interacts with people in general. The psychological dimension prevails over any other one. Since she can count on nobody except on her own ability to survive the sad experiences of racism and patriarchy, she has to rely on psychologic strategies. In *The Book of Not*, Dangarembga shows that, the more her female protagonist suffers from sexism and color prejudices, the more stoic attitude she develops to quell her woe that should allow her to cope with her sordid living condition. Tambu defines her psychological survival as follows:

“‘Unhu’ (personhood), as we knew it, required containing, and even negotiating and renegotiating passion. So, little could be done in a situation where negotiation was not practicable....There was a reason for this dysfunctionality, obscure to me then, which was the key to the philosophy itself.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸Tsitsi Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, op.Cit, p.116.

¹⁹⁹Ibid.

In fact, Tambu knows that the situation is complex and difficult. Since the concept of personhood strongly requires mental balance, she has to take the smooth from the rough. She has to accept and tolerate the unacceptable and never show her wrath to the oppressor. She acknowledges that such a situation is far from being easy, as it is a battle between her *self* and the *other*, a battle in which she has to retain her dignity as an individual while not challenging her oppressor. As she admits it, her wisdom lies in her ability to *negotiate*. This is true, for a negotiator is generally somebody who is in a fix and has to handle a delicate matter without being arbitrary or partial. This reflects her condition as a young lady at the Young Ladies' College of the Sacred Heart, dominated by Whites, and the life of a drudge she leads at the mission under her uncle's patriarchal authority.

Presumably, Tambu is caught between the duality of the White settlers' supremacy and patriarchy that both collude to oppress her. The only way out for her, is to admit her weakness and acquiesce in the two oppressive forces that ruin her life. Acquiescence in her subjugation implies, necessarily, tolerance and a good sense of understanding. Since her and the small Rhodesian community are surrounded with White students, teachers and members of the personnel, the indigenous students ultimately need to be watchful over the way they interact with the Whites at school. It is essential for colored school girls not to upset the White people, one way or another. That is why they need to control the slightest movement, to "please" them:

"(...) if you had 'unhu' and you lived with people. You were meant to know what angered them; you were meant to know what precipitated uncontrolled, unsociable feeling and what caused good humour, so that you ordered your

behavior in such a way as to inhibit the first while reinforcing the latter."²⁰⁰

Dangarembga shows that Africans have always been under pressure and “ill-at-ease” in their own countries under colonization, particularly women. But, beyond the double colonization that seems to subdue them, they have not given in, but rather, they attempt to eschew violence through different strategies that require tolerance. *The Book of Not* is very informative in terms of survival strategies. A good example is the discriminatory treatment Black school girls experience at school and the humanistic attitudes they adopt to overcome their prejudices. The report the White headmistress, Sister Emmanuel, addressed Babamukuru on Tambu is very telling in this regard.

When Tambu first came to the Young Ladies College of the Sacred Heart, she worked hard to get good school results. Little did she think that her color and class would have a negative influence on her condition. It is later on that she realizes that the living conditions at the convent are not conducive enough to African school girls. Beside, this had a bad impact on her psyche, but despite this, she tries her best to feature among the most illustrious students. She fails to understand the headmistress’s behavior and accusatory remarks on her. Despite all the efforts she makes, she is never impressed by Tambu’s intelligence and endeavors; neither is her uncle. Instead, she makes some arbitrary comments that lead Babamukuru to question Tambu’s sense of responsibility and decency. The headmistress’s report really upsets Babamukuru:

“Babamukuru lifted my report paper clear of my interference and turned to face me. ‘Tambudzai, I am shocked,’ intoned Babamukuru. ‘I did not believe a daughter of mine – I did not believe you,’ he corrected himself, ‘after everything we have invested in you, would

²⁰⁰Tsitsi Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, op.Cit, pp. 141-142.

spoil your chance at this school and engage in such behavior!”²⁰¹

In actual fact, Babamukuru knows better than the headmistress what Tambu is capable of doing or not. But his harsh reaction, following the woman’s subversive judgments, illustrates his ‘loyalty’ to the colonial authority, for whom he has always worked. Tambu knows that her life as a female student at the school is prejudiced by her color and sex, but she still cannot understand why the headmistress harbors such accusations towards her:

*“It was one of the worst moments I had ever lived through. ... Why did the nun dislike me so much!”*²⁰²

Her soliloquy reveals her dismay: she is at her wits’ end. Her uncle has taken the headmistress’s report for granted, he does not intend to tolerate a person who wages conspiracy against the White settler. To Babamukuru, Sister Emmanuel’s report is not to be questioned; Tambu is whimsical, lazy, flat and unwilling to learn, say rebellious. As the headmistress puts it:

*“Tambudzai has a complex. This makes it difficult for her to adapt to the spirit of the Young Ladies’ College of the Sacred Heart. She believes she is above convent rules designed for the welfare of the pupils. Her inability to be part of the college causes her considerable distress. If she is not happy here, perhaps it is best to remove her. Constantly she wears a supercilious expression.”*²⁰³

Babamukuru can tolerate the White woman’s insults, but he can’t defend his niece against the headmistress’s allegations. Besides, he fully knows that his niece strove hard to be among the best students. Through this dilemma,

²⁰¹ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, op.Cit, p.88.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid, p.89.

Dangarembga explains that Tambu as well as Babamukuru suffer under the yoke of colonial power. Instead of siding with a poor girl who tries to fend for herself, he backs down and talks his niece into negotiating. In other words, he compels her to accept the unacceptable and write a letter of apology to Sister Emmanuel. Of course she cannot do otherwise as she is compelled to bear with Sister Emmanuel's disgrace, out of respect and obedience to Babamukuru.

The letter Tambu has to write denotes Babamukuru's powerlessness in front of the White people. He is as victim of the system as his niece. Deep down himself, he knows that his 'daughter' did not misbehave with the school authorities, but, since the White Headmistress is suspicious of her, because of her color, he sides with her. To show his disapproval of Tambu's so-called misbehavior towards the White authority, he tolerates the aggression and downgrades himself through the letter of apology he forces her to write. Indeed, this attitude reveals his "emasculatation" by the White man, though he is regarded as the archetype of masculinity within his own family.

Even though Tambu is young, her acceptance of such an aggression is a psychological strategy to survive in a racist community through the concept of personhood. Contrary to Tambu, Babamukuru's submissive attitude basically symbolizes alienation and cowardice. At home, he rules his family with a master's hand, almost all the females who are around him are victims of sexism. But the aggression he inflicts upon women always fires back to harm him whenever he comes to interact with the White settlers. In other words, he is always the weaker person in front of the White man, which explains his immeasurable submissiveness. The way he handles the problem with Sister Emmanuel is noteworthy: he wants to keep a high profile through the public image he shows. Thus Tambu is for Babamukuru the person to sacrifice:

“‘You will tell her (Sister Emmanuel) that you are very sorry to have caused her to write such a report!’(...) ‘You will tell her you will improve your behaviour.... You will tell Sister Emmanuel (...) that you understand why she should write the words we have read, and why you deserve them.... In the very last sentence, you will thank her for giving you these instructions as to how you can become a better young woman.’”²⁰⁴

Actually, Babamukuru is the person who is apologizing through his niece’s letter. Tambu’s words represent a way for him to reiterate his loyalty to the White man. He does not want to be ungrateful for the advantages he has benefitted from him. If Sister Emmanuel’s report is somehow a reminder to Babamukuru of the ‘sacrifice’ the White missionaries have granted him, the letter of apology is a kind of full acknowledgement of this. Indeed, he reminds her, through Tambu’s words, that he is still grateful to her as he infers that, as long as he lives, no son or daughter of his will ever question her power or dare tread on the colonial authority.

If in *The Book of Not* Dangarembga insists on her young female protagonist’s tolerance to define a self-identity in an environment mostly dominated by Whites at The Young Ladies’ College of the Sacred Heart, in *Nervous conditions* she insists more on women’s tolerance in their quest for self-identity.

In *Nervous Conditions*, personhood is also central in Dangarembga’s female characters. It impacts on people’s attitude and interactions with others. It is intrinsically related to their victimization. Since society does not favor women’s development, at times, they have to negotiate in order to survive. Thus, Dangarembga shows Shona women’s stoicism in particular and African people’s

²⁰⁴ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, op.Cit, pp.90-91.

resilience in general, regarding their condition in a male-dominated society. More often than not, the women portrayed in the novel are likely to accept their lot as this helps them partly to live ‘harmoniously’ with their men, though this does not promote them that much.

In Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*, the concept of *personhood* shapes the female characters’ ambivalent attitudes since it is all about the *self* and the *person*. The intertwining between women’s inner feelings and their public image has a great impact on the way they behave towards their oppressors. While some of them seem to be more tolerant, because of the reign of patriarchy and colonial domination, others are less tolerant, which explains the different public images both types of women put forward as psychological strategies.

For instance, female characters like Mai, Tambu’s mother and Maiguru, Babamukuru’s wife, are submissive through and through. Not only are they submissive, but on top of that, they are advocates of tolerance toward men. They talk the younger generation into being more lenient towards their men. In so doing, they empower the oppressors while weakening their peers. Mai has always reminded Tambu of her status as a woman. Many a time, she told her daughter that women should not be rebellious against men, unless they want to question traditional ideologies that represent the true African social fabric.

In fact, women like Mai and Maiguru negotiate their survival through the public image they project to their male partners and to society in general. This amounts to saying that, the subjugation women experience at an individual level is repelled and mitigated by the community’s needs and stratification which place men on top, at the expense of women. Thus, the rigid and male-oriented society ultimately compels subjugated women to be submissive. Evolving in such a compelling society, worsened by the impact of colonialism, they have to forget and forgive the most ignominious and disrespectful experiences they are subject to, regardless of their rank. A good example is Maiguru: though she is a

member of the élites, she is still under the yoke of patriarchy: tradition and colonialism.

Maiguru is the archetype of submissiveness and presumably, she has gained all the achievements of ambitious women: she is highly educated, she has immigrated to the White man's country for years and her husband holds a key position in the educational system, yet she is in complete disarray. Her *self* and her *person* are in permanent conflict. In other words, she is internally dismayed, not to say shattered and nonetheless she feigns to be happy. Actually, she is bonded to Babamukuru, but she does her best to hide it through submissiveness and her pleasure to serve him.

That is to say, Maiguru is depicted in *Nervous Conditions* like nineteenth century Victorian women. Their peculiarity in American and British literature in that century is their victimization through an uncompromising bondage to men. Besides, this has been the battlefield of the feminist literary tradition in that period. As Elaine Showalter, a pioneer of American literary criticism and a feminist, points out in her book, *A literature of Their Own: From British Women Novelists Brontë to Lessing*:

*“In the 1880s and 1890s, women writers played a central role in the formulation and popularization of feminist ideology. [...] The chivalrous vision of the sacred influence of women had been a central concept of the Victorian feminine ideal.”*²⁰⁵

To Showalter, with regard to all the prejudices women suffer, the feminists' and women writers' role cannot be other than a commitment to stop women's bondage to men. Feminist writers like Showalter, have somehow fallen into the trap of a “woman oriented-vision”. They profusely exclude men on their

²⁰⁵ Elaine Showalter, *A literature of Their Own: British Women Novelist from Brontë to Lessing*, op.Cit, pp.182-184.

social agenda. Once again, this accounts for their inflexibility towards males in general and for their intolerance, which is, once again, the bone of contention between Western feminism and African feminism. But despite all this, the common denominator of Western and African women writers remains the fight for women's subjugation in their literary discourses.

Thus, Maiguru is trapped. Her subjugation is a part of her fate and she has to endure it. Although she repents it, she cannot do otherwise. It is part of her culture. Consequently, she accepts everything for the sake of communal stability. She can be likened to Tambu's mother: they are imbued with a great sense of tolerance towards men and have a tendency to teach their daughters to be obedient. They both demonstrate the inability to break out of the inheritance of the traditional beliefs concerning them, so they are only doing their parental duty to make sure they do not go off the ramp by ignoring their status as future and submissive wives. Maiguru may be very severe towards her daughter, Nyasha, for her attitude with her father, but still the little girl remains very distant towards him.

Nyasha's case is special. Her education as a young girl is culturally mixed, i.e., British and Zimbabwean. This explains the difference between her and her mother. While she tolerates her husband's supremacy and authority, her daughter attempts to resist them. Her inability to tolerate male power is inherent in her *self* and quest for identity. She has a type of *self* that is very different from that of her mother: the latter can camouflage her inner feelings, as a subjugated woman through negotiation. She eventually manages to devise some techniques in order to hide her real feelings and emotions that enable her to create occasions and opportunities to flatter male egos. Her mother, as was the case for millions of Black men and women who had been torn from their homeland and shipped in chains to the new world some three centuries ago, had to develop some survival strategies in an oppressive environment, but Nyasha does not have the

maturity nor philosophy to accept her destiny. Her inner feelings take over any stoicism that should have enabled her to disguise her rebellious attitude towards her aggressors and condone unacceptable social injustices.

In addition, Nyasha's intolerance and rebellion against her oppressive father account for the mutual antagonism that lies between Western and African culture. The few years she spent in England as a little girl robbed her of her African cultural values that are mostly embedded in tolerance and submissiveness. Curiously enough, she resorts to "boycott" food as a means to resist her father's authority. Her refusal to eat ends up into *anorexia nervosa* before it leads to her mental breakdown.

Furthermore, if we analyze Nyasha's mental breakdown that originated from *anorexia nervosa*, we will easily understand that she cannot condone her father's power, but it also tells a lot about her failure to cope with male omnipotence. From a postcolonial perspective, the *anorexia nervosa* that knocked her down, voices a total failure of her attempt to resist her subjugation. It resulted from a culture shock; and her illness has had a negative impact on her health and school results. On top of that, she has not succeeded in challenging her father's supremacy, despite her willpower. From this perspective, we can see how the White man succeeded in "enslaving" mentally the Shona women in particular and African women in general, a phenomenon which is of no little importance for both Dangarembga and Emecheta.

Emecheta for instance evokes it in *The Joys of Motherhood*. Her heroine, Nnu Ego, has endured sad experiences for the sake of her children and husband. She has tolerated her husband's vile treatment and irresponsibility, hoping to enjoy better days in the future. The outcome of her story is dramatic, since she has eventually committed suicide. Her suicide is the result of her inability to tolerate social injustice; that is poverty, subjugation, cultural corruption, say *double colonization*. As Dangarembga fictionalizes it through Nyasha's

psychological breakdown and her failure, Emecheta depicts the same story in *The Joys of motherhood*.

By dint of tolerating a heap of injustices, Nnu Ego eventually gives in. Her suicide echoes her weakness, man's dominating power and the impact of colonialism on women. At the end of the text, Emecheta discloses her main protagonist's disappointment and failure in her quest for self-identity. At a given moment in her life, she has not been able to carry any more burdens on her shoulders. That was the climax of her subordination and final triumph of her "aggressors" over her.

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta's discourse is comparable to that of her Zimbabwean counterpart, Dangarembga, regarding the extremism of women's tolerance, which naturally leads to the female protagonists' loss in their attempt to reconcile themselves with their communities and identity. But in analyzing Dangarembga's texts, the central point remains women's and female children's survival, through the psychological strategies they put forward in tolerating social injustices. Similarly, the same themes appear in Emecheta's work.

In *Second-Class Citizen*, Adah experiences many social prejudices as a female child and a woman. The strategies she uses are not that different from Dangarembga's female protagonist. She has to be tactful in the ways she carries the burdens of gender discrimination. The strategies she resorts to in order to survive involve mostly her ability to tolerate certain unusual practices. Through this, Emecheta seems to say that women's emancipation is far from being an overnight "fight". Rather, it is a long process and often an *unfinished business*, as some advocates of women term it, which requires endurance and a good sense of personhood and tolerance. In *Second-Class Citizen*, Adah has gone through several episodic tribulations she attempts to resist through tolerance, at first.

For instance, before she could join her husband, Francis, in England she had learnt to tolerate the most humiliating experiences in her life, i.e., accepting the interference of her husband's parents in her private life. She had to accept and accommodate with the overpowering presence of Francis's parents in the way she leads her life. A good case in point is for example her self-debasement when she wanted to get her mother-in-law's blessing over an authorization to join her husband abroad. This is all the more noteworthy as, in another cultural context, say Western, she would not have "to write home about" things that thoroughly concerned her private life. But, she had to be mindful and caring about her in-laws: she did not want to offend them, and therefore, she condones their poking their nose into her own affairs.

More interestingly, when she joins her husband in England, she faces other forms of social injustices and does not give in. She falls back upon tolerance and her ability to accept life differences. The living conditions her husband puts her and her children in are indecent. Their accommodation is dehumanizing as they hurdle themselves in a tiny one-room flat. But against all odds, she takes it upon herself for the sake of her children and dignity. Once again, in England, Emecheta's heroine has to cope with her towering husband, who treats her according to Igbo people's male-chauvinistic ideologies, but she also has to bear with the new forms of social prejudices she is victim of, as a female African immigrant. Since she is left on by her own, she has to find psychological ways and means to survive the scourges that befall her.

Generally speaking, Adah has to survive the trilogy of race, class and gender, to say nothing of her husband's oppression. Through her protagonist's experience, Emecheta postulates that the race issue is one of the heaviest burdens that the man of "color" has to carry. It does not promote mankind as a whole and it foils the social harmony of any given nation. It is part and parcel of her own personal experience as an African immigrant woman in England.

Besides, Emecheta's first semi-autobiographical novel, *In The Ditch*, is much about the social setbacks she experienced as an immigrant in England. She mostly focuses on the woes she has lived regarding accommodation, poverty and racism. But, it is also about personhood and tolerance, for beyond the discrimination she experienced in the gutter, she succeeded in surviving the wreck and depression. As she puts it in her autobiographical novel, *Head Above Water* in the episode entitled *Pussy Cat Mansions*: "People looked at me as if I had gone mad. Perhaps I had. None of them could see what I was seeing"²⁰⁶

This passage shows much about what Emecheta went through, and which, according to her, is beyond her surrounding's imagination. It also evidences the author's psychological state of mind at a moment when she was torn between her *self* and her *person*. In other words, she was partly engrossed in her inner feelings, as a victim of her class, sex and race; and partly with the type of uprightness with which she had to conduct herself regarding the way she interacted with people around her.

It is the same sad experiences of her *self* that Emecheta depicts in *Second-Class Citizen* through Adah's mouthpiece. Race and gender issues are central in the text. There is no escape for Adah: as a young African woman with children, she was unable to find a flat for rent because of her color and poor status as a mother. Through the episode entitled *Sorry, No Coloureds*, Emecheta pinpoints the various predicaments her heroine comes across in England due mostly to her color: "Nearly all the notices had 'Sorry, no Coloureds' on them. Her house-hunting was made more difficult because she was black...."²⁰⁷

Fully aware that autobiography is part and parcel of the writer's life experience, one can say without being mistaken that Adah's experiences are nothing but the reflection of the author's personal disappointment about her own

²⁰⁶ Buchi Emecheta, *Head Above Water*, London, Heinemann, 1986, p.38.

²⁰⁷ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.70.

life. In fact, the text reflects her emotional confusion when she first set foot on England. Adah's anticipated personal freedom, prior to the trip, is cut short by the harsh reality and hostile environment she has to face in a different culture. She has no other alternative than accept and tolerate the racial prejudices she has to face in the White man's country; otherwise her stay in England would be impossible. On the whole, the female protagonists in Emecheta's and Dangarembga's works face the same social problems, and they apprehend them the same ways, that is through personhood and tolerance for the sake of realism.

In *Double Yoke*, the Nigerian writer keeps the same stance. The main protagonist, Nko, encounters countless impediments in her pursuit of happiness. Her relationship with Ete Kamba is marked by rises and falls as the text is fraught with emotional and physical violence. From this perspective, the book undoubtedly leads the reader to wonder about the kind of attitudes and devices used by the female protagonist to maintain herself in such a male-dominated society deeply shaken by colonialism.

As a matter of fact, women have to conceive strategies and attitudes to eschew the various impediments that come their ways. Nko is no exception, her case is even more complex than that of the above-mentioned females, as she is haunted by her unreserved ambition. She has to be very meticulous about the way she interacts with people. At times, she has to be patient and tolerant towards men, for the sake of survival, but also for her own interest.

Ete Kamba's love affair with Nko is very illustrative in this respect. He wants his "would-be" wife to embody both traditional and modern values. He thoroughly believes in his customs for the wife he wants to marry: he seeks a woman with unreserved submission to him. To be certain that the girl he would marry is a virgin, he almost rapes her by the wall. He doubts her virginity and becomes sarcastic towards her, inflicting her both physical and emotional violence:

“(…) *I went to check There was not a drop of blood. You are a prostitute, a whore, and you put on this air of innocence as if you were something else. A whore, a shameless prostitute.*”²⁰⁸

Paradoxically, after what happened by the wall, Nko has allowed Ete Kamba many a time to know better by letting him sleep with her again. The fact that she accepts to tolerate Ete Kamba’s treatment, suggests that she loves him, but on the other hand, it shows her determination not to lose him or quarrel with him, and therefore she gives up and allows him to get what he wants:

“*She has allowed Ete Kamba to take her again He was desperate, he was searching for the virginal blood his mother and friends had talked to him so much about He dug, he groped then he despaired.*”²⁰⁹

Through this passage, Emecheta castigates women’s naïvety regarding men. Nko had to learn from the first aggression she suffered from Ete Kamba, and now she allows the same thing to happen again. Emecheta associates here women’s tolerance with sheer naïveté, but she also parallels the same tolerance with men’s pervasive violence upon them. The first so-called sexual intercourse Ete Kamba had with Nko by the wall did not suffice him though it was a sexual assault. However, he must make a second trial to be certain that she is truly virgin.

In the light of all this, Emecheta and Dangarembga show that, generally, women perhaps need to accept and tolerate certain social prejudices, in some situations, only to live harmoniously with men. The rhetoric of their oppression under the yoke of male domination and colonialism will be realistic, only when they develop psychological strategies that help them survive social pressure.

²⁰⁸ Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, op.Cit, p.59.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, p.60.

However, their so-called pacific resistance and their fight for their psychological survival will be fruitless if it is done in isolation from the rest of society.

IV.2 The impact of parental love on progenies

Families are part and parcel of the social fabric and its balance. In her article, “It’s all in the Family: Intersection of Gender, Race and Nation”, Patricia Hill Collins defines the traditional family as:

*“Formed through a combination of marital and blood ties, ideal families consist of heterosexual couples that produce their own biological children. Such families have a specific authority structure; namely, a father-head earning an adequate family wage, a stay-at-home wife and children.”*²¹⁰

It is clear that the head persons of any given family are parents, and children represent their greatest joy. Traditional families are characterized by gender roles. But if the distribution of roles in the family is not well-balanced, it will give way to an exclusive authority and supremacy to the father and a secondary role to the wife. Of course, this ultimately has an impact on the latter concerning her status and her authority in the family, particularly in African societies where customary laws and patriarchy empower men, at the expense of women. But, the focus here is the impact of parental love on children, particularly on female children in the reconciliation process of the social prejudices they experience. This is important since families should embody social equity in the way members are treated.

Analyzing traditional families’ ideals in the United States, Patricia H. Collins points out that members within the same families should have the same privileges and rights:

²¹⁰ Patricia Hill Collins, “*It’s All in the Family : Intersection of Gender, Race and Gender*”, *Border Crossings: Multicultural and postcolonial Feminist Challenges to Philosophy*, Vol. 13, No. 3, (part 2) (summer 1998), p.62.

*“In a situation in which notions of belonging to a family remain important to issues of responsibility and accountability, individuals feel that they ‘owe’ something to, and are responsible for, members of their families (...). Even when family members lack merit, they are entitled to benefits (...) women are expected to perform much of the domestic labor that keeps the family going, whereas men’s duties lie in providing financial support.”*²¹¹

Collins argues that the family is generally a place where social injustice rules supreme. In other words, once somebody feels in them a sense of belonging to a given family, they must be imbued with moral values, that ensure sympathy with the other family members. She believes that there should be no excuse concerning the execution of family obligations. To her, females take the lion’s share in all duties relating to domesticity, nurturing the children and taking care of their husbands while males’ duties are restricted to providing a living. This means that the evolution of the females in their families is not always easy, particularly when they vow to break through the social subjugation that befalls them.

If we agree that, in any given society, parents represent the family pillars, it is essential to ask the form of relationships between them and their female children and to query the impact of parental affection on the progenies’ condition, on their self-development and their quest for identity. To that effect, we must articulate the analysis on the female protagonist’s relationships with her biological parents by examining the following points: father-daughter love and mother-daughter love in relation to the construction of the female individual’s

²¹¹ Patricia Hill Collins, “*It’s All in the Family : Intersection of Gender, Race and Gender*”, *Border Crossings: Multicultural and postcolonial Feminist Challenges to Philosophy*, Vol. 13, No. 3, (part 2) (summer 1998), p.66.

self-identity. This will surely bring to light, among other points, the extent to which parents are socially committed to their daughter's subjugation and struggle.

Families are central issues in women's writings. They are the starting point of people's construction. The family concept is clearly depicted in Emecheta's and Dangarembga's novels. Since parents are at the top of any given family system, their responsibilities towards their progenies are essential for the latter's development. The stories of the two writers' protagonists are intrinsically related to their parents' charisma. In the following lines, we shall study the type of relationships between parents and their daughters, their responsibilities in their children's nightmarish experiences and how far they can go in helping them in their social struggle.

As a matter of fact, parents love their children more than anything. But more often than not, in Igbo and Shona societies in particular and in Africa in general, the individual does not act solely, but he/she generally acts in conformity with the community's principles, though some people may not respect this communal peculiarity at their own peril. On the whole, in traditional African families, the relationships between parents and their children are based upon love and respect. But the extent to which each parent is socially committed to his or her female child's emancipation is generally defined by the type of social structure the community abides by.

The Igbo and Shona societies are governed by patriarchal norms, with a great sense of masculinity, with no power left to women. The status of parents has a great impact on the ways they interact with their children. These are some of the root causes that account for the inequalities of gender roles within traditional families and the father's absolute authority on his wife.

The attitude of parents towards their daughters is of paramount importance in their development. Presumably, the place female children hold for their fathers is comparable with that of their mothers. Many a time, the names female children bear are reminiscent of their grandmothers, from their father's lineage. In her autobiography, Emecheta explains how she owes her name from her father:

*“My father decided on Onyebuchi, meaning ‘Are you my god?’ The pet name Nnenna, meaning ‘father’s mother’, was not recorded as he and only he could call me that
.....²¹²*

But, even though Emecheta attempts to explain her attachment to her father in *The Bride Price* through her female protagonist, Aku-nna, she mourns his death, the text does not show her father's commitment to her social construction. Rather, he has been more committed to the heroine's brother and his education. During his lifetime, he has always longed for the day Aku-nna would come of age and get married, because of the bride wealth she would bring along. But, he does not think of improving his own daughter's condition at all.

Once more, in *Second-Class Citizen*, Emecheta describes her relationship with her father through her main character. When a young girl, Adah seemed to be in friendly terms with him, but this does not entail any commitment from her father's part. Instead, she hints at his carelessness for her condition and future development. Emecheta gives details about her father's soft implication in her future, through the episode entitled, *childhood*. The type of relationship she had with her father is skin-deep and it does not have a great impact on her status and the building of her self-identity. In the novel, she insists on her heroine's father's lack of commitment to her schooling. This is illustrated by the package he left after his death for her brother's education.

²¹² Buchi Emecheta, *Head Above Water*, London, Heinemann, A.W.S, 1986, p.11.

Although Adah's father seems lenient towards her, her mother has a different attitude concerning her development. As a female individual, her personality is deeply affected by the type of relationship she has with her mother. This is quite understandable as mothers are carriers first and foremost: they are biologically closer to their children than fathers are. But, the fact that they are carriers does not actually mean that they always take side with their children, though they are gifted with the well-known *maternal instinct*.

Therefore, to Adah, her mother is not fully committed to her development, nor does she help her overcome the hurdle of life. Many a time, she is at a loss in the midst of her endeavors and quest for identity, and does not see her mother's support and presence to help her solve the different problems she faces, which Emecheta implicitly denounces. To some extent, she hints at the irresponsibility and carelessness of her heroine's mother.

When young Adah needed her mother's support in her schooling, the latter was never around her. Emecheta describes her as a careless mother who is not really involved in her daughter's life. While she expresses concern for ways and means to find a slate and join her age group to school, her mother confides in gossiping with her friends. Besides, if she succeeds in pulling herself out of the house to go to school, it is simply because she escaped her mother's vigilance, which imparts her absent-mindedness, negligence and, to a certain extent, her motherly irresponsibility:

“Before she left the room, one of Ma's innumerable friends came for a visit, and the two women were so engrossed in their chit-chat that they did not notice that when Adah slipped past them.”²¹³

²¹³ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.10.

Emecheta shifts the emphasis from the mother's irresponsibility to the teacher's help, Mr Cole, in comparison with Adah's mother. The teacher sees in Adah a desperate girl trying to fend for herself through education. Even if Mr Cole does not say it plainly to Adah's parents, he takes them as fully accountable for her schooling. He thinks that the little girl is a victim of neglect, a child who is discriminated against the basic right to education. He pities her, and the first thing that crosses his mind is to give her food before talking to the police about what happened.

Likewise, the police authorities have the same reactions as the teacher concerning the type of relationship Adah's mother has with her daughter. They believe that she is neglectful, otherwise, the little girl would not manage to nurture her plan and leave the house without her notice. Secondly, they question her involvement in her daughter's will to learn. To cap it all, they accuse her of irresponsibility and laziness:

“She was a great talker, very careless, otherwise Adah would not have been able to slip away as she had. Women were like that. They sat in the house, ate, gossiped and slept. They would not even look after their children.”²¹⁴

Adah's mother is absent in her self-construction, just like her father. Instead of getting involved in her life to help her iron out the difficulties encountered, she teaches her to accept all the biased treatment inflicted upon her by patriarchy. More interestingly, she tries to convince her to accept all the social injustices that she would face in her future life. In actual fact, Adah's mother prepares her daughter for the worst.

²¹⁴ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.14.

The climax of their relationship occurs after the death of Adah's father. The Ofili family is profusely shaken and the children are scattered, and her brother is sponsored by one of Pa's cousins while she joins her mother who is inherited by her late husband's brother. A closer study of the whole matter ultimately reveals a conspiracy of sorts in her subjugation. The new situation her mother finds herself in actually alienates her more than her own mother. What really beats Emecheta's heroine is her mother's indifference towards her condition. As she puts it, the relationship she has with her new Pa is almost improper: he is domineering and oppressive. She refers to him as a master, for she feels *enslaved* by him and cheated by life, when her mother is no more than a shadow of her former self.

As a result of her mother's lack of commitment to improve her social condition and fight gender inequality, Adah starts to be pessimistic about women in general. She is repeatedly disappointed by her so much so that she questions her own value as a female. As she puts it:

*"Somebody said somewhere that our characters are usually formed early in life. Yes, that somebody is right. Women still made Adah nervous. They had a way of sapping her self-confidence."*²¹⁵

After due consideration of the relationship between Adah and her mother, it appears that she seems to have failed to challenge the yokes of tradition and colonial power. Through her story, Emecheta depicts the betrayal of the female fight. As a young girl in quest for self-identity within an alienating society, a female child needs her parents' support more than anything. But surprisingly enough, her mother, whose role is of paramount importance in her development, is not ready to help her reach her goals. In the case of *Second-Class Citizen*, Emecheta depicts Mai as somebody conspirating with her "new father" to ensure

²¹⁵ Buchi Emecheta, *Secon-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, pp.11-12.

her daughter's submission and bondage to him. This is disappointing as her role as a mother should have consisted in preparing her daughter to surviving the tribulations of life. But a reading of Emecheta's text from a traditional and colonial perspectives naturally accounts for the heroine's mother's pessimism.

Double colonization does not give a voice to women as it imposes upon them conventions that nip in the bud their self-confidence and worldly-mindedness that move away from feministic standpoint. As Judith Kegan Gardiner puts in her essay: "*Mind Mother: Psychoanalysis and Feminism*":

*"The old double standard judged a man's honour by his deeds but a woman's only by her chaste not-doing; the new double standard still tests men's courage and commitment in the world, while censoring women, not for sexual liberty, but for failures of maternal responsibilities."*²¹⁶

It has to be noted here that, women's lack of commitment and responsibilities towards their children can have an impact on their credibility as writers. Some critics, particularly males, have viewed women's writings as worthless, unrealistic and rather idealistic, if any. To them, since they have failed to fulfill their roles as mothers at the family level, they do not deserve authorship, to say nothing of credibility. But most African and pioneer women writers take this attitude as discriminatory and sexist. As Ama Ata Aidoo spells it out:

"(...) on our continent, millions of women and girls have been, and are being prevented from realizing their full potentials as human beings, whether it be the possibility of being writers and artists, doctors and other professionals,

²¹⁶ Judith Kegan Gardiner: "*Mind Mother: Psychoanalysis and Feminism*", in *Making a Difference : Feminism Literary Criticism*, op.Cit, p125.

*athletes or anything else outside the traditional roles assigned to women.*²¹⁷

If Judith K. Gardiner accounts for women writers' incredibility as a result of their failure to meet males' expectations regarding their progenies, the Ghanaian woman writer thinks differently. To her, the discrimination women writers have experienced originates from sexism and the chauvinistic stance of traditional African societies, and not their irresponsibility in the way they treat their progenies, if they have any.

Besides, women writers' literary discourses revolve around parenthood and gender roles. As women writers insist on the role mothers play in African societies, they show their concerns and commitment to their subordination while reminding their readers of the impact they have on children's development in particular and on the society in general.

In *Second-Class Citizen*, Emecheta tells the story, through Adah, with a tinge of irresponsibility from the protagonist's mother. She seems to accuse her mother, but beyond this, insists on the contribution Mai could bring to her daughter, let alone her father.

In *Double Yoke*, Emecheta revisits the issue of parental love: the relationships between parents and their progenies and the impacts on their personal development. While *Second-Class Citizen* is a depiction of the main protagonist's life from her early age up to her coming of age, her motherhood and her quest for self-identity, *Double Yoke* evokes the protagonists' lives in a country which is at the height of its economic growth, social and political change. The way the country is moving into modernization colludes with tradition to create hybrid characters. But, the question one ultimately has to ask is how are children and women treated in their families, and what is the parents'

²¹⁷ Ama Ata Aidoo : "To be an African Woman Writer-an overview and a Detail", in *Criticism and Ideology*, op.Cit, p.156.

contribution to their development. This leads us to focus on parents and their commitment to their children's future.

The question is relevant, but it requires a deep scrutiny since *Double Yoke* intertwines with the impact of colonialism on the traditional values that characterize Igbo people. In her essay: "*Double-Think in Buchi Emecheta's Double Yoke*", Maria Vidal Grau postulates that:

*"In a rapidly-changing, independent Nigeria, communities are being placed under increasing pressure to transform traditional institutions and behaviour patterns into ones better adapted to the exigencies of Western social systems whose market economies and capitalist system depend on high social mobility and higher education."*²¹⁸

Maria V. Grau's analysis of Emecheta's text provides two perspectives: the disruptive dimension of traditional institutions and the stakes of modernity. She hints that the emergence of African countries has come along with some cultural side-effects that have deeply transformed the social order. She explains further that the dismantlement of traditional institutions gave birth to a new Western system. This amounts to saying that, together with modernity, people are expected to leave the rural area for big cities, using education as a pathway to obtain high ranking positions in society. With a mind-set focused on going into exile, families are impoverished, while big cities become demanding and alienating, and this will undoubtedly alter family relationships and parents' roles towards their progenies. Worse, the balance sheet of colonialism is thoroughly prejudicial to the Africans as it degraded the social function of families. In his essay, "*The Changing Roles of Women in Ndebele Fiction*", Tommy Matshkayile-Ndlovu studies how the Ndebele people, one of the most popular

²¹⁸ Maria Vidal Grau : "*Double-Think in Buchi Emecheta's Double Yoke*" *Many Sundry Wits Gathered Together*, 1996, p.346.

tribes in Zimbabwe after the Shona, witnessed the scattering and disintegration of families following colonialism:

“The coming of colonialism upset the traditional set-up by driving men away from their families to the city, where they tried to find work in order to provide food for their families instead of laboring in the cornfields. The separation of men from their families was designed and implemented by the colonial rulers and not by the African men This meant that young people, both female and male, could no longer rely on their parents to satisfy their material needs, instead they had to fend for themselves by seeking employment from the colonial masters.”²¹⁹

Tommy M. Ndlovu’s analysis is in line with Emecheta’s and Dangarembga’s views on colonialism. Both women writers assume that it disturbed the social stability of Africans, altering families and parents’ roles. If the Zimbabwean writer, Tommy M. Ndlovu, focuses on parents’ primary roles, which is to guarantee their progenies the basic needs for a living, such as food and health, Emecheta and Dangarembga go even further: they question the implications of parents in their children’s development. In other words, since female children are particularly prejudiced in their own Shona and Ibogo societies, parents should play a key role in their mental equilibrium. But surprisingly enough, the type of relationship they tie with children are often superfluous.

In *Double Yoke*, Emecheta insists on the rapidly-changing Nigeria; how the metropolitan economic system collides with the neo-colonial system to give birth to imperialism. The new economic and capitalist systems are antagonistic

²¹⁹ Tommy Matshakayile-Ndlovu, “The Changing Roles of Women in *siNdebele Fiction*”, in *Zimbabwean Transitions: Essays on Zimbabwean Literature in English, Ndebele and Shona*, edited by Mbongeni Z. Malaba and Geoffrey V. Davis, Radopi, New York, 2007, p.93.

with the essential “socialism” that characterized the African continent. Emecheta’s text shows the new prerogatives like high education which the system imposes upon her people.

This is what explains the movement of people from the countryside to the city. In *Double Yoke*, the protagonists cannot do otherwise; Ete Kamba and Nko happen to be in an epoch when Nigeria is caught in a typical capitalist system that requires highly qualified people to run the country. Even people who belong to the middle-class need a minimum literacy to be eligible. Consequently, some people like Ete Kamba and Nko need to further their studies to become eligible for the job market. Ironically, university life is not that easy for them. Once they move from the village to the city, the campus functions like a global fresco of all types of sordid experiences befalling students, particularly females.

Basically, Nko’s instability, and even Ete Kamba’s, stem from their parents: their ways of life and outlooks on the world are very different from that of their children. They are both dismayed, but their parents’ implication is questioned. They are at the forefront of what looks like materialism, resulting from the collision of the Western economy marked by its capitalist system and traditional African systems. Emecheta’s protagonists are in a social context thoroughly defined by materialism, in which they have to struggle daily for their own advancement. But in the midst of their quest for identity, they happen to be victims of modernism and the spirit of rampant competition among people.

Although the main protagonists are at a loss, Emecheta implicitly lays the blame on their parents who seem to turn a deaf ear to their progenies’ appeal. Worse, she accuses parents of tempting them into corruption, if need be, for the sake of money. For instance, Nko is very close to her mother. From the way they interact and confess to each other, one can say that there is mutual respect, love and sympathy between them. But that love does not suffice as the mother is not fully involved in her daughter’s self-construction and happiness. Her lack of

commitment is due to her social status: she is an obedient and submissive woman, not ready to challenge her husband's authority. Her "power" is too limited for her to take actions or make decisions on her daughter's future. She just gives a few hints to her daughter as to what she has to do to see her dream come true, and she stops there.

Many a time, Nko has confessed to her mother her ambiguous feelings concerning her life ambition: she wants to be submissive and modern. The latter listens to her warily, but once again, with no concrete actions. Instead, she reminds her of her sex as a handicap and a disadvantage that work against her ambition. She always recalls her past to show her daughter how things used to be and how they are now:

*"When I was your age, all I was thinking of was how to go to the fattening room and make myself round and beautiful for your father. I did not have to sit up night after night with no sleep. I did not have to eat just oranges to keep myself thin. I did not even have to look for a husband. Now you have this new thing, this made education for women and yet still, you want to have everything we had (...) it is going to be difficult."*²²⁰

The discussion between Nko and her mother shows the former's despair. But her mother always reminds her of her role as a woman. Judging from the way she talks to her shows that she is in conformity with traditional values which empower men at the expense of women. Furthermore, she views her daughter's education as something odd. As far as she is concerned, she cannot prevent herself from highlighting the apparent confusion in which Nko finds herself. Despite her education, she manifests a strong will to follow her mother's footsteps in becoming a traditional wife. She is obviously caught between two

²²⁰ Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, op.Cit, p.94.

different worlds. According to Igbo tradition, not only should women be submissive, but their roles as women also require them to bring up their children, particularly the female ones, to be in line with social precepts based on total obedience to men. It is this state of mind that leads her to always talk to her daughter that way. The passage is therefore informative, as it denotes the rigidness of traditional beliefs and customs.

When she deals with traditional women, Emecheta sends her readers back to the Victorian period in literature in nineteenth century England. The literary tradition that coincides with this period is wholly domesticated. That is to say, a literature that aimed at praising domesticity: the family and the domestic values. Victorian literature portrays women's servitude: a woman's ultimate role is to please her man and raise her children. As Nko's mother says, they have devoted their time and energy to take care of their aesthetics only to please their husbands. In contrast with the capitalist system, where there is a rapid expansion of technology, materialism did not rule supreme during the Victorian period, and writers cursed its worship. "*The citizen of today's Welfare State owes much to the protests of Victorian writers against the tyranny of wealth.*"²²¹

In *Double Yoke*, materialism is highlighted as the end result of colonialism and modernism. The rapidly-changing society robs people of their common sense. To Nko's mother, the issue of education is two-fold: it is culturally destructive, yet, it is the only alternative to material acquisition. She is aware of the new social context in which her daughter is under the sway of a double oppressive yoke. But, once more, she cannot go far as making the choice for her. Her position is ambivalent. She reminds her of her powerlessness, her condition and limits, the way Dangarembga's female protagonist is depicted. On

²²¹ Desmond Pacey, *Our Literature Heritage*, Canadian, The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1967, p.317.

that score, their mothers' contribution to the building of self-identity is totally inefficient.

Unlike the African-American writer, Zora Neale Hurston, in her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on The Road*, she describes her rise from poverty in the rural South to a prominent place among the leading artists and intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance. She reminds us of how her mother, Lucy Ann Potts, has been an inspiration for her. As a matter of fact, that mother reverberates throughout her entire autobiography, as she keeps the whole family together through motherly love and optimism. Lucy has always encouraged her daughter to be optimistic in life and to achieve her educational goals. As the writer humourously acknowledges it:

*“Mama exhorted her children at every opportunity to ‘jump at de sun’. We might not land on the sun, but at least we would get off the ground.”*²²²

Zora Neale Huston reveals the support and optimism she has always benefitted from her mother, she still remembers her encouragements as fundamental in her construction. This type of optimism seems to carry Zora Neale through both her personal and professional life as a committed writer.

Yet again, in *Double Yoke*, the heroine does not enjoy the same support from her mother. Her ambition is jeopardized by her pessimism and confinement to traditional values, as she had not been taught to be optimistic contrary to Zora Neale's story. In fact, an ambitious attempt from Emecheta's heroine is seen like an offence to tradition.

Besides, the several times that Nko has come to see her mother for moral support when she is at a loss, the latter is indistinct. It is plain that she wants to get out of poverty with her daughter's education as an alternative, but she knows

²²² Zora Neale Huston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, New York, Harper perennial, 1942, p.13.

that Nko cannot reach her objective unscathed, yet, she does not help her fix the problem in which she is. That is why her burning desire to succeed leads her into Professor Ikot's arms. If she wants to get her degrees, she will have to yield to the professor's sexual inclinations. As a result, she will lose the man she has always loved, Ete Kamba. On the other hand, if she repeals his demands, she keeps her man, but the fly in the ointment is that she will not probably get her degrees, and she wants both worlds: to be a submissive and accomplished traditional woman and a modern literate one. Thus, she wants her mother to be more distinct and pragmatic and help her find a solution to her problem, for she is at her wits' end: "*Oh please mother, help me.*"²²³

Instead of helping her daughter overcome what gnaws at her heart, her mother eschews the matter. She asks her to resort to pray, which suggests that Nko cannot count on her. It is a rather stoical way from her part to sympathize with her daughter, but also shows her weakness, and to a certain extent, her lack of determination in taking a firm stance to fight for her daughter:

*"I am sure Jesus Christ who said that all those who carry heavy yokes should come to Him, will help you. I think you should go to Him in prayer. Because daughter, you know what you are under, you are under a double yoke. So you need a stronger shoulder with which to carry it."*²²⁴

Nko's mother admits that as a woman, she does not have the required power and stamina to withstand the yoke under which her daughter finds herself, neither can she brave any superior authority for her sake.

Like Emecheta, the implication of parents is central in Dangarembga's text. The socio-economic context is the same in their works. In the case of *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*, the context also coincides with a

²²³ Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, op.Cit, p.94.

²²⁴ Ibid.

rapidly-changing Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. Although the historical context in Dangarembga's texts chiefly starts from the liberation war onwards, they echo the transitional period with all its setbacks. The social order is upset with colonialism as a main cause. This has a great impact on the integrity of families since it dismantled their social balance. With the new context and content of authority, women become even more bonded to men. They spend lesser and lesser time at home, because of the frantic search for jobs in the mines or in big towns. As a result, husbands become more demanding towards their wives and female children. Analyzing colonialism in Africa and its impacts, the Guanese historian, Walter Rodney assumes that with the advent of colonialism, women's roles have relatively degraded:

*“What happened to African women under colonialism is that the social, religious, constitutional, and political privileges and rights disappeared, while the economic exploitation continued and was often intensified.... Because the division of labor according to sex was frequently disrupted.”*²²⁵

Rodney converges with Emecheta and Dangarembga on this point, for both writers insist on the social and cultural transformations that have stemmed from colonialism, to say nothing of the exacerbation and severity of the economic conditions. Under such an unprecedented context, the status of African women naturally collapsed.

Furthermore, Rodney gives more details in his analysis and maintains that the quick change in women's roles and statuses is mainly caused by the impoverishment of the continent and the scarcity of job opportunities. He explains that women were given more power and privileges in traditional Africa

²²⁵ Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, op.Cit, p.227.

than in modern times before the capitalist system brought sexism into the job market:

*“It (the economic exploitation) was intensified because the division of labor according to sex was frequently disrupted. Traditionally, African men did the heavy labor of felling trees, clearing land, building houses.... When they (men) were required to leave their farms to seek employment, women remained behind burdened with every task necessary for the survival of themselves, the children, and even the men as far as foodstuffs were concerned.”*²²⁶

In Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*, the writer portrays women's precarious situation. They have to fight with all their might to bring their families out of poverty. This is understandable since the country is entirely ruled by White colonists. But the advent of women's self-development is uncertain in such social conditions because of bad colonial policies. Under the twin scourges of tradition and colonialism, women writers portray their characters' exploitation and discrimination. But they do not stop there for the sake of consistency, their commitment leads them to question parents' responsibilities and duties in the process of children's development. This is surely one of the reasons why Dangarembga expatiates on the relationships between parents and female children in her work.

In *Nervous Conditions*, female characters are at a loss in the midst of their self-construction. They need more than ever their parents' support to face up difficulties. That is to say, reconciliation with their parents could essentially help them be mentally strong in their quest for identity and social development. The book carries more tension than parental love. We chiefly focus here on the main

²²⁶ Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, op.Cit, p.227.

female protagonists' (Tambu and Nyasha) relationships with their parents so as to study Dangarembga's standpoint on the issue.

In her novels, Dangarembga focuses on the lineage of the Sigauke families, particularly on her female protagonists', Tambu and Nyasha. Since creative writing has a close relationship with the history of the world and human condition, the story of the Shona families is mostly woven from her own life story. The main events are set within the two girls' families, but emphasis is mostly laid on parenthood. Tambu's family opens the plot; they are struck by the sudden death of her elder brother, Nhamo. This event is central, for the fruitful information it bears. The interesting point about it is that Nhamo was not with his parents when the event occurred. He was at the mission for educational purposes, following Babamukuru's decision. If almost everybody agrees that Western education is fundamental in achieving social, economic and cultural freedom, Tambu's mother objects to that. While Nyasha sees this as alienating, Tambu's mother qualifies it as *mad education* or *miseducation*.

To Mai (Tambu's mother), Babamukuru is a perfect match with evil since, to her, he is fully responsible for the "Westernization" of her children. On top of that she suspects him of always attempting to snatch her children away from the family to the corrupt world of the mission and all that it stands for. Naturally, in her quest for self-development, Tambu is offered to take over his brother's place at the mission, following his death. This moment marks the beginning of hatred between her mother and Babamukuru, but also between mother and daughter.

This is all the more true as the moment Tambu leaves the homestead to the mission is depicted as a bitter experience for her mother to condone. The way her son was snatched from her by death occurred when she little expected it. Worse, she had not finished mourning his death when Babamukuru decided again to offer her daughter a better chance at the mission. She feels cheated by life and her own daughter, for never did she expect that she would leave her for

Babamukuru. The fact that the traditional and submissive woman attempts with all her might to resist the Western culture and eventually succumbs to it, symbolizes the collapse of African tradition and the triumph of Western culture through education. Mai's mental breakdown partly accounts for the Western capitalist system which is rampant, while altering the social fabric of Africans into a corrupt society where materialism prevails.

Mai's failure as a mother is evidenced by her inability to challenge Babamukuru's authority, a character Dangarembga uses as the symbol of patriarchy and male chauvinism. And to a certain extent, Babamukuru also reflects the British colonizer's authority and his "mad education". He always manages to impose his willpower upon his family. His interference in Tambu's family affairs is very often perilous for her mother's progenies. All this explains the hatred between the latter and Babamukuru. Things come to a climax between the two the minute she learns that her daughter will be uprooted from the homestead for the mission to get educated. For a mother who wants her daughter's happiness, this offer might be seen like good news, but to her, it is synonymous with separation and her daughter's initiation into a corrupt world.

In the light of this, Mai cannot sympathize with her daughter in all the prejudices she undergoes. Her 'dislocation' to the mission has changed their relationship and her grief wells up into hatred so much so that she starts to feel contempt for her daughter:

*"My mother's anxiety was real. In the week before I left she ate hardly anything, not for lack of trying, and when she was able to swallow something it lay heavy in her stomach. By the time I left she was so haggard and gaunt she could hardly walk to the fields, let alone work in them."*²²⁷

²²⁷ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, pp.56-57.

On hearing that Tambu would leave her for the mission, Mai is flabbergasted. She is a woman too powerless to interfere in decision making. This problem is all the more delicate as the decision is made by her husband's elder brother, Babamukuru. It betokens that women are second-nature: whatever the matter, even the most private decisions are always settled between men without their say. Therefore, when she hears the news, she cannot directly challenge him, simply because he is the pinnacle of authority and power. Instead, she marches to her husband, Jeremiah, to complain. This is very telling, for in actual fact, it reveals all her frustration and her disapproval of Babamukuru's decision and so-called generosity:

*“‘You, Jeremiah,’ she said, and she called him Jeremiah infrequently. ‘ You, Jeremiah, are you mad? Have you eaten some wide shrub that has gone to your head? I think so, otherwise how could you stand there and tell me to send my child to a place of death, the place where my first living child died!’ ”*²²⁸

This passage exemplifies what Tambu's mother would never dare say to Babamukuru bluntly. She complains to her husband because he is not as categorical and powerful as Babamukuru. Presumably, it is much more comfortable for Mai to come up against her irresponsible husband than Babamukuru, for she knows that her objection to the decision will certainly not “carry much weight” before him.

As the story unfolds, the relationship between Tambu and her mother becomes tense. Following the day Tambu leaves the family homestead, her mother starts to hate her. The new context in which she finds herself does not make things easier, simply because they happen to meet only on rare occasions, particularly at Christmas or on summer vacation, that is, when Babamukuru

²²⁸ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, pp.56-57

comes along with his family. These rare occasions should be normally good opportunities for the two to strengthen their ties, particularly those between mother and daughter. But surprisingly enough, they are chosen as good opportunities to rake up the past.

Very often than not, Mai accuses her daughter, Tambu, of betrayal. She cannot forgive her her decision to part with her. The day she chose to live with Babamukuru marked the final break between herself and her daughter. What is more, she thinks that her lack of education and poverty are used against her. She considers the departure of her daughter as ungrateful of her: she might be poor, unschooled and shunned by people, but never would she expect her eldest daughter to leave her for another woman, i.e., Maiguru, even one who could offer a more sophisticated and promising world. This partly explains the tension between Tambu's mother and Maiguru:

“She (Maiguru)-is-a-witch... because first she killed my son and now she has taken Tambudzai away from me. Oh, yes, Tambudzai. Do you think I haven't seen the way you follow her around,' she spat at me fiercely, 'doing all her dirty work for her,(...) You think your mother is so stupid she won't see Maiguru has turned you against me with her money and her White ways....”²²⁹

Actually, the chief impediment to Tambu's mother is patriarchy and the transition from traditional mores to Western rules. Her main troubles arise from the imperative decisions Babamukuru makes concerning her family, which she cannot fight because of his power. As she cannot confront him she then lavishes her anger out on someone else. She picks on Maiguru for three main reasons: Maiguru is educated, whereas she is not, she is “rich” and to her, Maiguru is solely responsible for the death of her eldest son, Nhamo. Tambu's mother is

²²⁹ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, pp.140-142.

scared by death and consumed with the fear of the fatal attraction of “Englishness” and the war raging in the country, and which, in her eyes, are devouring her family one by one.

Surprisingly enough, Maiguru is surely educated with a decent job, but she is not truly powerful and emancipated, as Mai might think. As a woman, she is trapped just the way she is. Furthermore, her education only serves to make her feel more resentful of her entrapment. She is still subject to the demands of her husband and the odd customs of her community. Even if she knows and understands the “European ways”, years of ingrained culture and patriarchy force her to keep silent and obedient.

What is more, Mai sees in Babamukuru and Maiguru the embodiments of Western culture and modernity. Colonial education is the device the colonizer falls back upon to corrupt people in particular and the society in general. Naturally, she wants to protect her daughter from the corrupt world: going to the mission is synonymous with acculturation and death. Such is the ultimate reason for the White man’s presence in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. That is why she is so sarcastic with Jeremiah and Maiguru, simply because they candidly condone Babamukuru’s aggression. Mai’s secondary social status, which Dangarembga evokes through her narrator, foretells colonialism as a vector of modernity and change, at the expense of tradition. In such a context, the individual has to make the good choice of joining the elites. Tambu has chosen to live with Maiguru at the mission because this opens an avenue to the new world for her, and even for her family. But, the gap between her and her mother does not facilitate her self-construction as a female individual who encounters many obstacles in her quest.

Beyond what happens between Tambu and her mother, there is great respect and mutual love, for each of them is prejudiced. She cares much about her daughter, the way the latter does, but they cannot go over that. Both are under the pressure of the Shona traditional mores that prevent women’s

emancipation and development. The fact that Mai is apprehensive about the ‘mad’ Western education at the mission that saps the traditional mores which safeguard social balance and the future generation’s security, suggests that she holds a particular concern for Tambu, even though she is powerless.

Likewise, Tambu is frustrated by her mother’s social and psychological condition, though she is still young and vulnerable. Her commitment to school is a good example of this awareness. Moreover, she morally rejects Babamukuru’s decision to celebrate her mother’s wedding at the church. She views it as immoral and humiliating, even if her uncle and chief of the family looks at it as the best religious pathway to cleanse all her father’s sins after several years of marriage:

*“Babamukuru did not know how I had suffered over the question of that wedding. He did not know how my mind had raced and spun and ending up splitting into two disconnected entities, that had long, frightening arguments with each other....”*²³⁰

This passage shows the young girl’s attachment to her mother. She is deeply concerned about male power, poverty, sexism and her duty towards her mother, family and herself, but she cannot go further in her reflection or take any rational action: her determination to change her status is still in its infancy stage and Babamukuru is too powerful to be confronted. Nevertheless, she decides not to take part in the celebration, which illustrates her sympathy for her family. The misunderstanding between Tambu and her mother mainly stems from the fruitlessness of their efforts to solve the social problems they both face.

²³⁰ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.167.

While in *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu feels the overwhelming power of her brother, Nhamo, in *The Book of Not*, Nyasha, one of the female protagonists is also oppressed by her father. From an early age, she is frustrated by the latter's devastating power. Consequently, the relationship with him is far from being tender. Instead, it is based upon hatred and "fight". Babamukuru's dominance always prevails in every situation in which she happens to confront him. In fact, Nyasha cannot stand his power, which is why she is firm with him even when he tries to be kind. For instance, when her school results turned out to be satisfactory, she did not care much about it when her father attempted to congratulate her:

*"When Babamukuru showed Nyasha her result slip, we discovered she had obtained distinctions in all three of subjects (...) Babamukuru now attempted to smile at his daughter But Nyasha did not allow this and discouraged her father by scowling."*²³¹

This is very illustrative of the father-daughter relationship. Not only does it show the distance between them, but it also explains the daughter's aloofness towards her father. She holds a grudge against him stemming from his overpowering dominance.

The biased treatments young girls face within their own families are suffocating. Beside male dominance, there are myriads of family ordeals, to say nothing of the moral code the whole community defines for them. A woman's life is shaped according to her family's and the community's dharma and outlook on the world. It is these two polarities we will focus on to pursue our analysis.

²³¹ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, op.Cit, p.193.

In a patriarchal context, a young girl cannot fully take advantage of life. More than once, she realizes that there is a power above her which her father and brothers embody. This accounts for the nature of the relationship between her and the latter. The brothers' will to impose their authority upon her does not always bring about peace as it is often coupled with male chauvinism. Men overtly show females that they are the privileged sex in all walks of life. This sad experience is almost common knowledge to all females, which explains, once again, the female writers' concern about it.

In their writings, women deliberately revisit the past events of their lives before they make a vivid description of their condition as females in an oppressive patriarchal environment. The recollection of childhood is very informative as far as the female child is concerned. Female writers choose their female protagonists' own story to tell readers about the hard treatments children in general suffer in their society and the female ones in particular. Their age is an excuse for parents, precisely male ones, to "exploit" them at will. The description of Emecheta's and Dangarembga's protagonists' lives start from childhood to womanhood to show the naked truth of their living conditions. For the purposes of the study, our analysis is based on the upgrading narration that moves from early age to maturity and explores on the various ordeals the heroine encounters during her lifetime.

Since *The Book of Not* is a sequel to *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga continues the story with a description of mother-daughter relationships. Surprisingly enough, Tambu cuts short of her stay at the mission without finishing her self-development project there. In other words, even though she has succeeded in getting the baccalaureate degree, her results are unsatisfactory for her uncle.

On top of that, the bone of contention between Tambu's mother, Babamukuru and her aunt, Maiguru, is now out of control, to say nothing of her uncle's constant accusations, that the sacrifices he has made for her have come to nothing. Babamukuru shows her niece the scars on his body, following the beating by the freedom fighters who suspected him of not only being an ally to the White settlers, but also accused him of being too Western and sophisticated. Eventually, Tambu leaves her uncle's house and the mission. The day she leaves the mission henceforth, her future becomes more uncertain and precarious. She faces various hardships ranging from sexism to racism. She goes through daily problems like housing and unemployment, so much so that she is near mental breakdown and needs psychological support from her mother.

The time the heroine has spent at the mission and the Young Ladies' College of the Sacred Heart has widened the gap between her and her mother. Once again, the latter believes that her poverty and illiteracy work against her, which is why her daughter prefers Maiguru for her. Mai has a good sense of analogy, but her analogy is flawed, for her daughter's choice is intrinsically related to her wish to emancipate when she finds herself entangled with the setbacks of the capitalist system. In a world where people are robbed of their humanism, parents' moral support becomes crucial for their progenies' development. As far as Tambu is concerned, she has always born a grudge against her mother, which is the result of a series of accusations levied by the latter. This explains the distance between the two characters. The 'mad education' Tambu's mother talks about has an impact on her own character because she is not a very sociable person either.

After many years Tambu spent at the mission, the convent and the university, there is still a gap between mother and daughter. When Mai calls Mrs May, the matron, to reach out to Tambu, the latter is flabbergasted for the fact that her mother volunteered to come to stay a few days with her in her one-room

apartment without her consent. If this sounds natural for a mother, it is not the case for Tambu. They are not on the same wavelength: the visit is an attempt to reconciliation, after many years of misconception and misunderstanding between the two. Whereas Tambu sees it as too daring and pretentious from her mother, the latter reminds her daughter of the sacredness of parenthood and motherhood:

*“Since you are walking and have come to the phone. I want to ask, are you aware of who gave birth to you? Can you tell me you know which stomach you came out of! Or do you think you dropped from a tree big and ripe like that.... You came from a stomach....”*²³²

After the conversation with her mother, Tambu feels nervous, confused and disappointed with human nature in general. Her reluctance to speak to her is understandable, as she still grieves for her mother’s truculence, callousness and ungratefulness towards Babamukuru:

*“Was there any misfortune in the world as bad as being the daughter of this woman! First her habits were ill bred and intolerable, next she plotted the murder of her brother-in-law, Babamukuru, (...), who was her benefactor and without whom neither she nor her family would be anything.... How sorry for myself I felt and how angry with my mother for making me suffer like this.”*²³³

This above passage reveals the author’s aureate skill. It is a soliloquy, a technique that seasoned writers resort to, to make their readers grasp the quintessence of their character’s mind-set. It tells more about what the text has not said so far, and gives useful details about the tense relationship between the

²³² Tsitsi Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, op.Cit, p.226.

²³³ Ibid, pp.228-229.

heroine and her mother. Through their relationship, Dangarembga sheds light on the impact of parenthood, particularly the mother's role on the female child's development. Tambu sees in her mother the reflection of her own image, that is to say, somebody who is prejudiced by poverty and society as a whole. She struggles and, in no way, does she want to end up like her, i.e., a loser.

Once again, through the way they tackle the issue of parenthood, Emecheta and Dangarembga are convergent in their writings. They maintain that parents hold a key role in their children's development. They take it as axiomatic that customary mores impede women's development, mothers do not have much power within their family that could help them support children morally, particularly female ones. Female children are victims just like their mothers, which jeopardizes their existence in a global world with its capitalist and imperial systems that imbibe the traditional values and impose the Western ones. The capitalist system that shakes African societies upside down induces people to be more competitive and more demanding. As Emecheta reminds us, in her autobiographical book, *Head Above Water*:

*“My mother did not understand me and did not see the reason for my wanting at school. How we both suffered those days. Poverty and ignorance can be really bad even for a mother and daughter who apparently loved each other but did not know how to reach each other.”*²³⁴

This shows that Shona and Igbo societies share similar values. Beyond women's subjugation, patriarchy, modernity and “Westernization”, women still attempt to rise from the ashes. They are bonded to their children; their maternal instincts urge them to keep an eye on their progenies, even though they are distant to one another, to some extent. Because, at the end of the day, their happiness depends on what has come of them. In fact, the Wolof proverb,

²³⁴ Buchi Emecheta, *Head Above Water*, op.Cit, p.25.

“*ligeeyu nday, añu doom*”²³⁵, is fully embedded in both societies: a mother’s endeavor is for her child’s prosperity and good fortune. The concept of parenthood Emecheta and Dangarembga depict in their works, regarding the mother’s role is totally dissimilar to what Camara Laye maintains in his novel, *The Dark Child*. In Camara Laye’s text, the protagonist’s mother plays a key role in her son’s apprenticeship, maturity and personal development, as can be noticed in Zora Neale Huston’s novel, *Dust Tracks on a Road*. This is relevant, as the customary mores and social stratification of Camara Laye’s society cannot be likened to Emecheta’s and Dangarembga’s own communities. But still, since the impact of parenthood on children’s development is compromised by the adversity of life, the female children do not fold their arms and give in: they open up to their kith and kin in order to fight an existence for themselves.

IV.3. Friendship and group-solidarity

Generally speaking, women undergo various setbacks that are somehow imposed upon them by patriarchy, traditional cultures and colonialism. Using their writing as an instrument to resist the stereotyping of women and their subordination, women writers show in their works female characters that are daily prejudiced by society. We have already shown that, in general, women and children cannot rely respectively on their husbands and parents to subdue the oppressive environment they live in. Husbands manipulate their wives through male chauvinism, which is noticeable in the way they treat their spouses, mothers are not powerful enough to challenge their husbands’ authority, to say nothing of supporting their progenies. Moreover, parents fail in their duty towards their children who cannot count on parental support to reach their goals. In the following chapter, we will insist on social interactions to study the

²³⁵ A Wolof proverb that upholds that a mother’s ultimate goal and efforts are for her child’s success in life. This shows the crucial role she holds in Senegalese society. If the child misbehaves himself/herself, society will not necessarily condemn him/her, but his/her mother. Likewise, if he/she fails, it is the mother’s responsibility that society queries. Conversely, if the child succeeds, society will venerate the father, rather than the mother.

concept of friendship and solidarity in relation to the prejudices women and children are subject to for their personal development.

Friendship and group-solidarity are generally applied to social life, through people's interactions. Friendship is defined as: "*the condition of sharing and friendly relationship; the feeling and behaviour that exist between friends.*" Solidarity is defined as: "*Loyal agreement of interest, aims, or principles among a group.*" Both concepts involve unison, collaboration and openness. If friendship involves sharing or retaining similar traits with someone and believing in the same dharma, solidarity connotes interconnectivity between people for a common purpose. If such concepts are applicable to feminist literary criticism, they put forward some cardinal values women share in order to ensure better living conditions.

The fact of sharing mutual respect and cardinal values suggests that some given people have a common enemy, and by uniting themselves they foster confidence and power to combat their "aggressor". The history of the world has shown that the most prominent associations, organisms, ideological movements and sororities of any kind across the world, have been based upon group-solidarity.

A good example of this is the Black Women's Club Movement, U.S. It consisted of clubs, associations and sororities that African-American women founded to offer public services. The movement sought to fight the triptych of women's subjugation, class, race and sex, to name but a few, while promoting social equity for women and men as well. The Black Women's Club Movement is in line with womanism, since it vowed to overcome the prejudices African-American women underwent, while promoting social equity, regardless of gender. It was deeply grounded in women's social commitment. As African-American women felt neglected and discriminated in the prevailing socio-economic system, they organized themselves on the basis of the common

injustices and interests they shared in order to improve their living conditions. As Lisa Clayton Robinson puts it:

*“(...) black women were quickly realizing that the gains the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments had brought to black men did not extend to them, and that the clubs were some of the only places where women could become leaders and speak out for change.”*²³⁶

Robinson’s revelations are noteworthy. They show the social context in which the movement was founded. It was after the aboved-mentioned amendments had been enacted. This suggests that if the political system had taken into account the social problems women encountered, they would not have any bad feelings towards the system that would ignite their counter-attack, nor would there be any pro-black feminist women’s club in the U.S. On the one hand, the foundation of the Movement is an outcome of the existence of group-solidarity among women. On the other hand, it came from a general awareness of the presence of a common enemy, which African-American women needed to fight.

More interestingly, other good examples of group-solidarity can be found in the history of Africa. They are the Front Liberal Movement, the struggle against the segregationist policy in Southern Africa and the Mau Mau Movement. Even progressivism, in Africa, is rooted in group-solidarity and nationhood. More interestingly, were it not for women’s unison and solidarity in Africa, African feminism would not be. Because, Western feminism does not take into account African and African-American women’s condition on its fighting agenda. What is more, since women’s experiences change through time and space, the experiences Western women undergo are dissimilar to those of

²³⁶ Lisa Clayton Robinson, « *Black Women’s Club Movement* », in *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African-American Experience*, ed. by Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, op.Cit, p.267.

African women. Likewise, the gender issue in Africa is not specific to each country, but still, those countries do all share a common socio-economic ground. Based on this awareness, they all joined the battle against the social prejudices inherent in their milieu. A study of the origin of friendship or sisterhood, and even the solidarity that exists between Black feminism and African feminism sheds light on the axes on which they base their struggles, and are closer to their African-American counterparts than their Western or European counterparts.

In fact, the two concepts are deeply embedded in African literary tradition. It is central in the production of Dangarembga and Emecheta. In the following lines, we will analyze their impacts on the texts under study in relation to the social condition women and children experience. It is an epistemological analysis of friendship and group-solidarity in the construction of identity and personal development which women and children attempt to reach.

Emecheta and Dangarembga show a particular concern over social issues. More often than not, their characters go through obstacles that are beyond their capacity, which is merely a disadvantage of the socio-economic situation, exacerbated by the new trends of the capitalist system. This has impeded their development, more than ever. The Western education countless Africans have counted on to better their socio-economic status appears to be an illusion. Hence, reconciliation is a fundamental need in their life. The two writers juxtapose the obstacles facing women with children and the interactions they engage in, through friendship and group-solidarity as means of survival and a pathway to construct their identity. Friendship and group-solidarity help them not only overcome their disappointment, torment and prejudices, but helps them resist and construct themselves, though the social relationships may appear, at times, stormy between them and the rest of the people.

In *Double Yoke*, Emecheta talks openly about friendship and group-solidarity. The novel is, to a certain extent, a depiction of Nigeria's emergence

into a modern country which is tantamount to many side-effects. People become more competitive, moved by ambition and the temptation of a corrupt society. Western education is depicted as almost the unique and fast track to material opulence. Consequently, the capital city and Calabar University are the new pinnacles of hope. These innovative platforms and technological hubs appear as modern microcosms hosting people and students from different walks of life, where women particularly fall preys to men and the system.

Indeed, the relationships between people foretell the kind of life style they lead. In other words, since friendship is substantially based on sharing feelings with other people, they reveal their social condition hoping to become better or simply overcome them. It is true that “man can be a healer to man”, but as the saying goes: “*forewarned is forearmed*”. This amounts to saying that the relationships people entertain are not always advantageous to their own development. On the whole, the kind of relationships Emecheta and Dangarembga come up with in their novels are rather constructive than destructive.

The love affair between Nko and Ete Kamba is very informative in *Double Yoke*. If we agree that friendship and love are intertwined concepts, they have a similar peculiarity: the sharing of common feelings. The backbone of Emecheta’s novel revolves round the love affair between two childhood friends, Nko and Ete Kamba. The writer unfolds their relationship to give free reign to her standpoint regarding her characters’ different tribulations. Through their friendship and love affair, she depicts the secret experiences each one faces, which turns their lives upside down and torn between tradition and modernity, with the impact of colonialism as the chief cause of these unprecedented changes.

The novel reveals that friendship and the relationships between people disclose two facts to the readers: first, the social problems the characters of the

novel undergo; second, the sympathy or indifference they have for one another with regard to their condition. More interestingly, it hints at the obligatory collective effort that they need to solve the social problems that befall them. It is through Ete Kamba's relationship with Nko that Emecheta sheds light on the countless prejudices her characters are subject to and which reflect the awkwardness of Nigerian society in particular and African societies in general.

It is through Ete Kamba's friendship and love affair with Nko that the former gets to know his own strengths and weaknesses. It also permits him to discover another aspect of Nko's personality, to say nothing of the real socio-economic and cultural turmoil they undergo. Since true friends and lovers are accomplices: the closer people are, the more it is axiomatic to confide in one another. Thus, Nko is very close to Ete Kamba, vice versa. This is understandable, as they are engaged to be married, even though they have not yet gone public. There is a good deal of openness and privacy between them, which leads them to tackle some delicate and personal issues inherent in their social condition.

The first delicate problem Ete Kamba has had with his lover, Nko, concerns her virginity. But beyond this, there are countless problems that beset them that Emecheta evokes in the novel. One of the most crucial issues is the problem of tradition and modernity, which makes Nko's and Ete Kamba's future uncertain.

Since Nko and Ete Kamba are bound by love, there must be some fairness in the way they treat each other. But, Nko is not fair with Ete Kamba, because of her affair with her tutor, Professor Ikot. In fact, he views the relationship between her and her professor as perverse and invidious, whereas Nko sees it as a godsend opportunity for her success. Professor Ikot is an authority at Calabar University and a religious guide. But because of his greed, Ete Kamba has misgivings towards him. He uses this power to take advantage of his "followers"

and female students, which Ete Kamba finds hard to condone. This is why he admits to Nko his resolve to stop attending his Sunday preaching. He believes that Professor Ikot is a mere pretender and the public enemy of the whole community:

“*See how that uncouth Ikot had made himself your protector, because you allowed him to be. And if you are not careful, Nko, he is going to use that power over you, so much so that he will be plunging a knife into you, and at the same time be telling you it is for your own good.*”²³⁷

Through Nko’s and Ete Kamba’s relationship Emecheta shows that the way things stand now in Nigeria exceeds all bounds. People cannot count on the educational system, nor can they rely on religion to change the social order. They are torn between “the devil and deep blue sea”, in other words, they do not know who to turn to since one cannot make the difference between the lecturer at Calabar University and the preacher: it is the one and same person who misuses his power.

Similarly, through Ikot, Emecheta’s portrays religious bigotry; which Toni Morrison deals with in *The Bluest Eyes*. In the literary world, some female writers seem to be possessed with religious bigotry. Instead of being a sanctuary for their female characters, who, more often than not, try to escape from the harsh and inhumane treatments they experience within their families and communities, religion, quite often, gives them the final deadly blow. Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* is a typical example. Soaphead Church can be likened to Emecheta’s character, Professor Ikot, for he is a self-declared “Interpreter of Dreams” who has learned the art of *self-deception* and manipulation. When the female protagonist, nine-year old Pecola Breedlove shows up at his place, so that he can help her have blue eyes, she becomes the

²³⁷ Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, op.Cit, p.122.

victim of her strange will. Soaphead cowardly uses her and intices her to commit a crime by poisoning his landlord's old dog, a crime that he, himself, intended to do, but lacked the courage to carry out. This is a perfect illustration of how hectic the companionship between religion and the most vulnerable members of society, young girls and women, can turn out to be. It is this awkwardness which Emecheta tries to depict through Ikot and Nko.

Moreover, Emecheta uses Nko's relationship with her friends on the campus to unveil their true characters. Each one of Nko's friends on the campus has a personal experience and idea regarding the status of women in society and their condition on the campus. Unlike most of her friends who are more open to the Western mores, Nko seems to be more conservative. The author insists particularly on her physical appearance: she does not dress herself ostentatiously, she ties up her head with a headscarf to feel secure. What is more, she never puts on high heels as her other friends do. When her affair with professor Ikot gets out of hands, and they know the very reason why she sleeps around with him, her friends freely give their opinions about it. Julia thinks that the ends can never justify the means, whereas the eldest and most experienced woman among them, Mrs Nwaizu, approves of Nko's affair, so she challenges Julia:

“We all want to work for our papers, but what do we do, when men old enough to be our fathers come round to tell us that we can't get it unless we have their lousy 'tutorials'.”²³⁸

Mrs Nwaizu, Nko and her likes are hopeless; they are portrayed as victims of the severe competitiveness and the adversity of post-independence life in their countries. As female individuals, they cannot escape from men's cruelty and power. At Calabar University, the only choice they think best is to give in to

²³⁸ Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, op.Cit, p.154.

men's demands in order to succeed in their studies. Julia thinks otherwise since women should not be forced to yield so easily, under any circumstance. In so doing, they lose their pride and dignity: *"It is easy to get a good degree using one's brain power than bottom power."*²³⁹

What is striking in Nko's story with Ete Kamba and Professor Ikot, is the group-solidarity and the sympathy of their friends, particularly, Nko's. Ete Kamba's friends have suffered in their flesh upon hearing that Professor Ikot is sleeping around with their friend's lover. One of Ete Kamba's best friends, Akpan, even talks the others into avenging him. The group-solidarity and the sympathy they have for their friend urge them to work out a strategy to lynch Professor Ikot in front of Nko. They succeed in their plan, for the former was beaten to death. But, where males come to blows to solve the problem, Nko's friends show their group-solidarity differently. They are all sensitive to what befalls their friend because they identify themselves with her. On the spot, Nko resolves to leave the university for good, for fear Professor Ikot might ruin her. But her friends, Mrs Nwaizu, Julia and Esther restored her confidence in her and encouraged her. Instead of judging her, they sympathize with her and convince her to stay on the campus and pursue her dream.

Moreover, they explained to Nko that Professor Ikot would not dare do anything against her, because if he did, he would ruin his own career as Head Professor. This is all the more convincing as he is longing for a promotion as Vice Chancellor, and if ever his authorities heard of his affair with Nko, he would lose everything. Eventually, Nko faces the music, which means that she accepts to stay and carry on with her studies. The most important element about Nko and Ete Kamba is that the friendship they tackle here is pregnant of the self-awareness regarding their condition in their attempt to reconcile with themselves and their next of kin. The text shows that, many a time, the

²³⁹ Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, op.Cit, p.155.

relationship branches out into group-solidarity that strengthens them morally and enables them to resist and find solutions to the different social prejudices befalling them.

In fact, friendship and group-solidarity are forms of resistance for women writers and a fight for women's subjugation. In *Second-Class Citizen*, Emecheta evokes it with the same vein and concern. A good scrutiny of the text reveals that these two concepts are part and parcel of the process of apprenticeship and construction the main protagonist is set to reach. The main protagonist experiences prejudices at an early age, but her mother is not a role model for a young girl who vows to emancipate herself from a stifling and male-dominated Igbo society. Since her mother is fully conformist, i.e., traditionalist and submissive, Adah succeeds in inculcating a feeling of inferiority of her own sex. From a psychogenetic perspective, this has a negative impact on her character, as she acknowledges it later, that people of the same sex like herself make her feel ill at ease. This amounts to say that the relationships she may tackle with her kind will exclusively concern male friends, if any.

In actual fact, Adah does not have many friends. First, she was married to Francis when she was still very young, and she did not stay long in Nigeria after her marriage as she immigrated to England with her family. The novel does not say much about the relationships she had with her age group in Nigeria, except for the already mentioned fatherly-love relationship, which can be questioned to a certain extent. Likewise, Adah's social integration does not improve much in England, though she enters into a relationship with some of her colleagues at Chalk Farm Library. It can be inferred from this that her reluctance to immerse in the English society is due to the fact that the two cultures are too dissimilar. Generally speaking, Africans are more sociable and prone to strike up a relationship, whereas Europeans are very careful, chiefly with immigrants. Thus, her sex, class and color speak against her and they compromise her social

immersion. But, Adah fully knows that she cannot be a ‘colored’ person, a woman, and on top of that an African immigrant, and ignore the English community without mingling with people. She has to keep a good profile and be careful like them, for she does not surely want to be disappointed by human nature.

For the above reasons, Adah entertains friendly terms with almost all her colleagues, but does not go too far into the relationship. Her closeness to her colleagues gains her the respect she enjoys from them, but it also enables her to know the different woes each and everyone experiences. She explains each of her colleagues’ afflictions through the relationship she has with them. She knows their private lives. For instance, she gets to know the torment of a half-caste West Indian girl, thanks to her friendliness with her. This is all the more paradoxical as Adah is reluctant to enter into a real relationship with anyone of her colleagues, except Bill. As Emecheta evokes it through her narrator’s mouthpiece:

“Bill was the first real friend she (Adah) had had outside her family. She had a tendency to trust men more because her Pa never lets her down.... There was another girl, a half-caste West Indian.... She liked Adah because Adah was at that age forcing everybody to like her.”²⁴⁰

The passage unfolds the mind-set of Emecheta’s female protagonist concerning her friendship with her colleagues and her socializing with people, in general. She is forcing colleagues to like her, yet, she does not confide in them. The real friend she has ever had is Bill, but what makes that person so peculiar as to deserve Adah’s trust and friendship? The answer to this question lies in the role that Bill has played in the process of her development and self-enlightenment. In fact, were it not him and some of her colleagues at Chalk

²⁴⁰ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.152.

Farm Library, Adah's life in England would have been more nightmarish and unbearable: "*The people at the library made her forget her troubles.*"²⁴¹

But, Bill is more than that, he is like a "Heavenly Father" to Adah as he showed her the straight and narrow way to her self-development. A key character in the novel, Bill is a Canadian immigrant in England, and a good example of someone who learnt a lot on the world history and literature, particularly on African literature and he is a socially committed person. His openness and full grasp of African literature and culture offer him an outlook onto the world. To him, Africa/African literature cannot thrive and develop without the Africans. More interestingly, he believes that one cannot proclaim oneself an African scholar without knowing and grasping the history of the very continent. Apart from the iconic figures who have marked Modern African literature, Adah finds it hard to say something about the literature of her own country. That is why Bill cannot understand her dumbness and ignorance of Africa:

*"He (Bill) liked Black writers. Adah did not know any Black writers apart from the new Nigerian ones, like Chinua Achebe and Flora Nwapa, and she did not know that there were any other Black writers. Bill tut-tutted at her and told her what a shame it was that an intelligent Black girl like her should know so little about her own Black people."*²⁴²

Once again, the character of Bill holds a key role to the extent that he teaches Adah how to get out of her comfort zone and embrace new challenges that should allow her to broaden her mind in the literary field, chiefly in creative writing. Their friendship is firmly entrenched in sharing ideas through reading, and to a certain extent, writing. The friendship between them branches out to

²⁴¹ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.152.

²⁴² Ibid.

reach other amateurs: they form a network of literature lovers within the company, which helps them strengthen their literary knowledge through exchange and confrontation at break time:

*“During the staff break he (Bill) would talk and expand about authors and their new books. He would then request it and the Camden Borough would buy it, and he would read it first, then would pass it on to Adah and she would pass it on to Peggy. Peggy would pass it to any other members of the staff who were in the mood to read books. It was through Bill that Adah knew of James Baldwin....”*²⁴³

The spirit of organization within the company, the creation of a small network and the sense of belonging to a specific entity generate solidarity among them. The confidence that Adah has always lacked is fuelled by Bill. He inspires her to a point that she takes up to writing novels, with Bill as an adviser and prompter. The relationships Adah has with some of her other colleagues are very helpful for her mental balance. It is a way for her to forget and overcome the social problems that nag her daily. The prejudices she goes through do not only stem from the new social context she is in, but it also results from her husband’s irresponsibility, her feeling of inferiority towards the Whites and overpowering ideologies based on patriarchy and selfishness.

Through the Nigerian immigrants in England, Emecheta castigates the discriminatory and racist Western society. She succeeds in painting a melting pot and diaphora of Nigerians, Indians, Italians and Canadians who are all victims of various scourges while focusing upon their difficulties in adjusting to a different culture. The prejudices are more acute on women like Adah, for her status as a woman and a mother impedes her development. Friendship and solidarity are ways for them to reconcile with themselves. Even though Bill

²⁴³ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.152.

seems to be a happy person, he complains all the time and criticizes the English people. He does not eat their food, nor does he wear clothes from England, everything he needs is sent to him by his mother right from Canada. But, the fly in the ointment is that his mother wants him to get engaged with a Canadian girl he does not truly love. He left his home country hoping to settle down in England and to, surely, find there his soul mate. Ironically, he is entangled in love with the librarian's daughter, Eileen, whom he eventually marries. Even if he does not say so, he faces some serious problems: he lives in a tiny apartment with his wife and two children they had within two years' time. Failing to cope with acute social problems, Eileen ends up parting with him. As for Peggy, another colleague of Adah, her anxiety stems from her "holiday-summer boyfriend", who returned to Italy without fulfilling the promise to marry her. As far as *Fay* is concerned, she undergoes the delicate problem of miscegenation: she swings between two worlds without knowing where she belongs. Emecheta sums up the situation in the following passage:

*"He came to England to escape, but then he had met Eileen. Poor man, he was too handsome to be left alone Peggy's problem was money to take her to Italy, where she hoped to get a working holiday in order to look for the young Italian who had lied to her. Fay did not like to associate herself with Blacks because she was too white, a mulatto"*²⁴⁴

There is a mutual understanding between Adah and Bill. Their friendship is sincere and advantageous to her, as it helps her broaden her scope in knowledge acquisition and writing strategies. Since the text connotes autobiographical, the acclamation of Emecheta as a renowned and timeless writer is partly possible because of the friendship established with people she

²⁴⁴ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.153.

had met during her stay in England. Bill gives Adah the courage, motivation and self-confidence she needed to carry on in creative writing when her husband burnt down what she called her first “brainchild” entitled *The Bride Price*.

Emecheta’s Zimbabwean counterpart, Dangarembga, is not outdone on this score. Her texts are mostly linked up with friendship and group-solidarity. More interestingly, the kind of friendship that Emecheta talks about in her *Second-Class Citizen* is emphatically noticeable in Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*. That is to say, if Emecheta takes Adah’s friendship with Bill and group-solidarity with her small world as an excuse for self-awareness and personal development, Dangarembga depicts the same phenomenon in her literary work.

The interesting point in Dangarembga’s story in relation to friendship is that it strikes her character at a very early age. The friendship between the two female children, Nyasha and Tambu, is a good example. They are thrown into a perilous adventure marked by many obstacles. Their friendship is interesting in the sense that, beyond kinship, they come from different backgrounds: Tambu is brought up within a traditional context and moral principles, whereas her cousin, Nyasha, spent the early years of her childhood in England. On top of that, she is intellectually inquisitive and has developed a clear standpoint concerning freedom, identity and women’s condition, very often than not, dissimilar to that of her oppressive father, Babamukuru. This leads us to say that Nyasha could be a good match for Tambu since she is in full apprenticeship, a real quest of identity and self-development.

The friendship between Tambu and her cousin can be likened to that between Adah and Bill, in Emecheta’s *Second-Class Citizen*. It is a sincere and strong one feeling based on mutual help. It is something new to Tambu, since her mother had always made her aware of the secondary nature of her sex, which renders her pessimistic about women. She is the perfect cross-picture of

Adah who acknowledges that she is more at ease with men than she is with women. Tambu has never engaged in a real relationship with someone, even with her late brother, Nhamo. She had kept herself at arm's length from him because he had boasted over his ability to attend school without any problem, to say nothing of his budding masculinity he started imposing upon her. Besides, Tambu has always dreamt of befriending Nyasha. As she reminisces the first night they spent together in their bedroom and the following conversation when she first came to live at the mission, then admits that their friendship was a new and unique experience, the best that ever existed between two creatures:

*“In fact it was more than friendship that developed between Nyasha and myself. The conversation that followed was long, involved conversation, full of guileless openings up and intricate lettings out and lettings in. It was the sort of conversation young girls have with their best friends....”*²⁴⁵

On the whole, Tambu's acknowledgement of friendship with Nyasha sounds perfect. But seasoned readers are skeptical about their standpoints on certain issues. This is noticeable in the way she explains their friendship. The following words are like a corrective to what seems perfect friendship between them:

*“You could say that my relationship with Nyasha was my first love affair, the first time that I grew to be fond of someone of whom I did not wholeheartedly approve.”*²⁴⁶

This passage draws the borderline between friendship and man's ego. Furthermore, it reminds us of the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, who defines this type of friendship like a *friendship of pleasure* based on passion: it can be

²⁴⁵ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.78.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

unstable and is constantly subject to abrupt change. Thus, he thought that the most important and truest type of friendship is the “friendship of virtue” which is based on good rather than passion. So, unsurprisingly, Tambu eventually grew out of her friendship with Nyasha.

However, the character of Nyasha is important in Tambu’s construction of personality and self-assertiveness. She has a good sense of analogy and criticism. She holds a particular truculence towards men, and is totally against Shona tradition which hampers women’s development and emancipation. Her spirit of openness and bulimic appetite for reading provide her with a good rhetoric device in communication. What is more, she is a “been to”, like her parents who read a lot about the most notorious writers, historians, heroes and martyrs of the world, and on top of that, she read from cover to cover all the books in the family library, including all those her mother could read only at postgraduate level. For that reason, she is everything that Tambu is not, but wants to be.

Actually, Nyasha is a reference in Tambu’s quest for self-identity. Likewise, their friendship is an opportunity for the former to confide in somebody whom she really trusts, for as a young girl she is a victim of hybridity and male chauvinism.

Nyasha plays a key role in Tambu’s apprenticeship into becoming a new assertive African woman. Since she queries the standard practices regarding equity and freedom she teaches her how to resist certain injustices to better face women’s subjugation. That is the reason why she is always critical of her mother’s bondage to her father and the latter’s oppressive attitude towards herself. As a result, she always does things differently from her own mother and that is why she cannot tolerate her supervising her reading. For instance, Maiguru thinks it premature for Nyasha to read romantic books, like *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, while she maintains that she is poking her nose in her

privacy and rejects her attempt to control her life, which startles Tambu a bit as she candidly tells her later:

*“‘Even If you have been to England, you should respect your mother,’ I told her. ‘I would not speak to my mother in the way I have heard you speak to Maiguru.’”*²⁴⁷

Even though Tambu seems embarrassed about the way Nyasha behaves herself in front of her mother, she better understands later on her attitude towards her parents. Basically, the reason for her sympathy with Maiguru is that, she just settled down in her house and avoids anything that could bring about trouble. This is because her stay there permits her to study hard at school and succeed in her life, a dream she had always cherished.

Tambu may disapprove some of Nyasha’s practices at this stage, but she now knows that she needs her for her openness and intellectual inquisitiveness. More interestingly, Nyasha is aware of her cousin’s ignorance and is ready to share with her instructive books in order to broaden her mind, the way Bill had done with Emecheta’s main character, Adah.

In other words, Tambu owes Nyasha a lot in her self-construction and personal development. The intellectual support she received from her is possible thanks to her sense of solidarity. Nyasha kindles her cousin’s intellectual curiosity by always questioning her on serious issues and trying to get her committed to social problems. The following and detailed passage sheds light on Nyasha’s mind-set and the kind of relationship she has with Tambu:

“When I tried to describe to Nyasha a little of what was happening in my worlds, she laughed and said I was reading too many fairy-tales. She preferred reality... she said, you had to know the facts if you were ever going to

²⁴⁷ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.78.

*find the solutions. She was certain the solutions were there. She wanted to know many things: whether (...) monarchy was just a form of government, the nature of life and relations before colonisation, exactly why UDI was declared and what it meant.... And she helped me to enjoy my heady transition by pointing out books that were worth reading....*²⁴⁸

Once again, this is an illustration of Dangarembga's social commitment to the human condition. It highlights the importance of knowledge acquisition in the quest of women's identity and freedom. This is in line with the feminist literary tradition since a feminist writer's role is to record women's social setbacks firsthand, and see the pervasive causes of their subjugation before she can write back to debunk those prejudices. Besides, this is also a criticism of the true writer's function in general and women writers in particular. Dangarembga seems to note the discrepancy between the two literary traditions after romanticism in the nineteenth century that differentiated African writers who were torn between *realism* and *idealism*. In fact, she is only validating what some female writers like Toni Morrison and Alice Walker think about fiction and its vital social responsibility, in the sense that it reflects the unvarnished truth in life.

Actually, Nyasha wants to raise her cousin's awareness about the futility and lack of commitment to Tambu's reading. To her, African women writers, and male as well, must have a full grasp and understanding of the world-historical heritage in general and of the African background in particular, before they could *deconstruct* any kind of Euro-centrist perspective or misconception in African literature. Besides, Michael Parker and Roger Starkey recall Achebe's viewpoint and insightfulness regarding Western writers' lack of authenticity in

²⁴⁸ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, pp.93-94.

their portrayal and perspective on Africa, which is caused by their Euro-centric inclinations and, to a certain extent, their lack of ‘intellectual honesty’ and commitment to African culture:

*“Chinua Achebe has warned (...) that ‘the European critic of African literature must cultivate the habit of humility appropriate to his limited experience of the African continent.’”*²⁴⁹

The value of this passage is that it illustrates the crucial role played by knowledge, evaluation and re-evaluation in writing. The writer should confine himself/herself to depicting the facts. That is to say, not only should he/she be culturally knowledgeable about his/her own realm, but also he/she should write without any bias on his/her part. This is valid for African male writings on women and women writers as well. The latter cannot resist and *deconstruct* male writings, until they have read enough about the world history and know the real prejudices that befall them, otherwise their writings will be assessed as futile and worthless by male writers and the Western audience. As Leslie M. Ogbudipe postulates that: *“Female writers should be committed in three ways: as a writer, as a woman and a third world woman”*²⁵⁰ In fact, the relationship between Tambu and Nyasha is a way for Dangarembga to both remind her readers of how committed she is as a fully-fledged writer. Tambu’s fairy-tale readings cannot be likened to Nyasha’s readings which are socially oriented to the human condition in general and to colonialism in Africa and its impact. Her fairy-tale reading is not realistic enough to trigger off critical thinking and commitment that can enable her to stand up and challenge men and the White people who oppress her so in order to change the social order.

²⁴⁹ Chinua Achebe, in *Postcolonial Literatures: Achebe, Ngugi, Desai, Walcott*, edited by Michael Parker and Roger Starkey, London, Macmillan Press Ltd, 1995, p.11.

²⁵⁰ Leslie M. Ogbudipe, *“Women in African Literature Today”* 15; London, James Currey, 1987, p.10.

More interestingly, Nyasha does not laugh at her friend, Tambu, out of cruelty, she laughs at her because she just cannot condone her ignorance. Her attachment to her leads her to propose some remedial solutions to her reckless reading. She urges her cousin and friend to re-consider her reading with more realism.

To some extent, Nyasha's relationship with Tambu is the same as Adah and Bill's in *Second-Class Citizen*. It is more than friendship. Both Nyasha and Bill contribute to their friends' enlightenment. Through this, Dangarembga and Emecheta reveal that beneath friendship, there can be mutual help. However, in *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga insists on the crucial need for group-solidarity among prejudiced women. She tries to show that one of the ultimate alternatives subordinated women have, is to improve their lot through group or sisterly love and solidarity. This is obvious as she juxtaposes despair with indifference in her text. A good example of this is what happens at the *dare*, commonly known as the family council.

For instance, while all the men that belong to the Sigauke lineage meet at the *dare* to discuss Lucia's problem with Takesure, the "accused" one, Lucia, does not stay there dumfounded. Rather, she talks all the women in the family, among whom, Maiguru, (Babamukuru's wife), into standing as one and unite to solve the problem together by starting at first to attend the meeting underway and then have their say in the decision making. But, much to their surprise, Maiguru backs down:

"What was needed in that kitchen was a combination of Maiguru's detachment and Lucia's direction. (...) Maiguru became very distant. '.... Let them sort out their own problems, and as for those who want to get involved, well that's up to them. I don't want to intrude into the affairs of

my husband's family. I shall just keep quiet and go to bed.”²⁵¹

The passage shows the exclusion of women in decision making and the impact of masculinity and patriarchy in the Shona tribe. To men, the only place women fit in is the kitchen, a place that always reminds them of their role as nurturers of men and children. Maiguru's detachment and indifference do not empower women. This is disappointing, for if women cannot count on the intellectuals of her likes, the improvement of their condition will always be an illusion.

Emecheta depicts the same situation in *The Slave Girl* using the *Aba riot war* that happened in her own country, Nigeria in 1929. This year is historical in women's struggle in Nigeria. It marked a collective collaboration against taxation the colonial power imposed to them. It is a good example of women's group-solidarity, social commitment and spirit of nationalism. The character of Ma Palagada is portrayed in *The Slave Girl* as an influential business woman who does not want to get involved in the women's fight against the payment of taxes imposed by the colonial authorities upon male traders, and which will be soon passed on to women. Ma Palagada's dearth of group-solidarity and commitment to social injustice is due to her alliance with the White settlers who do her a favor in her trade. To her, it is risky to get involved in such a fight, for she might be seen by the colonial authorities as someone disgraceful and disloyal, which the women traders at Onitsha market cannot stand. Madam Okeke points it out:

“We look towards people like you and your husband, Palagada, to help us,” she said shrilly, ‘and now you’re being lukewarm.’”²⁵²

²⁵¹ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.138.

Ma Palagada's refusal to collaborate is comparable to Lucia's cry for Maiguru's solidarity in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. But in Dangarembga's case, Maiguru's indifference is chiefly due to her subjugation and lack of authority, whereas for Ma Palagada, it is mainly out of corruption. But, beyond the discrepancy, they have a similarity that lies there in their indifference to group-solidarity.

Likewise, Gorgui Dieng* posits a lack of group-solidarity in his novel, *A Leap out of the Dark*. Moodu, the protagonist, is a renowned and socially committed teacher, serving in the capital city of Senegal. He is shocked by the socio-economic situation of his native village, Ngeech, which ranks now among the poorest villages in the neighborhood. His social commitment triggers him off to invite his age group and the village elders, hoping to raise awareness about the different tribulations that befall the village and, if need be, find remedial solutions. Surprisingly enough, the group-solidarity of his people upon which he relies on, is twisted by the chief and used against him. The following passage illustrates the lack of collaboration and group-solidarity he expected from his people:

*“The village chief sprang up like a spear hurled by a Zulu warrior and wrenched the floor from Moodu. Shaking with awful rage and his eyes popped, he thundered like a real fireball: ‘you have been talking and talking and talking, and we have been patient so far, but now we are tired of your nonsensical talk....’*²⁵³

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²⁵² Buchi Emecheta, *The Slave Girl*, op.Cit, p.132.

²⁵³ Gorgui Dieng, *A Leap out of the Dark*, Dakar, Les Editions des Livres Universels, 2002, p.79.

The elders' refusal to collaborate is comparable with what Emecheta describes in *The Slave Girl* through the character of Ma Paladaga. They turn their backs to the interest of the community for their own interests. This is all the more true as the day they start organizing themselves for a better development, the state authorities would stop helping them.

If friendship and solidarity are noticeable in *Double Yoke*, *Second-Class Citizen* and *Nervous Conditions*, the concepts are not explicit in *The Book of Not* as Dangarembga just talks about it covertly. Even though the socio-economic context in which people live requires a good relationship among them, the White men's presence is destructive of hope and is oppressive of any conspiracy against colonial power. The British colonizers' presence is synonymous with racism and discrimination that give way to psychological trauma. The Ladies' College of the Sacred Heart is a good example of female girls' loneliness and disarray: the small group of African girls is a victim of racism and discrimination. They lose confidence in themselves; they are displaced, ill at ease and disowned; that is why they cannot openly enter into a healthy relationship with their roommates. They are permanently under the control of the convent authorities who are almost all White people. In the school yard, they are very careful as they do not want to bump into White people. The context is not uplifting enough for them to nurture friendship.

Conversely, since colonial power is permanently on the alert towards indigenous people, and since there is a raging war of independence, there is no hint at group-solidarity in Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*. Furthermore, a conspiracy against the colonial authorities cannot be plotted without any organization, friendship or group-solidarity, otherwise it is bound to fail. In fact, the group-solidarity Dangarembga comes up with in *The Book of Not* is rather a progressive and nationalist movement that the *vakoma*, known as the elder

siblings, have founded under their common faith for the liberation of Rhodesia from the British colonizers.

Besides, women have played a key role in the struggle for independence in Rhodesia in particular and in Africa in general. The author has shown their contribution in the way they supply food and knit clothes for the freedom fighters. Tambu has mixed feelings about them, because she deeply knows that any suspicion from the White authorities will work against her. On top of that, the security forces are under patrol from six p.m. Thus she does not side overtly with the freedom fighters. Because, if she does, it would not only mess up her plans to become a member of the élite, but it would also jeopardize her security and that of her whole family: “*Now the curfew transformed everything.*”²⁵⁴

In *The Book of Not*, Tambu experiences a slight mental breakdown with the exacerbation of the social situation, which the writer calls “temporary austerity measures”. It becomes more and more precarious for the protagonist, and she does not have now someone like Nyasha by her side to whom she can confess. She is constantly haunted by the fear of war, even at school her mind drifts to the war that is raging behind the mountains. She is torn between ambition, cowardice and guiltiness. Eventually, she starts knitting clothes for the freedom fighters to get more political.

On the whole, through the novels under study, Dangarembga and Emecheta maintain that friendship and solidarity can be good alternatives for women to fight the social injustice they undergo. Their female protagonists are under different yokes, but still, the relationships they establish through friendship and solidarity help them resist their oppressors and overcome social inequity. Reversely, they show that, in a corrupt society, solidarity is a double-edged sword under oppression, because women can use it against their kin for their own good and development. Emecheta understands the complexity of such

²⁵⁴ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, op.Cit, p.83.

a journey and the unity it requires when she launches her battle cry: “*Black women all over the world should re-unite and re-examine the way history has portrayed us.*”

**Chapter five: Women's Hegemony
Within Destructive Powers**

Man's ultimate goal in life is to improve his social condition. This is one of the goals of the feminist literary tradition in particular and women's writings in general. Women writers' main concern is to bring the hardships of marginalized women to the surface while promoting their hegemony. This is legitimate, as women's status is relegated to a second position in most African countries. Their low condition accounts for the existence of repressive and harsh cultures that slacken their development. Women writers maintain that, no matter the series of social injustice, moral and physical violence women might experience, they should not go backward. Thus, through female characterization, they show women that always "rise from their ashes" after being trodden a thousand times. As earlier explained in the previous chapter, they always develop strategies in order to maintain the social fabric's harmony and enhance their development. In a sense, this justifies their beliefs in human values. The relationships children and women nurture are, very often than not, for their personal and collective development, even if the community fails, sometimes, to see the perspectives of their collaboration as a common good.

Emecheta's and Dangarembga's works epitomize the building of women's development. Their heroines are coming of age within repressive cultural environments. But the destructive milieu and powers which naturally hamper their development and hegemony, do not constitute the dead end of their ambition: they want to go further and push back the limits. It is in this perspective that we continue our analysis. As such, emphasis is put on the issues of emancipation and freedom with a great sense of subjectivity, because of the side-effects the quest has on some characters. This will help us scrutinize cases of effective female protagonists as transitional as they spearhead the emergence of new African women in the world's socio-economic arena.

V.1 The quest for emancipation and freedom

Women and children bear the brunt of the double domination of patriarchal cultures and colonization. These two elements can be considered as restrictive powers to their freedom and construction. Women are denied fundamental rights, such as the right to a decent education, the right to decision making and the right to have property, to name but a few. By the same token, gender-based discrimination deprives them of the right to inheritance when their husbands die, to say nothing of racism. These scourges are pervasive in women's studies. Since the feminist tradition's main concern is to empower women, scholars help define literary theories that would bring about a feminist consciousness for oppressed women to subdue restrictive forces that 'entrap' their emancipation.

Basically, the feminist tradition is grounded in seeking ways and means that could help change traditional norms imposed upon women for their better socio-cultural and economic re-construction. As such, women writers' commitment to women's condition appears to be fundamental in discourse. Since male writers' production does not promote them, so it belongs to them to portray anew the blurred image of women through fiction. As Gayle and Coppèlia illustrate it:

“History has been a record of male experience, written by men, from a male perspective. What has been designated historically has been deemed so according to a valuation of power and activity in the public world. History has been

*written primarily from the perspective of the authoritative male subject....”*²⁵⁵

A committed woman writer cannot look away and just pretend to not see while women are misrepresented. Since Dangarembga's and Emecheta's commitment to women's condition is unquestioned, their writings connote the female characters' cry for freedom and emancipation in the context of repressive traditions. In the following lines, we will be examining some cases of female characters' attempt to gain freedom, but more importantly, we will assess the extent to which their trial and escape are successful against the social restrictive powers which are more likely to facilitate their entrapment than their emancipation.

Taken as a whole, Dangarembga's and Emecheta's novels under study are based on the female characters' quest for freedom and emancipation. The construction of *self* is understandable, as their condition is secondary. A quest is: “*an attempt to find something.*”²⁵⁶ If we agree that a quest, in itself, rests on people's hope to find something, we have to consider the reverse possibility, that is to say, of not finding what one is looking for. Therefore, a ray of illusion inevitably hangs over the female protagonists' quest for freedom and emancipation in the respective cases under study.

Almost all the female characters in Emecheta's *Double Yoke*, from the main character to minor characters, are struggling one way or another to set themselves free from the bondage of men, traditional norms and the severity of the colonial capitalist system.

For instance, the main protagonist's mother experiences in her homestead the dominance of her husband. She devotes herself to please him and nurture her

²⁵⁵ Gayle Green and Coppèlia Kahn: “*Feminist Scholarship and the Social Construction of Woman*”, in *Making a Difference, Feminist Literary Criticism*, op.Cit, pp.13-13.

²⁵⁶ The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, op.Cit, p.859.

son Ete Kamba. She cooks for them and does not share with them the food. She contributes in the family needs with the little money she gets from the fields. Even though she does farming as a means of survival, she does not make both ends meet and falls prey to the towering image of her husband, who hardly recognizes her efforts and contribution. Worse, she is a victim of moral and physical violence, because her husband happens to beat her on some occasions. Her attitude towards freedom and emancipation is depicted through a feminine perspective. She cannot go beyond the sphere of patriarchal order which tradition has defined. Her chances to emancipate are null and void. Emecheta depicts the attitudes of these categories of women, like Ete Kamba's mother, as being against women's emancipation, since they accommodate with their oppressors.

Besides, the feminine discourse through which Emecheta portrays Ete Kamba's mother cannot be applied to modernity. She is depicted as a typical submissive traditional woman. Her attitude, totally grounded in nurturing men and pleasing them, is questionable in modern days. This is certainly what actually accounts for Nko's and Ete Kamba's mental ambivalence when they leave their traditional villages to live on Calabar university campus. Presumably, their lives cannot continue as expected, because they have carried along with them traditional mores of their society that collide with the rapidly- changing world and modernity, inevitably bringing about confusion in the characters' lives, principally the female. It is common knowledge that modernity has a side effect on society. Very often, it is associated with corruption and a quest for materialism. Analyzing myths in *Double Yoke*, Ezanwa- Ohaeto posits that:

*“In a situation where survival depends on the ability to exploit the others, it means that decorum is discarded by both men and women in the effort to survive.”*²⁵⁷

The value of Ezenwa’s viewpoint lies in the relationship between struggle, exploitation and corruption. In *Double Yoke*, survival is no other than the characters’ awareness of their condition and the action they take to change the situation by leaving the village for the city. The lack of *decorum* Ezenwa refers to is noticeable in big cities, since the values that rule traditional life are, by far different from those generally prevailing in big towns. Therefore, the quest for freedom and emancipation characters have set in motion cannot be easily achieved as it occurs regardless of moral or ethical values. It is a “fight” between the two sexes, from which women do not get out unscathed.

That is the reason why the *survival* Ezenwa alludes to is difficult or quite impossible for both men and women, particularly for the young ladies on Calabar campus. The hegemony they crave for is unrealizable, simply because the absence of *decorum* is against its realization.

In such a context, the future of women is blurred. They might try to escape from their entrapment, but do not succeed in achieving their goals. A good illustration of this is the character of Nko. Her life is comparable to that of a “slave”, for she is at a loss and torn between tradition and modernity. She cannot live happily, as long as she stays in this situation. Since freedom is gained only through personal and collective endeavor and determination, she makes a vow to get it by studying hard. However, her quest for freedom and emancipation fails since she does not reach her objectives.

The relationship between Nko and Professor Ikot is very telling. It is immoral because each one wants to deceive his/her partner. Professor Ikot is

²⁵⁷ Ezenwa-Ohaeto: “Replacing Myth with Myth: The Feminist Streak in Buchi Emecheta’s *Double Yoke*”, in *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*, op.Cit, p.165.

driven by his sexual inclinations, whereas Nko is blinded by her dream to get her degrees. But actually, none of them believes in retaining the ethics that should normally define a good relationship between a student and a professor. Beyond this, Emecheta shows the nature of a corrupt society and its impacts on people.

Nko's attempt to emancipate has messed up her life. She does not achieve her goal with Professor Ikot, that is to say, to have a good training that would surely enable her to help her poor mother. Worse, she is pregnant with him, and on top of that, she is losing the man of her dream, Ete Kamba. Mrs Nwaizu's reaction and solution to Nko's problem is an illustration of the stakes:

“Anyway you can make it up with Ete Kamba now. You must explain to him why you did what you did. That your family would suffer if you went home without a certificate.”²⁵⁸

Mrs Nwaizu is the eldest of Nko's friends on the campus. She is married with four children. Therefore, she has more experience than the rest of the group. Despite the ignominy of Nko's relationship with the professor, she understands her case as she knows that, Nko is only a victim of her sex, the system, poverty and society as a whole. She even overlooks her lack of decency towards Ikot. In fact, Mrs Nwaizu's reaction translates almost all the female students' despair on the campus. They experience the same pressure. Her reaction also echoes the female students' chief objectives at Calabar University. For them, a good training is merely a way out of their social problems. To her, if Nko explains to Ete Kamba the very reasons why she accepted to sleep with Ikot, he would surely understand. But she forgets that Ete Kamba is unpredictable and proud, worse, he can be very violent at times.

²⁵⁸ Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, op.Cit, p.154.

In fact, in *Double Yoke*, Emecheta shows through her heroine's experiences that women's emancipation is put in jeopardy when they count on nobody or nothing, but the educational system for a good training. Social life on campus is corrupt, the way society as a whole is in big cities. Women are confronted with the same prejudices they usually undergo when they come to live in big cities in pursuit of happiness. The exacerbation of poverty and the austerity measures imposed upon them by the new capitalist system impede both men's and women's advancement, dashing their ambition and chance to emancipate.

On the whole, Emecheta's characters perceive the journey as a good opportunity for them to have a better life, but in the end, they realize that there are some forces beyond them and other realities that complicate their quest for freedom and emancipation. Her novel, *The Rape of Shavi* is centered on the quest for a better life. The story is based on a nuclear war that raged in Europe. A group of Western scientists, "the albinos" meet with Shavians, following a crash. The kingdom of Shavi is depicted like a peaceful place, where Shavians live as one community. The group is positively taken aback by Shavians' hospitality, but negatively surprised by their cultures. As days pass by, they learn more about one another. The Shavians' 'guests' are obsessed with their quest for better days, since their countries are sorely shaken by social and economic turmoil. The adventure they engage in is for them a golden opportunity to escape from the absurdity of life. The following passage from Flip, the pilot, and one of the Shavi kingdom invaders, is a good illustration of this:

"What was there for them to do? This is what has led to his decision to try to preserve the great gift of life which God had entrusted into his care. He had persuaded some of

his friends from the Newark flying club to escape with him, and seek a refuge safe from the two warring giants."²⁵⁹

It is sure that Flip and his crew had a clear objective before setting out. Never had they thought that, they would find themselves in the midst of an "alien" kingdom. They had left their country with a great hope, only to find themselves in the desert among "uncivilized" people they intended to indoctrinate. Interestingly enough, the Shavians they look down upon, turned out to be not only courteous with them, but deeply rooted in their culture, with a solid and sound political and social organization. From this perspective, their quest for freedom seems to be a disappointment since they have not achieved their objective.

Likewise, the prince of Shavi, Asogba is tempted and lured by the White man's science and know-how. He wants to go to the White man's country in order to reinforce his capacity to better rule the kingdom after his father's reign. He acknowledges his community's backwardness in technology and is determined to empower the kingdom once he has learnt the White man's art. By way of illustration, we can quickly evoke the open-hearted discussion he had with the *council of Elders* to convince them about his project to leave the kingdom for Europe:

*"I want to go with the albino people, to learn their tricks. Then when I return I will teach our young men to build and fly birds of fire.... We will be the most respectful and feared people of the desert. No longer will we be a timid people hiding in a secluded oasis behind the Ogene hills...."*²⁶⁰

Prince Asogba is motivated by his lust for power. The council faces the same dilemma most traditional African rulers were confronted with when the

²⁵⁹ Buchi Emecheta, *The Rape of Shavi*, London, Flamingo, p.28, 1985.

²⁶⁰ Buchi Emecheta, *The Rape of Shavi*, op.Cit, p.134.

first European missionaries came and wanted to impose their Western cultures and religions on them. It is the same dilemma The Most Royal Lady experienced in Cheikh Amidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure*. The prince's sojourn in the White man's country is an important stage in his quest for freedom, but it meets with failure, since he is imprisoned at his arrival. More importantly, when he comes back to his homeland, he leads the kingdom astray with his power lust, noticeable in the way he wants to conquer the neighboring villages. His quest is as futile as Samba Diallo's in *Ambiguous Adventure*. The Most Royal Lady's ultimate goal in sending him to France was to enable him acquire knowledge, but unfortunately, the outcome of his quest results in madness.

Similarly in *Second-Class Citizen*, Emecheta talks about women's search for a better life with the same degree of interest as in *Double Yoke*. The heroine's quest for emancipation in *Second-Class Citizen* is focused on two pillars: education and emigration. A study of the two ways the female protagonist chooses to change her life will ultimately help assess her quest for emancipation as a success or failure.

Once again, Emecheta chooses colonial education and emigration as a necessity for women's emancipation. The book is mainly centered on the importance of learning and emigration. From childhood to adulthood, Adah strives against the stifling cultures that prevent the construction of her identity and development. She tries to resist them in her own ways. As a young girl, she cannot go to school, whereas her brother and age group can, which is a direct result of her sex, but also of poverty. But, she has always shown her parents and people around her that these constraints were invented by men along with cultural ideologies only to disown women of their freedom.

As such, Adah cannot follow the norms tradition has marked for her. She then starts to take actions to guarantee herself the education she was deprived of as she is fully aware that it is a fundamental prerogative for both her personal

development and that of her family. The decisions she makes are two-fold. First, she invites herself to Mr Cole's classes when she is not recognized as a regular-registered student. Second, she uses the money her cousin, Vincent, gives her to buy meat for the family to pay for her entrance examination tuition. It is because of her determination to change her condition that Vincent inflicts on her *hundred and three stokes* to get back the money from her, but she does not give in. To her, going to school is more important than eating.

Adah's struggle continues. Later on, she found a job as a librarian at the American Consulate, and eventually got married with Francis. But, the question the writer raises at this stage is whether her money will set her free or will it just make life harder for her. If we analyze Adah's own case from this perspective, we shall surely maintain that her attempt to emancipate is far from being a success. The evidence of her failure lies in the fact that she strongly believes in her marriage with Francis as an end to itself. More importantly, Emecheta's heroine resigned as a librarian from the American Consulate in order to immigrate to England when all opportunities were open to her in her own country. Basically, her marriage and her sojourn in England are fundamental elements in her quest for freedom. However, both projects seem to be a failure for her: her husband does not put her in good conditions, and, worse, there is never enough money to cover the family needs. On top of that, she is a victim of violence in its broadest sense, as she acknowledges her disappointment in the following passage:

*“Had she made a mistake in rushing into this marriage? But she had needed a home. And the immigration authorities were making it difficult for single girls to come to England.”*²⁶¹

²⁶¹ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.40.

The soliloquy is followed by the answer the reader awaits. It gives more information about Adah's premature marriage with Francis, which was merely a way for her to secure a home of her own. On the other hand, it was a good opportunity for her to fulfill her childhood dream to go to England. Through her heroine, Emecheta accuses Francis of showing an irresponsible attitude towards his wife, though the latter is also as responsible as him, as she does not consider the matter well enough before engaging. In fact, this is a reminder to young girls concerning the delicate nature of marriage and its impacts on women's freedom.

This is all the more important as Emecheta herself has experienced the same predicament with her husband. She seems to accuse herself for being partly responsible for her unhappiness at a certain time, because she did not fully consider the stakes of her own marriage. Focusing on *Second-Class Citizen* and all these ups and downs, we can surely assess the heroine's quest for emancipation and freedom, at this stage, as being a disappointment.

The emancipation and freedom of Emecheta's heroines in the novels under study remain unrealized dreams, because of pervasive constraints like poverty, society's corruption, the austerity of the capitalist system that resulted from colonization, the norms of tradition on women, not to mention race and class. Similarly, Dangarembga evokes women's scourges in her literary production as systematic restrictive powers to women's emancipation and freedom. In the following lines, we shall study the extent to which some women are stereotyped as real victims of entrapment in relation to their quest for emancipation and freedom in Dangarembga's texts.

In *Nervous Conditions* for instance, Dangarembga gives her readers a crystal clear indication at the outset of the novel about her main female characters' condition. She gives useful details concerning her protagonist's frustration when her only one brother dies, but, more importantly, she gives detailed portrayals of her other female characters. She talks about their

subjugation, 'resistance' and the outcome of their struggles within the restrictive powers of the Shona society. As the heroine and narrator puts it:

*"... my story is not after all about death, but about my escape and Lucia's; about my mother's and Maiguru's entrapment; and about Nyasha's rebellion-Nyasha, far-minded and isolated...whose rebellion-Nyasha, far-minded and isolated, my uncle's daughter,whose rebellion may not in the end have been successful."*²⁶²

Dangarembga hits the nail on the head when the narrator articulates her story on women's condition. She goes further and talks about women's attempt to struggle by insisting on their 'resistance' outcome to restrictive powers. The study of the characters' attempt to emancipate from restrictive powers and its outcome will help us better understand the nature of each one's entrapment.

The peculiarity of the three pre-cited women lies in the similarity of their life experience. There is a cloud that hangs over their heads that impedes their advancement: it is the patriarchal system. Babamukuru is the symbol of supremacy in the Sigauke family which is composed of his own family and his kindred's. As such, women, principally, feel the burden of his power upon them. The three women, the narrator's mother, Maiguru and Nyasha, are naturally bonded to him, not to mention Tambu, which makes their escape to freedom harder to accomplish.

The emancipation of the narrator's mother is compromised because of Babamukuru's power. He separates her constantly from her beloved ones. He starts with her eldest son, Nhamo, whom he takes with him to the mission and unexpectedly dies in his own house. After the boy's death, he takes his sister, Tambu, which her mother can hardly bear. To crown it all, there is poverty while

²⁶² Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.1.

she has to cope with an irresponsible husband around to help her overcome her problems. At a given time, Tambu's mother is a mere shadow of her former self, for her sarcasm and efforts have led her to the brink of a mental breakdown.

The struggle of Tambu's mother is only skin deep, i.e., she does not have the authority to protest against Babamukuru and improve her social condition. She does attempt to resist him, but it is just emotional. Except her truculence towards him, there is no concrete action she takes that might help her set free from men's bondage.

Likewise, Maiguru undergoes the same condition as the heroine's mother. Her case is even worse since she is different from the latter as an intellectual woman, whereas Tambu's mother is illiterate. Maiguru underwent the same training as her husband, yet, she is 'entrapped' by the same impediments most African intellectual women undergo under the spurs of traditional norms and colonialism. She is a victim of the patronizing attitude of her husband who controls her life and that of her daughter and ruins her chances to emancipate from him and live decently. There are three elements that illustrate Maiguru's entrapment. First, her lack of assertiveness towards Babamukuru, second her "poor" financial situation and third, her trial and failure to escape from her husband's homestead.

Assertiveness is one of the fundamental hallmarks oppressed women need to channel their protest against their oppressors. Maiguru is very often voiceless and fidgety in front of Babamukuru. On the several occasions on which the latter has imposed his willpower to control their daughter's life, herself and the whole Sigauke family, she eschews confrontation. Instead, she cajoles him and strokes his ego. As headmaster, he is also preoccupied by his work. When he comes back home he is tired and tense, particularly towards Nyasha. Most of their disputes occur at meal time. Every time that there is "verbal battle" between

Nyasha and her father, resulting naturally from the latter's abuse of power, Maiguru backs down without defending her daughter.

Not only does she side with Babamukuru, but also manoeuvres to appease him, by serving him more food or calling him by his pet names, while accusing her daughter of being disrespectful towards her father. Again, when she feels that there is hysteria in the atmosphere between the two, she always intervenes to fondle him and serves him food to avoid a confrontation: “*Are you sure you have enough meat, my Daddy-d? Maiguru interrupted fondly. Let me give you some more.*”²⁶³

This is quite disappointing since the problem between Babamukuru and Nyasha is a “fight” over freedom and power, which is exclusively a Western type of women's resistance. Even though Tambu questions Nyasha's loyalty towards Babamukuru, she sees her resistance to her father as legitimate. In view of all this, Dangarembga depicts Nyasha as opposite to Maiguru, and demonstrates the latter's lack of assertiveness and boldness in front of her husband. Her stance on the female question can be seen as effete, because she is not committed to change the myths belittling women to secondary positions.

Another illustration of Maiguru's entrapment is her attitude vis à vis Babamukuru concerning money. He controls his wife's life. She has a job and the money she earns does not belong to her, but to her husband, who uses it to meet the family needs and those of his relatives'. This is alienating for her, since she needs the money as well as him to solve her personal problems and help her relatives like him. This is important, for in Africa the salary is not personal, as parents and relatives have their share in it. Maiguru confirms some parents' reluctance to have female children, mostly because of the economic context. They prefer boys to help them in the fields because girls are bonded to their husbands once married. This is the case with Maiguru, she is “exploited” by her

²⁶³ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.81.

husband as she cannot fully enjoy the niceties of life that money can afford. Her husband uses both his money and her salary, not only to meet his own family's needs, but also his sisters' and brothers', whereas his own wife is left with nothing to get by.

Analyzing “*The Married Woman*” in her essay “*The Second Sex*”, Simone de Beauvoir comes to the conclusion that marriage gives more power to men, at the expense of women. She depicts it thus as instrumental in fighting women's subjugation:

*“Because marriage normally subordinates wife to husband, the problem of their mutual relations is posed most sharply to the female. The paradox of marriage lies in that fact that it has at once an erotic and social function He is a demigod endowed with virile prestige and destined to replace her father: protector, provider, teacher, guide; the wife's existence is to unfold to his shadow; he is the custodian of values, the sponsor of truth, the ethical vindication of the couple.”*²⁶⁴

Simone de Beauvoir likens the husband to a “demigod”. She sees the latter as somebody who has full control over his wife. She also compares him to a *provider*. In *Nervous Conditions*, Babamukuru is not Maiguru's benefactor or *provider*, as Simone de Beauvoir portrays the husband's role; she is a provider just like Babamukuru, but the naked truth is that what she provides cannot be seen because all the money she earns goes to her husband. She is the “money provider” for her husband. The fact that she does not have any control over herself as an intellectual woman proves that she is a victim of entrapment and her chances of emancipation are minimal.

²⁶⁴ Simone de Beauvoir: “‘*The Married Woman*’, in *The Second Sex*,” op.Cit, p.515.

A third illustration of Maiguru's entrapment is her trial to escape from her revered husband's grip and her failure. After a close consideration of her relationship with Babamukuru, she starts to be conscious of her subjugation. She now knows that her efforts to study hard for a job have come down to nothing, but serve to empower her husband and improve his family's living conditions, at the expense of hers. After due observation, Tambu pities Maiguru:

*"I felt sorry for Maiguru because she could not use the money she earned for her own purposes and had been prevented by marriage from doing the things she wanted to do...."*²⁶⁵

Maiguru is cheated by life but does not take it for granted. She is determined to change her attitude with her husband. She can no longer tolerate his selfishness and indifference to her condition. For a change, she girds up her loins to protest against him for more respect and freedom. Her reaction is the outcome of all the intolerable treatments she has supported so far. In fact, Babamukuru has always taken his wife's money to satisfy his brothers' and sisters' needs. The wedding celebrations of Tambu's mother at church has cost him a good sum of money, most of which belongs to Maiguru. This wells up into rage and leads her to query the nature of her relationship with him:

"(...) when it comes to taking my money so that you can feed her (Tambu) and her father and your whole family and waste it on ridiculous weddings, that are when they are my relatives too. (...) I am tired of my house being a hotel for your family. I am tired of being a housekeeper for them. I

²⁶⁵ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.102.

*am tired of being nothing in a home I am working myself sick to support.*²⁶⁶

Maiguru can no longer bear it when Babamukuru tells her to mind her own business on things that concern his brothers and sister. This is paradoxical since he uses his wife's own money to support his family. Eventually, she decides to leave her husband's house to seek refuge in her brother's. Nyasha is very skeptical about her mother's leave. To her, she does not have the nerve to challenge her father, to say nothing of leaving him. She strongly believes that her mother's new quest for emancipation will lead her nowhere. Nevertheless, she approves of her decision "to upset the setup", but knowing that she lacks initiatives, she is very pessimistic about her trial. Besides, she confesses to her cousin and friend that her mother's escape cannot be a successful transition in her life since she has left a man's house to seek refuge in another man's house, i.e., her brother's:

*"Nyasha was unhappy that Maiguru has gone to her brother. 'A man! She always runs to men,' she despaired. 'There is no hope, Tambu. Really, there isn't.'*²⁶⁷

After all the years she has toiled and moiled and has worked as an educator under colonial rule, Maiguru does not have a home of her own. The only place where she can seek refuge is no other than her brother's, an attitude both humiliating and unrealistic. The fact that she goes to her brother's house suggests that it had never occurred to her of leaving her husband before the incident, nor had she ever pictured herself living in such a precarious situation. More interestingly, Dangarembga seems to suggest through Maiguru's trial and failure that women's freedom is intrinsically correlated to their ability to anticipate men's unpredictability. In other words, as long as women depend on

²⁶⁶ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.172.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 175.

men they will be always subjugated. They have to be financially independent to ensure for themselves a minimum life standard, like a place to go when the worst comes to the worst.

Therefore, Maiguru's escape cannot be successful, because she was not psychologically and financially prepared to cross the Rubicon. Besides, her stay at her brother's house lasted only five days before her husband brought her back to his homestead. To wrap it all up, Maiguru's trial to emancipate has led her nowhere. She cannot be free, merely because she is 'trapped' in traditional gender oppression and colonial power. Dangarembga explores Maiguru's entrapment through three illustrative points: her lack of assertiveness, confidence and determination. Her quest for freedom should have been successful if she had protested against Babamukuru earlier, instead of cajoling him whenever he mistreated her. Likewise, her literacy and professionalism do not bear a satisfactory outcome for her. They should insure her enough financial autonomy, which should free her from her oppressive husband.

Dangarembga's heroine mentions from the onset the three female characters who are victims of entrapment: her mother, her aunt Maiguru and her cousin Nyasha. Our analysis would be incomplete if we stopped at depicting how the former women have failed in their quest without exploring the extent to which Nyasha remains a victim of entrapment in her own quest similarly to Maiguru and Mai, Tambu's mother.

As has already been underscored through her relationship with Tambu, Nyasha is a central character in *Nervous Conditions*. In her essay, "Strategic Fusions: Undermining Cultural Essentialism in *Nervous Conditions*", Janette Treiber reports on Dangarembga's standpoint on her own work at the African Literature Association Conference in 1997, and her comment of the key role which Nyasha holds in Tambu's personal development:

“While Tambu initially naively sees education as a way to elevate her community into a modern, better life Her cousin Nyasha is instrumental in this process of learning....”²⁶⁸

Nyasha is the character that mostly embodies the stereotyping of indigenous people’s psychological torments as “nervous conditions” just to recall Jean Paul Sartre’s viewpoint in prefacing Franz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*. Because of her truculence towards the “oppressors” and the “oppressed”, Tambu sees her cousin as a rebel whose “resistance” turns out against her. The Western culture Nyasha was exposed to and the Shona traditional norms imposed upon her by her father, Babamukuru, do not only alienate her, but they also destroy ultimately her chances to emancipate herself. The survival strategy on which Nyasha relies to resist restrictive powers is tantamount to self-sacrifice.

Nyasha is conscious of her subordinate condition. To emancipate herself, she needs to shake off the chains of patriarchy and colonial domination that impede her advancement. As such, she buttresses her quest with two strategies: food “boycott” and a merciless rebellion against her father.

To show her disapproval of her father’s tyranny and the Western culture, Nyasha turns her back to everything represented by the two paradigms. She willingly challenges him, using food as a tool in her protest. This is a way for her to emancipate from restrictive powers, but does not get out of it unscathed. The eating disorder she couples with excessive reading and sleeplessness have a great impact on her health. She eventually goes through a mental breakdown resulting from *anorexia nervosa*. This is very telling since her mental breakdown marks the failure of her rebellion against Babamukuru and the

²⁶⁸ Janette Treiber, “Strategic Fusions : Undermining Cultural Essentialism in Nervous Conditions”, in *Emerging Perspectives on Tsitsi Dangarembga : Negotiating The Postcolonial*, op.Cit, p.84.

colonial system. In fact, *anorexia nervosa* is for Nyasha a radical form of “resistance” to both her father and colonial rule based on food boycott or restriction. The psychiatrist that is supposed to treat her in the city of Salisbury believes that she is only a pretender, because to him, it is scientifically proved that Africans do not generally catch pathologies like anorexia:

“(…) *the psychiatrist said that Nyasha could not be ill, that Africans did not suffer in the way we (the narrator, Babamukuru and Maiguru) had described. She was making a scene. We should take her home and be firm with her.*”²⁶⁹

The psychiatrist’s hasty judgment is understandable since he is a White man. His indifference urges Nyasha to call on an African psychiatrist instead of a White one who does not have any idea about African realities and cultures. This corroborates the fact that, to countless scholars, particularly Western scientists, anorexia is not an African category. Rather, it is typical to Western literature. In fact, critics view it in *Nervous Conditions* as an indictment. Still, seen from a postcolonial perspective, the use of anorexia is not an oddity, but rather, a means of ‘resistance’ and the oppressed woman’s formation of identity and freedom. As Michelle Vizzard points out:

“*Nyasha’s anorexia can be understood as a hysterical response to the restraints of the colony as partially represented by the father. The representation of anorexia, a condition usually associated with middle class West, in an African text is one of that raises a number of problems,*

²⁶⁹ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.201.

*despite the way that the text itself invites a selective use of psychoanalysis.*²⁷⁰

Vizzard's viewpoint can be quite insightful. She sees the depiction of anorexia irrelevant in African writers' texts since it is a reality that does not exist in African cultures. For the psychologist Graham Richards, the concept of *anorexia/anorexia nervosa* is described as follows:

*“Eating disorder marked by refusal or extreme reluctance to eat, leading to loss of body weight and potential fatal self-destruction. Typically, if not exclusively, anorexia occurs in adolescent females and is usually related to obsession about body size and hope.”*²⁷¹

Richards bases the concept of anorexia on a typical pathology that occurs during the period of female adulthood. To him, it stems from the female individual's anxiety regarding obesity that is seen as pejorative. In fact, obese women are looked down upon in Western societies. He goes further to maintain that the ultimate cause of anorexia is the feeling of *stress* plaguing obese women. By all accounts, anorexia is rhetoric to a psychological disorder. From a postcolonial viewpoint, it is used responsively as an attempt to *deconstruct* women's subjugation in particular. It is through this perspective that Nyasha's eating disorder is relevant: it is definitely for her a way to emancipate herself from both patriarchal and colonial subjugation.

Because of her illness and following her hospitalization, Nyasha's rebellion remains a failure, the same as her mother's bold attempt to escape and Tambu's mother, which lead them nowhere but to more subjugation. The common denominator the three of them share is their entrapment, though each

²⁷⁰ Michelle Vizzard: “‘Of Mimicry and Woman’: Hysteria and Anticolonial Feminism in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*.” in “*Indexing Her Digest: Working Through Nervous Conditions*” by Brenden Nicholls, in *Emerging Perspectives on Tsitsi Dangarembga: Negotiating the Postcolonial*, op.Cit, p.103.

²⁷¹ Graham Richards, *Psychology: The Key Concepts*, op.Cit, p.18.

of them is distinct in the way they attempt to emancipate themselves. The striking point about Maiguru and Nyasha is that beyond all their intelligence, openness and training, they remain “trapped”. Nyasha’s merit is the help she brought to her cousin: her awareness she develops on gender inequality and colonial oppression, but also, the way in which she contributes in fostering her self-construction. However, her greatest mistake remains her naiveté in confronting individually and overtly the long-standing myths established by traditional society.

The quest for emancipation and freedom described by Emecheta and Dangarembga in their novels stems from the severity of traditional ideologies and colonial oppression which their female protagonists are subject to. Their attempts to change oppressive myths in order to get free and live as decent female individuals end up in failure, because of the overwhelming powers crushing them. But still, their commitment to women’s condition fuels some of their female characters with endurance and patience that will ultimately enable them to emerge as transitional forces.

V.2 The transitional female protagonist

It is commonly acknowledged that the celebration of women’s rights is the outcome of a bitter and long “struggle” between men and women. An interesting case in point is the two-day struggle which the small group of women, and men as well, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone and Susan B. Anthony led in 1848 in the town of Seneca Fall, New York, to launch and defend triumphantly the Women’s Rights Movement. As Sally G. McMillen puts it:

“In their quest to achieve equal rights for all women, these four sought to convince elected officials to alter or eliminate the many laws that oppressed women. They tried

to change society's perceptions of women as innately inferior to men. They attempt to erase boundaries that confined women to a separate sphere and convince Americans that women deserved the same opportunities men enjoyed.”²⁷²

Elizabeth C. Stanton and her peers foregrounded their struggle in their commitment to fight women's subjugation for social equity. It was based on a good theoretical background in structuralism. In other words, an observation of how society evolved in the nineteenth century America showed men at the center, and women at the peripheries. In fact, women had been denied of their basic rights, such as the right to vote, to have property and to get educated, as noted earlier. On top of that, tradition and religion were also there to subdue their progression. The way society was structured and functioned during that period gave no room to women's development. That social injustice gave rise to a feminist consciousness in a small group of women that fought for equal rights between men and women. Thus, be it the pioneers of the Women's Rights Movement in the streets of Seneca Fall, America, or Western feminism led by White women in Europe, both movements considered women of “color” as “others”, people who do not belong to the peer-group. They did not fully take into account the real problems of African and African-American women.

These women of “color” found out that they were neglected as their status was second-nature. Besides, it is from the shortcomings which ranged from discrimination to racism in America that African-American women launched their own struggle and conception of feminist literary tradition. Naturally, this triggered off female scholars and committed writers to define an agenda for women of “color”, focusing on the real human condition they faced. The redirection of feminist theories by intellectual women and activists appeared to

²⁷² Sally G. Mcmillen, *Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women's Rights Movement*, op.Cit, p.229.

be historically transitional in women's struggle. Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka's viewpoint is a good illustration of discourse reform in feminism:

*“The feminist movement which gave impetus to feminist critical theory had been based mainly on the history of White women's experience and gender construction. By the middle of the 1980s, women of color begin to question the basis of the mainstream feminist theory, the dominance of the feminist movement by white women....”*²⁷³

The emergence of Black feminism was rooted in the awkwardness of Western feminism. It is the same oddity in Western feminism that African women writers had pinpointed in Black feminism. This ultimately prompted them to define a feminist literary tradition that is fully grounded in their own experience which seeks to construct gender equality among the Black community in America. The different movements and ideologies may be different, yet, one of the strongest things that stands out between the dissimilarities of these ideologies resides in the peer-groups' commitment to the woman question. By all accounts, their struggle was transitional in women's quest for equal rights and freedom. The transition that occurred in women's history owes its acclamation to female scholars' activism. It was chiefly through women's writings, assertiveness, self-reliance and determination that they succeeded in resisting and transforming restrictive powers imposed upon them.

Moreover, women's writings give no little importance to the social commitment that represented mainstream feminism literary criticism that has helped voicing the myths that subdue women's emancipation. African women writers hold a particular concern about women's hegemony in their literary works. Very often than not, fictional characters go through hard experiences

²⁷³ Amofolabo Ajayi- Soyinka: “*Black Feminism Criticism and Drama: Thoughts and Double Patriarchy*”, *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, Spring 1993, p. 161.

based on gender inequality starting from childhood to adulthood. But, the main point in women's writings in modern African literature in general and in the authors' texts under study in particular is the depiction of the transitional female characters towards emancipation. Through their self-assertiveness, reliance and determination, Dangarembga's and Emecheta's female protagonists generally go from "rags to riches", which typifies their fiction as *bildungsroman*. A more detailed glossary of the concept will necessary evidence the extent to which the novels studied may be classified as *Bildungsroman*.

In actual fact, *Bildungsroman* is German; it is a two- patterned word: "Bildung", which means formation/apprenticeship and "roman", which means novel. Thus, it is a novel of growth, apprenticeship and personal development. In *Bildungsroman*, very often than not, the protagonist is gifted with good qualities, but his/ her life is conditioned by detractors or the 'villain' characters who bend on destroying everything they build to achieve his/her objectives. Reversely, there are positive characters that help the main character achieve his/her goals. There is one characteristic that is noteworthy in *Bildungsroman*: the spirit of personal sacrifice. In order to get final realization, the main character has to part with the past in order to construct something new.

In fact, it is from this perspective that Dangarembga and Emecheta set their female protagonists within restrictive powers from which the latter strive to emerge in order to hail them as transitional characters to build their life project. This is why we focus on the female protagonists' self-assertiveness, reliance and determination in the novels under study to see the extent to which they can appear as transitional characters.

In terms of discourse, Emecheta's texts are in general double-edged or multi-faceted. *Second-Class Citizen* is no exception. It is a depiction of women's subjugation, but it is also a portrayal of women's hegemony. The protagonist's struggle shows, in no small way, the construction of her development. This is all

the more challenging for her as she remains a victim of double colonization that debases her nature and “enslaves” her. Focusing on her mother’s experience, Emecheta acknowledges in her autobiography, *Head Above Water* that:

“[m]y mother, that slave girl who had the courage to free herself and return to her people in Ibuza, and still stooped and allowed the culture of her people to re-enslave her, and then permitted Christianity to tighten the knot of enslavement.”²⁷⁴

The double oppression Emecheta’s mother went through in particular, and African women in general, fuels the satirical perspective of the writer’s works and her commitment, to some extent. To Emecheta, these constraints that impede women’s hegemony can be changed. In *Second-Class Citizen*, Adah symbolizes transition and hegemony. She is transitional in the sense that as a young girl and woman, she has experienced the most humiliating scourges women are generally victims of, but she has never surrendered. Rather, she falls back upon unimaginable surviving strategies to break free from entrapment. These include self-reliance, assertiveness and determination.

As a young girl, Adah already imposes a good personality upon herself. She has always believed that there is no other way to get out of poverty but formal education. So convinced is she about this that Emecheta uses a metaphor to express the importance it holds for her: “*school or die*”. This shows the budding determination in the little girl’s mind. Her personality even bears an impact on the way she apprehends men in general and marriage in particular: she does not want to be at their mercy. She just wants to be different from ordinary women who are trapped in male chauvinism. When she was eleven years old, she started to show obstinacy, misgivings about men and the marriage-issue:

²⁷⁴ Buchi Emecheta, *Head Above Water*, op.Cit, p.3.

“She (Adah) would never, never in her life get married to any man, rich or poor, to whom she would have to serve his food on bended knees: she would not consent to live with a husband whom she would have to treat as a master and refer to as ‘sir’ even behind his back. She knew that all Ibo women do this, but she wasn’t going to!”²⁷⁵

This reaction from Adah reveals her good character. The above-mentioned acknowledgement occurs after her mother is inherited by her father’s brother. The latter thinks that the little girl can no longer continue to go to school like her brother, and that she has to think about how she can be financially useful to him. In Adah’s eyes, marriage is pure “servitude” and she will never accept to be any man’s “servant”, whatever his social position might be.

Adah’s marginalization and “feminist” consciousness is precisely noticeable when she immigrates to England where she starts to feel her husband’s wild nature towards her and the exclusivist Western society. There, she starts to redirect herself and her outlook on the world, and particularly, her attitude towards men. Knowing that she is prejudiced, it is of prime importance for her to survive, and for that purpose, she does not only need to rely on herself, but also needs to be assertive and confident.

A good example of Adah’s assertiveness is her inclination for writing. The fact that Emecheta channels her female protagonist into creative writing is not fortuitous, rather it suggests that writing is an ultimate rhetoric device to voice the myths that subdue women’s status. By the same token, it is a way of resisting the tradition that hails men on top of women. This takes the readers back to the importance of acquiring a good education. Because writing, in itself, requires some intellectual prerequisites; one does not become a writer overnight.

²⁷⁵ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.19.

Good writers are also good readers and observers. They need to know about their own culture and civilization, but also about the world around them and its impacts on undercurrent issues. That is where the character of Bill, Adah's friend in England, is important. He cultivates in her the self-reliance she needs to become a prospective African woman writer.

Self-reliance is paramount for any assertive woman, particularly for immigrant women as they are very often victims of racism, class and gender inequality. Emecheta's heroine needs it more than ever, as her husband exhibits a feeling of inferiority towards the Whites. Francis's attitude is paradoxical, he is worse than the White people that Adah has met with in England. He is the kind of person who generally reminds her of her color as being a handicap. This makes her life difficult and compromises her career as a writer. For instance, when she enthusiastically informs him about the manuscript she wrote, *The Bride Price*, he was very pessimistic and skeptical about it:

“Then Francis said, ‘You keep forgetting that you are a woman and that you are Black. The White men can barely tolerate us men, to say nothing of brainless females like you who could think of nothing except how to breast-feed her baby.’”²⁷⁶

Francis's pessimism on women is almost criminal. When he puts forwards such allegations, his intention is to kill Adah's spirit, but little does he think that she would ricochete the rhetoric back to him. The following conversation between them betokens what Malcolm X calls his joy to “verbal battle”. It shows Adah's assertiveness, self-reliance and Francis's sarcasm:

“‘Well Flora Nwapa is black and she writes,’ Adah challenged.

²⁷⁶ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.167.

‘Flora Nwapa writes her stuff in Nigeria,’ Francis rejoined.

‘I have seen her books in all the libraries where I worked.’

Francis did not reply to this.’²⁷⁷

Bill’s reaction is completely opposite to Francis’s. He encourages Adah, by telling her that her first draft is of good quality, and that she can free herself through writing. In fact, he only gives her the confidence she lacks to hold on and proceed with her writing. It is a good source of motivation for her, because Bill’s reaction is as a recognition of her writing skill by a White man living in England. It appears like a testimony to her intelligence and a correction to all the people, Africans as well as Western, who presume that women have no brain, and that men are the only persons who have the cognitive ability to think rationally. Bill’s voice never leaves her, as it produces a sound that constantly rings on her mind to remind her of all the tremendous things she can do with words:

“The more she writes, the more she knows she could write and the more she enjoyed writing. She can feel this urge: ‘Write; go on and do it, you can write.’”²⁷⁸

Even though Francis attempts to impede Adah’s work, still, she resists. He eventually burns the book, but this does not prevent her from keeping her faith in herself. Another good example of the state of transition for Emecheta’s heroine is her survival strategies to overcome the racial prejudices characterizing the Western society during her stay in England and her determination to keep her children with her.

²⁷⁷ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.167.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

Adah is very different from the other Nigerian immigrants she sees in England, they have totally different attitudes concerning children. Very often than not, capitalism is associated with antisocialism. For instance, whereas a child, a baby boy particularly, is seen like a bird of good omen in Africa, in Western countries, children appear to be constraints for African immigrants. They constitute a real burden for working parents and even for their neighbors. The system in which African immigrants find themselves compels them somehow to ‘tame’ themselves and adapt to the White people’s ways of life. The Nigerian community in England made it a practice to foster their children while Adah totally refuses to do so. This remains a bone of contention between herself and them. To her, the joy of motherhood is sacred and beyond “imagination”, no matter the country in which she lives; nothing or nobody can change this, even her husband:

“Children used to be one of the greatest achievements Francis appreciated, but in London, the cost, the inconvenience, even the shame of having them had all eroded his pride in them.”²⁷⁹

This passage shows that Francis has given in. He fails to cope with the Western way of life, but his wife still believes in herself: instead of fostering her children as everybody does, she chooses to hire Trudy, a babysitter, though she is convinced of the latter’s affair with her husband:

“You sleep with her, do you not? You buy her pants with the money I work for, and you both spend the money I pay her, when I go to work. I don’t care what you do, but I must have my children whole and perfect.”²⁸⁰

²⁷⁹ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.75.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, p.64.

This imparts Adah's determination and the adversity of life she faces. She is starting something nobody in her community dares do before. In addition to her decision to keep her children and her job, she also intends to resist racial prejudices, the way she challenges her husband.

The racial discrimination African immigrants or "minority groups" face is very noticeable through the problem of housing. The episode entitled "Sorry no Color" connotes the racial prejudices Adah experiences. What stands out in the episode is the parallelism between the racial discrimination she encounters when she was in search of accommodation for her family and her shrewdness in attempting to eschew the race issue. Landlords do not pay justice to tenants from Africa. Not only are African immigrants looked down upon, but also through Adah, Emecheta pinpoints the hostility of the Western system's social policy regarding immigrants, which is too dehumanizing and degrading. She draws the line between the immigrants' treatment abroad and the way they are treated at home. Abroad, African nationals are not generally well treated, whereas, the white immigrants receive a "red-carpet" treatment in Africa. Emecheta questions the white man's humanity, philanthropy, his sense of universality and brotherhood when confronted with African immigrants' social problems.

The law does not protect tenants. Adah sees herself evicted from her former flat and belittled by her landlord at Ashtown Street, simply because of her children and her color. She was not given a good margin of time to search for a new place to live. In fact, the solicitor wrote to Francis and Adah on behalf of the landlady to inform them about the decision she had made without any prior notice and decency. She accuses her of being boastful of her children, that the latter distress her and suggests that she should lock them up in their one-room apartment to prevent them from getting down the stairs. Adah has no other choice than to leave the flat, as she is determined to stay with her children. For

the wealth of the world, she would not keep her children locked away. This differentiates her from Francis and other immigrants. She always rebounds when she is assaulted, whereas Francis eventually gives in. The Western society's requirements towards large families have totally changed Francis's sensitivity towards his children. His attitude has changed because of the misperception Western people have for children and their intolerance towards Black people:

“They (Francis and the others) believe that one had to start with the inferior and stay there, because being black meant being inferior Children used to be one of the greatest achievements Francis appreciated, but in London, the cost, the inconvenience, even the shame of having them, had all eroded his pride in them.”²⁸¹

It is clear that Adah is gaining more and more ground over Francis, though they suffer in England. For Francis, it is the dead end, whereas Adah is more hopeful. She does not adhere to the truism of “color prejudices”. She intends to fight them until the last ditch, because she believes in herself and human dignity. As an African, pregnant of her fourth baby, she is fully aware of the fact that finding a new flat is like looking for a needle in a haystack. The notices in front of the house are discriminatory about the kind of tenants landlords want to give their flats. People like Adah do not have a ghost of a chance to be eligible, because everything works against them:

“Nearly all the notices had ‘Sorry, no coloured’ on them. Her house-hunting was made more difficult because she was black; black, with two very young children and pregnant with another Every door seemed barred against them;

²⁸¹ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, pp.71-75.

nobody would consider accommodating them, even when they were willing to pay double the normal rent.”²⁸²

Landlords’ notices for vacant flats reflect their own perception of Black people. They stereotype the latter as secondary. This explains their aloofness: they do not want to mingle with them in the same building, to say nothing with Africans of large families. In view of all this, Adah does not back down. Since the color of her skin and motherhood work against her, she decides to camouflage them when she negotiates with the landlords for the sake of her children. When she sees a vacant room in front of the post office, she could not believe that the notice did not say ‘*Sorry, no coloureds*’, but nevertheless, she tried to hide her African origin:

“(…) she pressed her wide tunnel-like nostrils together as if to keep out nasty smell. She practiced and practiced her voice in the loo, and was satisfied with the result. The landlady would definitely not mistake her for a woman from Birmingham or London, yet she could be Irish, Scots or an English-speaking Italian.”²⁸³

The fact that Adah tries to camouflage her identity does not suggest that she rejects it. Instead, Emecheta shows the extent to which her heroine is desperate and determined to fight back. It is a form of resistance that is all the more laudable as her husband has lost faith in himself. The author sets her as a good example among her community, as one who tries to keep her head above trouble waters while her chauvinistic husband and the austerity of the Western society strive to pull her down. Her Nigerian “friends” do not appreciate her efforts to change, they are looking at her as someone daring, who does not want to conform to tradition and reality of the Western world. But despite what they

²⁸² Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, pp.70-71.

²⁸³ *Ibid*, p.73.

might think of her, she has the merit of trying to push back the limits that restrict women's lives at home and abroad. The love Adah has for her children and herself is a strong motivation for her to challenge all restrictive powers.

Similarly, the African-American writer, Ernest J. Gaines describes the color prejudice against Black people in America in his novel, *Of Love and Dust*. The plot revolves around a murder case. The male protagonist, Marcus, is black and after he was found guilty of murder, he had to work on the plantation. There, he falls in love with a white woman, Louise, the overseer's wife. Given that they cannot live their love affair as they wish on the plantation, because of Louise's husband, they decide to elope with her daughter. Marcus's elopement is highly risky, because nobody will let him cross the borders in company with two White persons. Since he is prejudiced by his color, he eventually resorts to camouflage Louise's and her daughter's "whiteness" the way Emecheta's heroine tries to defeat the color prejudice in order to rent a vacant room: Louise used the same strategy: "*She had blackened up her face just the right amount.*"²⁸⁴

Surprisingly enough, the two of them do not succeed in their attempts because they are caught by Louise's husband. Marcus gets killed following a fierce battle between the two rivals. Although Marcus's and Louise's plan failed, they were hailed as martyrs of resistance among their communities since they had started something that nobody had ever dared accomplish before. This is all the more worthy of notice as Louise is one of the White women who suffers the same subjugation as other Black women do. She leads a life of routine on the plantation, and her husband is not devoted to her. Her affair with Marcus is, in a way, a sort of compensation for her anxiety and despair, and more importantly, a way for her to rebel placidly against her revered husband. She might be likened to Emecheta's female protagonist in *Second-Class Citizen*,

²⁸⁴ Ernest J. Gaines, *Of Love and Dust*, Dial Press, New York, 1967, p. 243

but the latter's subjugation is more complex. Whereas Louise is only under the yoke of her husband's supremacy, Emecheta's protagonist transcends women's emancipation since she protests against restrictive powers such as patriarchy, gender-bias, class and racism. She faces a heavy subjugation she is resolute to change through struggle.

Adah's personal endeavors set her as a transitional character in women writers' depiction of female protagonists' hegemony. The most striking illustration of this remains her resolve to confront life and her husband. She has always been victim of moral and physical violence, but when the worst comes to the worst, she completely changes her attitude towards him. First, she resists him physically before she resolves to challenge him by killing the evil spirits in him. Whenever Francis starts to hector her, she fights back by resisting as much as she can:

*“She did not know where she got her courage from, but she was beginning to hit him back, even biting him when need be. If that was the language he wanted, well, she would use it.”*²⁸⁵

Not only does Adah come up against Francis physically, but surprisingly enough, she decides to oblige him to fulfill his obligations as a man and the chief of the family. From now onwards, she keeps her salary, to take care of herself and her children. This would have been immoral if her husband did not have money, but since Francis has a new job, it is only fair to compel him to fulfill his duties towards them. Beyond all, he merely gives her “two pounds” for the two of them and their four children. Since she is the one who has a regular job, Francis threatens to write a report to the court to intimidate her. Given that they are no longer in Nigeria, he tries to use the corruption of

²⁸⁵ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.162.

Western society against his wife by twisting the roles: he wants her to fully take charge of him, instead of him doing so:

“She would not pay the rent, because it was a man’s job to do that, she would not contribute to the food budget, because was she not his wife? She would only be responsible for her children, their clothes, the nursery fees and anything else the children needed.”²⁸⁶

Adah’s resolve is stronger when Francis burns her manuscript. This event marks a turning point in the protagonist’s life. The fact that Francis “kills her brainchild” rates him a “criminal”. She thinks that since he is able to burn coldly the draft of her first novel, he becomes a threat to her and her children, for he might as well kill them. Thus, she does not only resolve to stop Francis’s allowance, but also made the final decision to divorce and keep her children at arm’s length from him. As earlier noted, Adah’s change is coupled with a high degree of rhetoric device. It is what basically allows her to speak out and protest against her husband without any fear. The following conversation between her and Francis is a good illustration of her confidence, assertiveness, but also of Francis’s irresponsibility and chauvinism as he reminds her of the bondage that ties him to her:

“Once a man’s wife, always a man’s wife until you die. You cannot escape you are bond to him.... My father knocked my mother about until I was old enough to throw stones at him. My mother never left my father.’

²⁸⁶ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.162.

*'Yes', agreed Adah again, 'but was there a month when your father did not pay the rent, give food money, pay for all your school fees?''*²⁸⁷

This passage is also a good illustration of Adah's change and new attitude towards her husband. It marks a break with people's traditional conception of marriage which consists in "enslaving" women for the rest of their lives. Emecheta also gives us a glimpse of the psychological pathology that affects Francis. In fact, his rash attitude towards his wife is merely a by-effect of his childhood memories. It is the "mirror phase", a period during which the person becomes mature from the prejudices he/she experienced in his/her childhood. The recollection of such bad experiences can lead to two attitudes: very often than not, it urges the victim to avenge and correct injustice, but reversely, it can also urge him/her to identify with the oppressor. Francis identifies himself with his father. He holds it for granted that a woman is, and will always be, the weaker sex: one who is meant to be always humiliated and down trodden. Beyond all the sad experiences he has undergone as a child, Adah reminds him that the reference to his mother does not carry much weight since his father had always fulfilled his duties towards his wife and children.

She pontificates on to say that it is probably because of his father's "responsibility" towards his mother that the latter had remained submissive and obedient towards him, which Adah sees only as his mother's own view of marriage and freedom, but not hers. As far as she is concerned, marriage is not an end to itself. From this perspective, Emecheta sets her heroine as transitional.

Emecheta and Dangarembga are congruent in the way they depict their female protagonists regarding their condition. *Second-Class Citizen* is a telling account of the female protagonist's apprenticeship to maturity. Adah has undergone various prejudices that generally befall women. But as she grows up,

²⁸⁷ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-,Class Citizen*, op.Cit, pp. 171-172.

she develops a personal character through determination, self-assertiveness and confidence that help her protest against the racial myths and injustices that subjugate women in particular and Black people in general. Dangarembga's texts are as committed as Emecheta's to women's empowerment. Her work unfolds the same note of women's survival.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Emecheta's Zimbabwean counterpart centers the transition Adah has shown in *Second-Class Citizen* on her female protagonist: Tambu. She is the perfect match of Adah. She has taken back upon herself countless social injustices that range from sexism, patriarchy, racism to class. Like Emecheta's heroine, Tambu has remained committed to herself.

In fact, Tambu has always venerated Babamukuru. Her uncle is like a demiurge to her, a man without whom her "existence" on earth would have been impossible. The consideration and respect the little girl holds for him can be merely seen from a desperate and poor female child's perspective. On top of that, children are taught to show respect to elder people in Africa. Their role in African societies is so fundamental that the Malian writer, Amadou Hampate Ba, likens the passing away of an elder to a burning library. On the other hand, Tambu's attitude towards Babamukuru is also understandable, as he is the one who fosters her at the mission so that she can pursue her education: he is her savior and benefactor. Beyond all the support Tambu gets from Babamukuru, Dangarembga depicts him as the symbol of patriarchal authority in the Sigauke family. But, since he is the one who has fulfilled the heroine's childhood dream, the latter does not mean to disappoint or challenge him overtly at her age. It is later on, when they get to live together with her maturity and Nyasha's rebellion against his supremacy, that she starts to be projected like an iconoclast. As Linda E. Chown points out:

“*Nervous conditions’ introduces a new kind of individualism based on a way of knowing which moves beyond indecision into a richly affiliated certainty.*”²⁸⁸

Indeed, the language shift is vivid in the text. As the author unfolds the story, the female protagonist acquires a new *self*: she becomes more certain and assertive. She starts to uncover the myths that subjugate her.

Nervous Conditions shows the omnipresence and omnipotence of Babamukuru in the shaping of women’s lives. But Tambu is gradually becoming suspicious of him, because of his chauvinistic inclination. His authority is never questioned bluntly in the family, but the text reveals some events that change Tambu’s attitude towards her oppressive uncle that trigger off her protest. The most striking occasions are: first, when Babamukuru decides to celebrate anew her mother’s wedding at the church; second, when her uncle and aunt accuse her own mother of murder and betrayal, and lastly, following her unsatisfactory A level results. All these events are important in the heroine’s life. She confronts them with the same stamina as Emecheta’s heroine, that is to say with determination and assertiveness. Basically, these occasions are strong moments, for they represent a shift that marks an effective transition in the protagonist’s self-construction and identity.

As earlier mentioned, it is following the family council that Babamukuru has decided to celebrate the marriage of Tambu’s parents anew at the church. To him, all the good years her parents have been together are offensive to God since the marriage is not celebrated in the framework of Christian mores. He even goes on further and comes to the conclusion that their union is mere adultery and that, as long as they live together, the family will always live in extreme misery. But, Tambu questions the relevance of Babamukuru’s decision over the

²⁸⁸ Linda E. Chown : “*Two Disconnected Entities : The Pitfalls of Knowing*” in *Tsitsi Dangarembga’s Nervous Conditions, in Emerging Perspectives on Tsitsi Dangarembga’s Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.248.

marriage celebration. Not only is she skeptical about it, but more importantly, she resolves not to join in the fiesta she views as a masquerade and a denial of privacy right.

“‘ Er, Tambudzai,’ Babamukuru said to me at supper on the Thursday before the wedding, I shall take you home tomorrow, in the afternoon with Lucia, so that you can help with the preparations over there.’

*‘Do not take me at all. I don’t want to be in your stupid wedding,’ I want to shout....’”*²⁸⁹

Deep down herself, Tambu wants to show her frustration to her uncle about the wedding celebration, but silence is part of her psychological strategy to get what she has come to the mission for. While all of Babamukuru’s family get themselves busy over the celebration, she keeps herself aloof from the others, she is not that involved in anything that concerns the wedding. Instead, she finds ways out of whiling away time with some friends at school. On the eve of the celebration, she stayed with them until late and she lied to her aunt that she had some extra work to do, but that is just an excuse not to attend the ceremony.

On the very day of the wedding celebration, Tambu gathers herself and confronts her adamant uncle for refusing to take part in it: *“‘I am sorry Babamukuru,’ I said, ‘but I do not want to go to the wedding.’”*²⁹⁰ What is peculiar about her resolve not to take part in the celebration is that, she declines after Babamukuru summoned his wife to fish her out from her bed to get ready for home, which she flatly refuses to do. This represents the first overt challenge between Tambu and her uncle. It is self-consciousness and resistance to his authority, but also a good illustration of her commitment to obtain consideration

²⁸⁹ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.164.

²⁹⁰ Ibid. p.167.

and minimum respect. Naturally, he turns everything out against the young girl. He threatens to stop her allowances, but she prefers to be punished for what she believes in, rather than conspire with him to destroy the sacredness of her parents' marriage:

*“Babamukuru could not leave me alone. ‘Tambudzai,’ he returned to warn me, ‘I am telling you! If you do not go to the wedding, you are saying you no longer want to live here. I am the head of this house. Anyone who defies my authority is an evil thing in this house, bent on destroying what I have made.’”*²⁹¹

Dangarembga's heroine is as determined as Emecheta's protagonist in *Second-Class Citizen*. Very often than not, they stoically accept the sacrament of reconciliation through self-sacrifice for the sake of self-worth and freedom. Following the incident, Tambu was punished: Babamukuru discharges Anna, the maid, for two weeks' leave for his niece to take over from her. During all this period, she is turned into an “unpaid servant”. But to her, the punishment symbolizes a new triumph over her all powerful uncle, which she acknowledges as a “feather in her cap”, an achievement in her quest: “(...) to me that punishment was the price of my newly acquired identity.”²⁹²

The confrontation Tambu has had with Babamukuru is transitional. She never thought of transgressing or pushing back the limits he has set for her. Likewise, little did she think that her uncle would go so far as to inflict a “knife-wound” on her soul. Her refusal is a resistance and protest that show her pride in herself and commitment to social justice. Dangarembga's heroine protests against her entrapment the same as Adah in *Second-Class Citizen*. In the above-mentioned books, Dangarembga's and Emecheta's female protagonists show

²⁹¹ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.167.

²⁹² Ibid.

transition in their lives, but more importantly, their struggle to resist illustrates the two writers' discursive convergence and commitment to women's condition.

As can be noticed in *Double Yoke*, Emecheta talks about the same transition through the polyphony of her female characters. A good example of this is Miss Bulewao's arrival at Calabar new university, which marks a rupture because postgraduate students are generally tutored by male lecturers in this university. There seems to be some discrimination in the way teachers are recruited. Miss Bulewao is a role model and good illustration of change. This is relevant in the sense that in women's writings, the education of female children is important for their personal construction. Female characters strive to get formal education, not only to shift themselves from poverty, but also to use education as a tool in fighting against social injustice and gender discrimination. Miss Bulewao is representative of Buchi Emecheta's own life. As a female individual, she benefitted from formal education in England and in her native country, Nigeria, to be a specialist in creative writing.

This holds a double dimension. As a woman, it helps her fight sexism, racism and class prejudices, but also as a writer and artist, she uses her talent to make the world read about her personal experiences. Thus, Miss Bulewao is a representation of the author's life, since the latter has spent several years abroad. As a writer, she is more popular abroad than locally. After several good years she has spent abroad, her decision to return to Nigeria is a way of contributing in reforming the country. This is all the more insightful of her as after independence the new African leaders have come up with new scourges that have befallen the continent and that range from corruption to mismanagement, to name but a few. Basically, the initiation of Miss Bulewao's students to creative writing evidences the intrinsic correlation between writing and its social function. The presentation of the course by a female teacher is a rupture to tradition in the sense that never before had a woman presented it. It is a

transition, for it undergirds sexism under capitalist systems. The social commitment Miss Bulewao tries to make her students aware of validates the fact that writing should ultimately help them dissect the current fallacy of their leaders' management and policies.

Miss Bulewao's first contact with the students is a surprise for them. Calabar University is a new one, but the way it is managed reflects the new leaders' mediocrity and the dearth of social commitment. The lecture hall where she is supposed to work is dark, because of poor electricity. She urges her students to draw inspiration from their own social experiences and instincts to write in order to become political:

*“When Miss Bulewao entered with her masculine brief case and quiet tread, the students were too full of their woes to see her. She was a very insignificant looking woman Would you start your creative work by writing me an imaginary story of how you would like your ideal Nigeria to be? You realize, I hope that subjects of this kind most of the work depends on you They were used to the unevenness of their compound surrounding-pot holes here, open gutters there, a dangerous puddle at the other end.”*²⁹³

As a teacher, Miss Bulewao inspires change, because she wants her students to use creative writing as a corrective to fight social injustice. This is insightful and laudable since the author herself seems to use her instinct to write about what she experiences everyday during her stay in Lagos after she spent several years in England. *Double Yoke* is written with the same commitment to women's condition. Female characters are subjugated: they undergo many prejudices, but still they push back the limits in order to have more freedom. Miss Bulewao strongly believes in herself and uses creative writing as a tool to

²⁹³ Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, op.Cit, pp, 3-4-5

voice the hidden reality. From this perspective, the novel is in line with the construction of women's self-identity.

As regards women's struggle and resistance, Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*, is, in no way, dissimilar to the other novels under study. The book develops the same discourse. It is in itself a transition in the protagonist's life, for, whereas *Nervous Conditions* is centered on the protagonist's unyielding will to get formal education during her childhood, *The Book of Not* is ultimately grounded in the heroine's quest for personal development and identity. The first part of the novel describes the social context in which the small group of African girls evolves at the Young Ladies' College of the Sacred Heart. They are victims of the same prejudices as earlier mentioned in the other books, but this time Dangarembga lays great emphasis on the side-effects of war crime and racial segregation on Zimbabweans, particularly on females.

Before Tambu leaves Babamukuru's house, she has undergone sad experiences from her uncle, her White school mates, teachers and the school staff. Dangarembga depicts her resistance in *The Book of Not* with the same splendor she uses in *Nervous Conditions*. In the beginning, the small group of African girls competes to be among the best students at the convent school, though they do not have the same advantages as White settlers' children. As the story unfolds, the text shifts emphasis from their personal endeavors to the outcome of their efforts. While some of them perish along the way, others get out of it unscathed. They show confidence in themselves. The example of Tracey is noteworthy. After years of studies, she has more chances than her school mate, Tambu, because of color prejudice.

This is a plague for Tambu since she still suffers from the discrimination she experienced at high school. The trophy that should have recognized her as the best student had gone to Tracey simply because she is Black. Years after

independence, she experiences the same prejudices and the same person is introduced to her as being her new director:

*“(...) like Sister Emmanuel, pointed at objects that should be done, as a consequence of which action, such objects invariably went. That was the new Tracey, in the new Zimbabwe, advertising executive for Afro-Shine, a local product by young entrepreneurs in baggy suits, and also Deputy Creative Director.”*²⁹⁴

The racial discrimination Tambu went through at the convent school with the headmistress, Sister Emmanuel, is not that much different from the subjugation she experiences with the newly independent Zimbabwe: she continues to work and take orders from the same White settler: the oppression may change, but the oppressor remains the same. What is new in her subordination is the new self-consciousness she seems to gain. In other words, she resorts to self-confidence to shake off the chains that alienate her. In fact, she might be humiliated a thousand times, and differently, yet she is gifted with the talent of writing. Her works are copied and disowned from her by her colleagues at her workplace. Even one of them plagiarized from her production and saw herself heralded “the year’s best copywriter in the company”. This leads her to resign, but she has an asset she can later use as a weapon by turning the destructive violence she is a victim of into a constructive violence through the power of her words. As she puts it: “*words-you could do much with words.*”²⁹⁵ Once again, this shows the determination, confidence and assertiveness of Dangarembga’s and Emecheta’s heroines. Their protagonists acquire training and maturity that help change their condition. At first, they are

²⁹⁴ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, op.Cit, p.216.

²⁹⁵ Ibid, p.220.

oppressed, but, very often than not, they eventually have the last laugh over their oppressors.

V.3 The new African woman

It is commonly acknowledged that the ultimate function of feminist literary criticism is to use scholars' works and shed light on the different forms of subjugations that befall women and ensure social justice for them by voicing the oddness of oppressive cultures and sexism. This is the backcloth of Western feminism whose aim has been to establish equity between men and women. But as earlier mentioned, Western feminism is not in line with African women's aspirations. The existence of African feminism is a result of African women's consciousness of their own realities and commitment. Thoroughly speaking, African feminism does not look away from the direction and mores defined by Western feminists, but seeks to be more realistic and committed to offer African women more opportunities in the socio-economic, cultural and political fields. Analyzing feminism in Africa, Gwendolyn Mikel points out that:

*“African feminism differs from Western feminism because it has developed in a different context. Today, African women are seeking to redefine their roles in ways that allow them a new, culturally attuned activism. This is not a totally novel challenge, since there is evidence of gender hierarchy, female subordination, and women's struggles to reshape their statuses and roles within traditional African cultures in earlier historical periods.”*²⁹⁶

The discrepancy Mikel notes here is palpable in African women's writings. African women writers come up with a discourse that is steeped in their own cultural paradigms. Not only do they contextualize their work, but are

²⁹⁶ Gwendolyn Mikell: “*Feminism in Africa: An Interpretation*”, in *Africana*, edited by Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., op.Cit, p.740.

also socially committed to write anew their own history. This explains the novelty in their portrayal of African women in their fiction. The two women writers here concerned provide good illustrations of female characters whose struggle is merely a pretext to fostering the “construction” of the new African woman.

As socially committed women writers, Emecheta and Dangarembga take women’s condition at the forefront of their works. Their writings reflect the different kinds of problems women encounter in their lives. Their texts are peculiar in the sense that they do not just depict female characters under the sway of an oppressive culture and leave them there, it is more than that. Even though they surely set their protagonists within an alienating environment, their heroines are not static characters. They struggle to change their sordid living conditions. The construction of identity and freedom for the women portrayed in their novels goes crescendo with their personal endeavors. The two writers seem to postulate that freedom is not a godsend gift or something hereditary. Instead, it is gained through merit, perseverance and endurance. These normative criteria of women’s emancipation are succinctly applied to the main female protagonists in Emecheta’s and Dangarembga’s works.

In other words, Emecheta’s and Dangarembga’s texts show a clear cut improvement in the heroines’ lives: during their childhood, they were victims of the weights of Igbo and Shona societies’ restrictive powers where patriarchy, sexism, racial discrimination and imperialism rule supreme. However, they always manage to eschew the constraints that impede their freedom. They come up with different strategies with a view to reform the social order. In this respect, they appear, not just as transitional characters, but rather as reformists. It is from this perspective that we study the point in case while focusing on the challenge that still faces women in the modern world.

In their novels, Emecheta and Dangarembga come with a project. Their characters incarnate the new types of individuals that reshape the cultural norms which alienate women. They are set as good models for women's resistance to capitalism which exacerbated women's condition after colonialism in Africa. The ideology that lies beneath their discourse is that women cannot "construct" a world of equity and social justice regardless of gender-based discrimination, unless they are committed to change their condition. In other words, the fact that some of them are "enslaved" by men, suggests the prime need to undo their bondage to men and any kind of injustice.

Indeed, this is an everyday struggle for Emecheta's and Dangarembga's main protagonists. In *Second-Class Citizen*, Adah fights against sexism the way Dangarembga's heroine does. This similarity is not the only one shared by their protagonists, they also have the same social project, which consists in getting free from men's tyranny. This is plain as they are coming of age and it is even more explicit when they become mature.

This is all the more challenging for them as it is traditionally acknowledged in Shona and Ibo tribes in particular and in African societies in general that women are naturally bonded to men, mainly after marriage. However, a woman who has been to school and exposed to other cultures, who has benefitted from her experience abroad, and on top of that is committed to social justice, may not corroborate this cultural convention. Instead, she may be tempted to question the myths and taboos that alienate her. *Second-Class Citizen* marks a change in the way that the female individual's life is shaped according to tradition and her struggle.

The events unfolding in the novel reveal a new African woman through the character of Adah. The first event that illustrates this is her attitude towards birth control. The perception White people have on children is a far cry from that of Africans': in Africa, children are perceived as messengers of hope and

fortune, especially male children, whereas Western people consider them as problem to be solved. Their misgivings are related to the way their society functions. For instance, a working mother will always find it difficult to cope with her work while raising her children in a capitalist system. This explains Western people's individualism. However, working mothers are now experiencing the same situation in modern African societies.

Adah's determination to resort to birth control has nothing to do with resentment. On the contrary, she loves children like the apple of her eyes. Her inclination towards it, is a personal decision she has made to better resist female subjugation. In fact, it is a way for her to attune to the new Western system, which is uncompromising for ambitious African mothers of her likes. On top of that, she gave birth to two children within two years before she came to England and she had a narrow escape in delivering her third baby. She is health-conscious and knows that birth control is a form of resistance to sexuality and other kinds of sexual violence perpetrated by men over women. Analyzing procreation in Igbo society Marie Umeh points out, tongue in cheek, different forms of violence that are related to sexuality:

“In Igbo society (...), to prevent female rebellion, which would lead to a complete disregard for tradition and the ways of the ancestors, various methods have been devised by patriarchy to control Igbo women's sexuality: clitoridectomy, rape, incest, sexual deprivation, ostracization, fear, humiliation, and the psychological sexual blinding of women. Generally speaking, the only time a woman is regarded as being chaste and pure is when the

sex act is performed by her husband for his recreation, and for her procreation.”²⁹⁷

In *Second-Class Citizen*, Adah resorts to birth control simply because she cannot accept her husband’s control of her sexuality. Once she is aware of Francis’s sexual inclinations, she first talks to him about it, before she goes to a Family Planning Clinic in order to get some methods of contraception. She wants to fully control her sexuality by any means necessary, including contraceptives. She is determined to do so because of the terrible experience she has gone through with her third baby, Bubu. She even goes as far as deciding to stop having children. The following passage evidences Francis’s uncontrolled sexual inclinations and Adah’s restrictive stance:

*“Well, how was Adah to tell the woman that Francis said the best way to control the population was to pour it on the floor? Adah could not bring herself to tell the nurse that. (...) Whatever happened, she was not going to have any more children. She did not care which way she achieved this, but she was having no more children.”*²⁹⁸

Even though Adah fails in her birth-control efforts, Emecheta uses this as a pretext to ignite women’s attention to avoiding to be trapped in the sexual web, since it can somehow be an obstacle to their freedom. She has the same standpoint as Marie Umeh who comes to the ironical conclusion that sexual intercourses between husbands and wives are merely “relaxation time” for the former and an occasion for the latter to merely bear children. Umeh implicitly accuses men of misogyny and selfishness.

²⁹⁷ Marie Umeh : “Procreation Not Recreation : Decoding Mama in Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood*”, in *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*, op.Cit, p.911

²⁹⁸ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.143.

To come back to Adah, men are only motivated by their sexual impulse. They do not care about women's happiness or health. Female subjugation through sexuality is pervasive in African societies. It is partly due to the sacredness of sex as taboo, and partly to patriarchy. Emecheta's heroine is aware of that, sexuality undergirds woman's power physically and psychologically. She knows that if she follows Francis's sexual impulses she will definitely have more children than she had expected. This will be difficult for her to cope with since she must combine her work to reading, writing and raising her children. In view of all this, she needs to fight her husband's desire, to avoid ending up a victim. The fact that she stands up to fight, using her own methods, hails her as a new African woman aiming to have a full grasp of her body, and to get free from sexual subjugation. On this score, Emecheta is in line with Cora Kaplan. Analysing sexuality, the latter views it as a key element of women's dismay and psychological balance in women writers' discourses:

*“The psychic fragmentation expressed through female characters in women's writing is seen as the most important sign of their sexual subordination than their social oppression (...) Women's anger and anguish (...), should be amenable to repair through social change.”*²⁹⁹

In fact, the psychological dimension Kaplan refers to is also noticeable in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* through the character of Nyasha who is blindly negative about marriage. She thinks marriage bonds women to men, and repels the mere thought of getting married. She hardly appreciates it when Tambu's mother presses her blossoming breasts to remind her parents that she is physically marriageable and that she looks forward to seeing her future husband:

²⁹⁹ Cora Kaplan : « Pandora's box : Subjectivity, Class and Sexuality in Socialist feminist criticism », in *Making a Difference : Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. by Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn, op.Cit, p.146.

“Nyasha didn’t like being discussed in the third person, nor did she like the sort of talk going on....”³⁰⁰

By all accounts, Emecheta and Dangarembga are bound by their concern and inclination towards women’s condition. Besides, in *Second-Class Citizen*, the heroine tries to overcome various unvoiced obstacles to improve her condition. Birth control is not the only issue Emecheta pinpoints, there are many more challenging ordeals that Emecheta’s protagonist overcomes. When the situation between Adah and Francis gets out of hands, she resolves to rely on nobody but herself. She decides to find herself a room, an event which is actually a turning point in the story. On the whole, it is a good achievement since Adah has long been confronted with a problem of environment in Lagos. Following her father’s death, she often protested against the suffocating environment of her “new” father’s homestead, which had not been conducive enough to her studies, because of the tension in the air. Even though the room she occupies now with her children in London is not of good standard, still, it is her own, and a good start in freedom acquisition. This is all more relevant as most women writers maintain that a good environment can act as a catalyst for women’s development.

Since Emecheta’s female protagonist faces problems of decent housing and is a victim of racism, her resolve to find a room of her own can be interpreted as a protest against *environmental racism*. This is insightful, as African immigrants and Black people live generally in filthy and tiny apartments or ghettos with little consideration to the environment. In fact, the concept *environmental racism* is generally used to refer to the incident that occurred in North Carolina, United States, in 1982. In his article, “Environmental Racism”, Tim Weiskel explains that after thousands of cubic yards containing toxic waste were collected over fourteen different locations, the local authorities chose a site

³⁰⁰ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.131.

in Warren County to dump the waste on a plot of land that had belonged to Black people during slavery. Surprisingly enough, the choice was not fortuitous, it was chosen out of racial discrimination. Weiskel gives a detailed explanation of the incident in his article as follows:

*“It appeared to local residents that this site had been chosen not for its environmental suitability but rather because it was located in a poor, predominantly black, and politically powerless community (...), residents organized and protested the siting of the toxic dump, and more than 500 people were arrested in a large public demonstration protesting the implicit racism behind the choice of the Warren County location.”*³⁰¹

Furthermore, Weiskel is in harmony with scholars, socially committed intellectuals and postcolonial writers, because not only does his standpoint chart *environmental racism*, but is also intrinsically related to colonialism. He also indicates that the phenomenon is not exclusively typical of the United States, it does happen under colonial domination and continues to plague minority groups under neocolonialism with a new concept he calls “corporate exploitation”.

The concept is glossed in Buchi Emecheta’s first autobiographical novel, *In The Ditch*. The book contains a great tinge of confession, humanism, construction of self-identity and freedom. It is a vivid castigation of the precarious living conditions of minority groups and their families abroad, particularly in England. It is a third person narration through the character of Adah, in which Emecheta uses writing as a tool to talk about her personal experience as a female African immigrant. She depicts the Pussy Cat Mansions or the ditch like a strange fresco, a mixture of all kinds of dwellers, unprivileged

³⁰¹ Tim Weiskel: “*Environmental Racism: An Interpretation*”, in *African*, ed. by Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louise Gates, Jr., op.Cit, p.679.

Black or White people, orphans living from hand to mouth, and couples whose marriage hangs by a thread, because of endemic poverty:

*“It is a curse to be an orphan, a double curse to be a black one in a white country, an unforgivable calamity to be a woman with five kids without a husband.”*³⁰²

The passage illustrates another hallmark of the book’s discursive peculiarity. It is firmly embedded in social commitment, for it takes to the forefront women’s and immigrants’ social problems, but also those of all the needy indigenous people in England in general. It is written from a sociological perspective, because the writer was a post-graduate fellow in sociology when she wrote this sad experience. The inhabitants of Pussy Cat Mansions are referred to as “problem families”. The climax of the novel revolves around the protagonist’s consciousness and how the other female inhabitants of the Mansions organize themselves to protest against insecurity and *environmental racism*. Their living conditions are indecent, but the charm of Emecheta’s writing lies therein the protagonist’s and her friends’ commitment to fight the welfare adviser, Carol, who merely sweetens herself at their expense with the welfare state program.

But beyond Carol, Emecheta criticizes the local authorities’ blatant and anti-social policy and their racist inclination. Through her heroine’s determination and tenacity, and particularly the female inhabitants’ collective collaboration, they succeed in flouting society’s partiality towards people of ‘color’ while sympathizing with all those who live in extreme poverty in the ditch. “The Tenant Association” is a good instance of resistance and female collaboration. At the meeting, the author shows a high degree of self-consciousness in the protagonist who becomes more assertive and self-

³⁰² Buchi Emecheta, *In the Ditch*, London, A.W.S, Heinemann, p.71.

confident. First, she decides to have her say and rejects all kinds of stereotyping that refer to the ditch dwellers as factual social cases:

*“We are not all problem families, you know. A family is a problem one if, first, you’re coloured family sandwiched between two white ones; secondly, if you have more than four children, whatever your income is, if you are an unmarried, separated, divorced, or widowed mother, with a million pounds in the bank, you are still a problem family and lastly, if you are on the ministry you are a problem....”*³⁰³

Adah puts the stress of women’s plague on poverty and racism, but mainly on motherhood. She draws her peers’ attention to that, because, to her, *divorced, separated or widowed women* with many children are more prejudiced than anybody, for the system turns a blind eye to them, to say nothing of the law.

This is more vivid in *Second-Class Citizen*. When Adah with breaks away from her husband, and that the latter takes the matter to court, she becomes very skeptical about the trial’s outcome. Because, she knows that it is a ‘curse’ to be a Black woman without a husband, with many children, in the White man’s country. Indeed, her husband manoeuvres to distort the legal system by denying that he is married to her and refusing any link of parenthood with the children in order to avoid the responsibility for supporting them. But still, Adah rebounds by asking the magistrate to be given custody of her children:

“Francis said they had never been married. He then asked Adah if she could produce the marriage certificate Something happened to Adah then. It was like a big hope

³⁰³ Buchi Emecheta, *In the Ditch*, op.Cit, pp. 98-99.

*and a kind of energy charging into her, giving her so much strength even though she was physically ill with her fifth child. Then she said very loud and very clear, 'Don't worry, sir. The children are mine, and that is enough. I shall never let them down as long as I am alive.'"*³⁰⁴

The above words show Francis's malice and Adah's victory over him. It is a confession and a cry from the heart that allow her to escape for good from her oppressive husband and to live independently as a decent human being in her one-room flat with her loved ones: her children. Through the different events the author unfolds in the novel, and the way her heroine overcomes them, Emecheta surely hails her as a new African woman.

Likewise, *Double Yoke* is depicted in the same vein. The peculiarity of the novel with regard to female subjugation, women's construction and development seems to be mostly centered on the female protagonist, Nko and some minor characters.

On the one hand, Nko can be hailed as a new African woman. For, as a female student, she is prejudiced by the system. At a certain time, her future was mortgaged, but she manages to pursue her studies and obtain her degrees brilliantly by using her body as an asset. In other words, she uses her so called *bottom power* to get her degrees in order to take her family out of poverty. Though she gets out the relationship with Ikot with a baby, she is still determined to pursue her studies, which shows her attachment to her family and her commitment to the objectives she has set to change their social situation. The collaboration of her roommates on the campus is laudable, too.

³⁰⁴ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.17

More importantly, it is a form of resistance, in the sense that Nko's friends voice the social setbacks that stifle women's freedom, which range from rape, early marriage, virginity, to tradition and modernity. They give their views about the severity of life for women in general and female students in particular. They also query the morality of her methods over using her "*bottom power*" to get her degrees to overcome her family's poverty, while taking into account the prejudice of gender inequality. They come to the conclusion that her method is condonable, after all. The discussion between them appears to be a conspiracy against women's oppression and a cry for their freedom. But, the most striking element about it, is the female students' analytical mind about women and violence, and Nko's self-commitment to resist.

Emecheta does not give any other details about her heroine's future, but her resolve to survive is unquestionable. She resolves to carry on with her studies, to keep her baby and confesses to control her sexuality in the future, because it could be a handicap in a rapidly changing and capitalist country like Nigeria. In fact Mrs Nwazu is set as a good example, not only for Nko, but for all the female community on the campus and beyond. She is married with four children to raise, yet she keeps striving to guarantee herself a better life. She cautions Nko about the delicacy of the situation, but once again, the latter is determined enough to take up the challenge:

*"I am sorry Nko. Now you have to work even harder. Because you know the more children you have, the harder you have to work."*³⁰⁵

Mrs Nwazu's words are somehow useless since Nko has already defined new directions for her life. She knows that she is only halfway in her self-construction process. That is to say, she has not finished her studies yet, nor does she have enough means to help her family. Thus, she will not be in a

³⁰⁵ Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, op.Cit, p.159.

position to fulfill her dream if she has to take care of more than one child while coping with her studies. Therefore, she acknowledges it to Mrs Nwazu: “*I am having only this one*’”.³⁰⁶ Her confession is a good instance of maturity and self-determination. As an adolescent girl, she has always dreamt of being a good wife and a mother, but now that she sees life from a new perspective, she becomes more realistic and critical about her own condition. One of Nko’s friends ironically turns Mrs Nwazu’s argument against her when she wonders where was the girl who had always dreamt of being an obedient wife and good mother: “*‘No she has not gone. She has simply just grown because she is going to be a sure academician and a mother....’*”³⁰⁷

In view of all this, Emecheta ranks Nko, and even the community of female students on the campus, as new African women whose ultimate goal is no other than to wrench freedom from men’s oppression, traditional mores and the weight of the budding Nigerian imperialism. She is in perfect harmony with Dangarembga, as earlier discussed. Her female protagonists struggle like Emecheta’s. But, it is not all Dangarembga’s female characters who successfully protested against oppression, but she has at least hailed her main female protagonist, Tambu, and her aunt, Lucia, as new African women. For the sake of consistency, it is essential to study the extent to which the two-cited women remain role models.

The character of Lucia in *Nervous Condition* can be likened to Emecheta’s character, Nko, in *Double Yoke*. For, in the beginning, Lucia is a sex-victim as she has been sexually exploited by Tambu’s father, Jeremiah, and a distant relative, Takesure, to whom she is bonded by “marriage”. Since they live all together under the same shade, the father of her baby remains a mystery for the Sigauke family. Despite her pregnancy, Lucia does not seem to be

³⁰⁶ Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, op.Cit, p.159.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

handicapped by this sad experience. Moreover, she succeeds in demystifying “the Most Revered Man”, Babamukuru. Because of her assertiveness and truculence, he is careful with her. In fact, she symbolizes resistance the way Emecheta depicts Adah and Nko in her two novels under study. She protests against women’s obsequiousness, stoicism and gender-inequality. For instance, among Shona and Igbo people, and in Africa in general, women are not committed to get involved in decision-making, but Lucia is an exception to this. Whenever the *dare* or family council meets to discuss delicate matters, she marches into the room to partake in the discussion and defend women’s interests until the last ditch, without Babamukuru’s opposition.

What is more, Lucia is an ambitious woman. She is aware of her poverty and the impact of money on women’s freedom. She does not disregard the fact that, as long as she is poor, she will entirely depend on Babamukuru, say, men. Since she is a dignified woman who wants to depend on nobody but her own, she convinces him to find her a job as a cook at the mission school. The mere fact of finding a job when there is no ray of hope to get it from him, is a good achievement, to say nothing of the security it will insure her, as it will keep her at arm’s length from the tyranny of men like, Jeremiah and Takesure.

More importantly, with the money Lucia earns she can take care of herself and her baby without anybody’s help. The character of Lucia is very inspiring for all oppressed women. In the beginning, she was illiterate, poor and at men’s mercy. But later, she girds up her loins in order to keep a high profile among her people. She fights illiteracy by convincing Babamukuru to enroll her at the mission school, which permits her to work jointly as a cook and a student. She appears like a role model, for she manages to blend her culinary know-how with Western education in order to emerge like a transitional woman.

Likewise, Dangarembga’s heroine, Tambu, symbolizes resistance. Once again, it is noteworthy to remind the narrator’s confession regarding the future

of female characters. In the beginning, she makes a precision about the outcome of female characters' struggle by wondering whether they have 'escaped' or been 'trapped'. She acknowledges further that her story is about her 'escape' and 'Lucia's'. Thus it is axiomatic that their final realization is unquestioned. Since Lucia's escape has already been discussed, in the following paragraphs we shall attempt to discuss Tambu's escape and how Dangarembga ranks her as a new African woman the way we studied Emecheta's heroines in the books under review.

The difference between Tambu and the other female characters lies in the fact that she is the narrator like Adah in *Second-Class Citizen*. The story is narrated in the first person and Tambu is basically the fictional image of Dangarembga. Thus, she uses Tambu as a device to depict her own experience, i.e., a female individual at a loss in a society where patriarchy and colonialism are in full swing. The story of Tambu is grounded in female subjugation and resilience. Dangarembga does not only depict women's "victimization" as Tambu displays a good resistance towards her oppressors. But her escape and heroism mostly lie in her ability to get a formal education that helps her overcome the alienating situation of indigenous African women. In order to tell the world about her own experience and women's lot, she needs to fall back on memory, pull herself together and recall the past through investigation: "*I shall (...) begin by recalling the facts (...) the events that put me in a position to write this account.*"³⁰⁸

The passage is a vivid illustration of the author's commitment, but also of the intrinsic connectivity between writing and orature. Studying Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, Linda E. Chon posits that:

"The novel naturally becomes one: the history and the story both of others and also the story of self and other (...)

³⁰⁸ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, op.Cit, p.1.

*Tambu has come to command and encourage both her lyrical impulse towards feeling AND a narrative drive to relate and classify. This moment gives rise to a temporary symbiosis of oral and written impulses.”*³⁰⁹

It is the same ‘lyrical impulse’ that Dangarembga continues in *The Book of Not*. She centers the novel on her female protagonist’s story of *self* and *other*. If in *Nervous Conditions* Tambu eventually leaves Babamukuru and the mission for her self-definition, in *The Book of Not*, she still leads a precarious life. The events reveal a series of tribulations that befall her heroine. The same prejudices she knew as a Black student and a female individual, occur again as her production are disowned by her colleagues.

But beyond all, there is hope for her even though she has not built anything concrete for herself and family as she has always wanted. She has acquired maturity and has a full grasp of writing skills that will help her liberate herself from the sordid living conditions of her epoch. This might be utopic for some, given that the text ending denotes pessimism, to some extent. But one has to consider that people can transform the world with the power of their sole words and Tambu has the gift of writing. Even though she has been down trodden several times by her uncle, colleagues and White people, the ability to write and her consciousness will necessarily give rise to a commitment to women’s condition. This is all the more true as Dangarembga uses the character of Tambu as artifice to talk about women’s social subjugation. The mere fact of remembering the past events of her life in order to record them as though they had occurred in fiction, is a good move towards freedom. Dangarembga fuels her texts with her protagonists’ “lyrical impulses” as the only prerequisite and

³⁰⁹ Linda E. Chon, : “ ‘Two Disconnected Entities’: The Pitfalls of Knowing in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*, in *Emerging Perspectives on Tsitsi Dangarembga: Negotiating the Postcolonial*, edited by Ann Elizabeth Willey and Jeanette Treiber, op.Cit, p.247.

instrument to protest against women's "oppression". She is in line with her Nigerian counterpart. The two writers' protagonists have been under the sway of patriarchy, colonialism and globalization, but through their endeavors and commitment, they transcend the barriers that impede their advancement; as such they depict them as new African women who advocate change and better consideration.

On whole, Chapter five, and last but not least of this study, marks a break with the previous ones. Actually, it is the outcome of this study. It has discussed women's reconciliation beneath the prejudices they undergo and their hegemony within restrictive myths. In the books considered, Emecheta and Dangarembga pinpoint the prejudices that befall women through different perspectives and concepts that function to improve their condition, which implicitly means that, in the pursuit of freedom and happiness women writers need to combine their commitment with a high degree of humanism.

Conclusion

The work under review mirrors two women writers' novels, Buchi Emecheta and Tsitsi Dangarembga. The gap in their literary production is noticeable because of Emecheta's seniority in the world fiction, but also the social, historical and political context of both writers' respective countries, Nigeria and Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. Emecheta wrote her first novel, *In the Ditch*, in 1972, whereas Dangarembga made her debut in fiction in 1988 with the publication of her book, *Nervous Conditions*. More interestingly, Nigeria gained independence in the sixties, like most African countries, precisely in 1960, whereas Zimbabwe became independent twenty years later, in 1980. Besides, Rhodesia had been under the yoke of colonial rule from 1888-1965 before it sank into civil war, following the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) signed by Ian Smith, a former politician and Rhodesia's first native-born prime minister from 1964 to 1979. These events have had a negative impact on the proliferation of literature in Zimbabwe, and they account for the postcolonial dimension that is used jointly with women's commitment to their condition in Zimbabwean fiction, but, in no way does this suggest non-commitment from Dangarembga.

What is more, there may be a gap between Emecheta and Dangarembga, regarding their lives and their countries' socio-political background, but, if we agree that literature is socially conditioned, and that every writer reflects some ideologies and class interests, we will not question the two writers' similarities. In fact, they have more similarities than dissimilarities. Moreover, if we consider *per se* the literary discourse of their works, particularly in the novels studied, we will not be surprised by the convergence of their standpoints and their commitment to the woman question and mankind, as a whole. In the four novels considered, Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*, *Double Yoke* and Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, *The Book of Not*, the two writers decry social injustices in general and women's subordination in particular. The plots are intrinsically

related to the two writers' own experiences. Besides, they are autobiographical and semi-autobiographical, for the above-mentioned reasons.

Double Yoke was written following Emecheta's return to her native country, Nigeria, where she has taught creative writing at Calabar University, after twenty years' stay in England. As an intellectual, observer and critic of the world around her, she is disappointed and shocked to see that after several years of independence, her country is still lagging behind. The university that should primarily host and train the future elites of the country is mismanaged. Much to her surprise, she notices the naked truth and existence of gender inequity in the academic supervisory personnel. Since writing has a social function for her, she bears witness in her book to the awkwardness of her Igbo society regarding women's condition through the polyphony of her female characters, particularly through Mrs Bulawao.

Second-Class Citizen is a corrective of Emecheta's semi-autobiographical first novel, *In The Ditch*. It was written only two years after it, since the Western critics viewed the narration of the first novel too truculent and subversive on the race issue. Thus, Emecheta wrote the story anew with more "realism" and less "dramatizing" while mainly focusing on the apprenticeship of Adah to self-realization. Similarly, Dangarembga's two books are autobiographical. But, it is of paramount importance to clarify that *Nervous Conditions* is a result of the author's stay in England, like her Nigerian counterpart, Buchi Emecheta. What is more, it is a combination of the series of prejudices she has encountered as a female individual in her Shona society and the different tribulations she has undergone in England as a Black woman. *The Book of Not* is a sequel to *Nervous Conditions* the Zimbabwean writer published eight years after her first novel. It is written in token of the racial discrimination and gender oppression the author has experienced during her life time, not to mention the side-effects

of the civil war on her. Taken as a whole, it is a telling account of her childhood and womanhood experiences.

The backcloth of the four texts and the two authors' life stories cannot be parted; they are intertwined. In view of all the experiences gained, they cannot allow themselves to give little importance to the status of women in Igbo and Shona societies. Benefiting from their literary work, which is a pinnacle of articulate thoughts and literary conviction, at once, timeless and timely in the context of our day, they essentially put their writing expertise at the disposal of women, as they are devoted to improving women's living condition. Presumably, the authors set their protagonists at the forefront of their stories as the latter struggle for freedom and self-realization within suffocating environments. Not an overnight achievement, their self-fulfillment and realization appear as the outcome of long perseverance and assertiveness. In addition, it connotes their determination and commitment to reform the society they live in through their endeavors. This commitment undoubtedly leads us to women's independence and freedom, but also to a more egalitarian society between men and women.

Emecheta and Dangarembga believe in the inter-connectivity between history and literature. To better understand the gender issue in women's writings, one has to go back to history. The historical background of the continent has a great impact on the status of women. In the work structure, it is linked to women's socio-cultural heritage.

This socio-cultural heritage, in relation to our study, encompasses the sacredness of traditional beliefs, the weights of patriarchy and women's impeding ordeals. It raises the question of how all the pre-cited elements have come to prejudice women. In other words, the two authors give us deep insight of Igbo and Shona societies, their traditional mores and conceptions on women.

Tradition has a strong influence on people's minds in Igbo and Shona well-structured societies. For instance, at the apex of the Igbo society chart, there are the traditional gods whose wrath is never queried. The commonality of the two societies is explicitly based on the community rather than the individual. There is a cult of merit in both societies, the most ambitious and hard-working people being the most authoritative persons among their people. The rigidity of traditional laws does not tolerate any infringement; people have to fully abide by the customary mores. Should they fail to do so, the traditional gods bend on destroying their lives and their progenies'. Moreover, it is traditionally believed that there is a symbiosis between the world of the dead and that of the living, and they act jointly to watch out for any kind of infringement upon traditional values. Emecheta reminds it as follows:

“No one dared ignore any of them. Leprosy was a disease with which the goddess of the biggest river in Iboza cursed anyone who dared to flout one of the town's traditions.”³¹⁰

If even tradition means rigidity, a good structural organization and sacredness, there are also some ideologies which are irrelevant in the eyes of the writers. Dangarembga and Emecheta are skeptical about certain traditional beliefs which still continue to alienate African people, women in particular. In *Second-Class Citizen*, Emecheta questions the powers of traditional gods the same way Dangarembga questions the awkwardness of some of her Shona tradition.

Likewise, the flaws featured in both traditions are also related to patriarchy and male chauvinism. Since most African societies are characterized by the patriarchy, men are prized far more than women who are bonded to men and denied human rights by right of tradition. In fact, masculinity rules supreme. The point of convergence between the two writers is formal education.

³¹⁰ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, op.Cit, p.16.

Emecheta's protagonist, Adah, in *Second-Class Citizen*, and Tambu, Dangarembga's heroine, relate their denial of formal education. Beyond the injustice of the system, there is also sexism working against them.

Women are certainly "victimized" by the patriarchy, but Dangarembga and Emecheta do not show disregard for men's subjugation. Weaker men are castrated by the revered ones. Babamukuru is a good example of this as he symbolizes patriarchy and mitigates his brother's and distant cousin's power and their manhood. Beyond male dominance, women are depicted in the novels as prejudiced by society through servitude and domesticity; they are victims of "objectification". Their development is questioned, since at an early age they are overused by parents. Once married, they take care of their husbands and raise the children, which generally impedes their development as individuals.

Another issue worked by Emecheta and Dangarembga is the pervasive question of colonialism. This is understandable since the issue cannot be dodged from Postcolonial Studies and African literature or just simply from women's writings and its ultimate function, because of its negative impacts on the latter's condition.

Colonialism has completely "upset the setup" of social and cultural stability in Africa. The presence of the White man on the continent goes hand in hand with the forced imposition of his culture and religion. This explains the dual implementation of mission churches and schools on the continent. These two entities are the major pillars the colonizer has fallen back upon to indoctrinate indigenous Africans. Although traditional African leaders had misgivings towards the White man's new culture and religion, still, he has succeeded in disrupting indigenous people's attempt at religious integration. Worse, the contact between the two cultures has brought about a cultural shock and caused a severe mental breakdown at individual level, leading at times to alienation and hybridity.

Besides, the issues of alienation and hybridity are central in African women's writings. Women writers generally evoke it as an end result of women's entrapment. More often than not, alienation is an artefact of women's *double colonization* as they are concomitantly subject to patriarchy and colonial domination, which is evidenced in the two authors' novels.

In *Double Yoke*, Emecheta insists on her protagonists' constant swing between the yoke of tradition and that of colonialism. She also depicts the same situation with the same vein in *Second-Class Citizen*, through Adah's bewilderment during her stay in England. The Western culture's dearth of decency and people's antisocialism, to say nothing of racism, have had a negative impact on her *self*. The culture shock she experiences in England has been a daily drama.

If the issue of alienation is broached on the surface in Emecheta's two novels studied, in her *The Joys of Motherhood*, she "pinches her finger" on it, for the heroine's entrapment exceeds all bounds and her alienation induces her to commit suicide. But unlike Emecheta, Dangarembga delves deeper into the subject of hybridity and alienation. Babamukuru and his family are good examples of hybrids. They are under the yoke of *double consciousness* resulting from the crisscrossed cultures they have retained from their stay in England and their own Shona culture. But the charm with Dangarembga's depiction of *double consciousness* is the artifice of anorexia nervosa she uses to express the extent to which alienation can go. Her heroine does not commit suicide, because it is non-committal for women to act as such. But beyond all, the two writers posit that hybridity is a result of the collision of two different cultures, and that alienation is a correlative junction to hybridity and women's subjugation. They postulate that oppression can undoubtedly alienate people. Instead of empowering women, the historical heritage holds back their progress. In fact, with colonialism, women's status degrades to a second-nature.

Surely enough, colonialism has brought about the impoverishment of Africa and it had a great impact on its economic growth. Emecheta and Dangarembga insist on endemic poverty and the scarcity of money that have resulted from the economic downfall that exacerbates women's condition. They posit that the impoverishment of Igbo and Shona people in particular and of Africans in general, has ultimately induced a crystallization of traditional mores and male domination: husbands become more demanding towards their wives while female children are mere puppets and assets for their fathers because of the prospective bride-price. The novels studied give clear cut examples of these forms of prejudices, but Emecheta and Dangarembga do not content themselves with depicting them *per se*. Their commitment tilts them to provide an in-depth representation of women, and develop in their writing discourse a more participative approach. This explains the inclusiveness of literate and illiterate women's awareness and their struggle to improve their condition.

The novels show illiterate and literate women as well as men who strive themselves for a better life, deploying survival strategies. By developing themselves through entrepreneurship, these women act, not only as role models who aspire to feature prominently among the elites, but also contribute to fostering the spirit of nationhood. The discrepancy between Emecheta and Dangarembga lies in the fact that illiterate women learn their way around by starting from scratch, chiefly by using obsolete means at their disposal in order to thrive their business. But, while illiterate women depend upon precarious means for their economic independence, literate women work on two pillars to join their country's élites: formal education and emigration. Much to their surprise, the two pathways they choose are not always conclusive and easily affordable to them.

This is understandable because of the gender inequality prevailing in formal education, to say nothing of poverty. Yet again, formal education is one

of the most striking and dehumanizing injustices Emecheta's and Dangarembga's heroines are subject to. Though often denied of this right, they have never given up hope fighting tooth and nail to get educated.

Similarly, they see emigration as a way to social mobility and freedom. But still, they eventually get entangled in new plagues that befall them. In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu is "uprooted" from the family homestead to live at the mission with her uncle, Babamukuru, following her brother's death. To her, this opportunity has been the pinnacle of hope, but once there, she discovers her uncle's chauvinistic bias. What is more, at the Young Ladies' College of the Sacred Heart, she does not feel that she belongs to the community of White settlers' children: she starts to experience racism, the way Emecheta's heroine does when she joins her husband in England. There, Adah is not only ill-treated by her husband and looked down upon by the White people she lives with, but is also confronted with new social impediments.

In fact, it would be irrelevant of Emecheta and Dangarembga to just portray women's subjugation without proposing transitional actions. This would only leave their work uncommitted or merely effete. But, since writing should be socially-oriented, they use their texts as tools to empower women. Thus beneath the pervasive social pressure their protagonists go through, there is always a glimpse of hope for their construction and self-identity. As they get mature, they develop new survival strategies which consist in reconciling with themselves beyond the daily prejudices they face. This explains why, at some stages, the two writers' texts shift emphasis from female subjugation to psychological and social dimensions. As is the case in most oppressive environments, the oppressed, in order to survive, needs to work out strategies to outsmart his oppressors. More often than not, both writers use a stream of consciousness in female characterization with useful details. For the sake of the protagonists' survival, the authors are for a stoic approach through the ways

their characters interact with their “oppressors” and the world around them. But, in no way do they suggest that they accept their subjugation. In order to survive, they need to be tolerant and patient. This explains the concept of *personhood*, which is a way for oppressed people to show the external feelings that should not betray their internal and actual feelings. Though Adah and Tambu start to be aware of their secondary status and their subjugation, they do not protest overtly against their oppressors, even if they feel the injustices in their bones. They try to thwart the situation psychologically for some time through tolerance and intelligence, before taking strong corrective actions.

Emecheta and Dangarembga advocate psychological survival and tolerance, but they maintain that the parents’ role is of paramount importance in the construction of women’s self-identity and development. Women cannot reconcile with themselves while disregarding their parents’ support as they need it in the construction of self-development. But in so doing, they should not get ‘trapped’ by male chauvinism or blindly follow their mothers’ footsteps at their own peril. Dangarembga particularly insists on this ambivalence through the tumultuous relationships between Tambu, Nyasha and their parents.

In the process of construction engaged by their protagonists, the two novelists believe in women’s friendship and group-solidarity as instrumental in women’s hegemony. Women need to foster relationships and solidarity in order to wrench freedom from their aggressors. Besides, the novels under review portray good instances of friendship and group-solidarity that help solve serious matters with women’s collective collaboration. Through friendship and group-

solidarity, the female protagonists are eventually empowered with assertiveness, confidence and a strong personality which inevitably prompt them to voice the myths that shatter their personal growth and defeat the destructive powers undermining it. In the light of the above, we can safely conclude by typifying Emecheta’s and Dangarembga’s novels as women *Bildungsroman*.

This does not escape critics' analyses of Emecheta's and Dangarembga's novels. This is sustainable since the main protagonist has to part with the past in order to construct something new and get final realization. But, beyond all, the protagonist needs to do away with the dark episodes of her life story in order to build something new, though it is hard.

Another hallmark of Emecheta's and Dangarembga's novels is the relationship between the female protagonist's personal growth and her maturity, but also the outcome it bears. The protagonist is generally the narrator who becomes mature and looks back on her life from a different perspective to voice a protest against social inequality. This is all the more relevant as the stories place the heroines and narrators within restrictive powers under which they have to ensure personal development through sacrifice and endeavors.

The endings of Emecheta's and Dangarembga's novels mark a sharp break with the beginnings. From the outset, their female protagonists' lives were controlled by 'forces of evil' that impede their progress, but they come out of the experience unscathed like role models and tradition reformists, that is to say, they are portrayed as pioneers paving the way for all oppressed women. This gives their texts a "bottom-up structure", which is different from male writers' texts that are, in general, concomitantly bottom-up and top down stories. In other words, the hero starts from scratch and then, through his personal endeavors reveals the pinnacle of hope and goes downhill anew. In his analysis of Achebe's heroes, Thomas Melone refers to this as the hero's 'circular fate' or *destin circulaire* in Achebe's novels. Okonkwo's life is a good example of it in *Things Fall Apart*.

If the different predicaments that befall women are numerous, the oppression that they sustain alienates them. The optimistic ending of the texts studied is based on the heroines' awareness and commitment to push back the limits that block them. In view of all this, we can surely maintain that the four

novels studied are more social than feminist. Because, Emecheta and Dangarembga do not believe that women's writing is a battle between men and women over power. In actual fact, writing should be based on a social dharma seeking to empower women, and it should be used as a means to promote mankind, as a whole, for a better and harmonious society.

Once again, the two writers are optimistic about women, for most of them across the world are now in charge and can fill any position in the political, social and economic fields. However, there is room to be watchful about the new challenges that hold back women's promotion while not promoting equal justice. These challenges range from rape, prostitution, AIDS, sexual harassment, genital mutilation, and even terrorism, to name but a few. Thus, the issue of women is an "unfinished business" as Hilary Clinton acknowledges it. That is the reason why women should get out of their comfort zone and strive to voice a protest against any kind of biased treatment and humiliation, i.e., they need to think locally and act globally, on a daily basis, so as to ensure social equity without radicalism or female chauvinism. Only then will they live harmoniously with men and contribute truly to the world's capacity building.

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