



## Dichotomic Ideologies in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) by Tsitsi Dangarembga: Claiming and (Re) Shaping Identities and Agencies

Saliou DIONE, Mamadou DIOP

*African and Postcolonial Studies, Department of Anglophone Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar (Senegal)*

**\*Corresponding Author:** Saliou DIONE, *African and Postcolonial Studies, Department of Anglophone Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar (Senegal)*

**Abstract:** *This article shines light on the polysemantic implications of *Nervous Conditions* (1988) by Tsitsi Dangarembga as it explores issues of gender, choice, (in)justice, empowerment, 'place', meaning, roles, discourses, prejudice, and relations in a patriarchal and dogmatic African society. In delineating the social, economic, 'political,' cultural, and psychological hurdles facing women, Dangarembga invites the reader to see beyond and re-interpret the lines of oppositional ideologies which come into play between male and female characters as they struggle for more space, recognition, self-actualization, and identity in a chauvinistic, male-dominated environment. As such, leaning on sociology, psychology, postcolonial and queer theories, deconstruction, feminism, this article sets out to underscore the bedrock of dichotomic outlooks and the rationales behind the unflinching battles for agencies and identities. Thus, the interplay between culture(s), ideologies, behavioral contradictions, and paradoxes of selves, power, and the shaping of agencies in the attempts to end subalternity is emphasized by means of axiology, dialogism, rhetoric, and discourse analysis*

**Keywords:** *Africa, gender, power, psychology, identity, ideology, agency, colonization, feminism.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Women's writings have always resonated with allegories of challenging existence, being, becoming and behaviors connected to the dynamic 'realities' of their societies. Zimbabwean female novelist Tsitsi Dangarembga is among those writers who exemplify the complexities of the nature of their lives, the paradoxes and deep-seated ordeals they are faced with. The gender issues which permeate her literary productions are all the more symbolic as they bear witness to all the trials and tribulations she brings to light in her literary works. Among them is *Nervous Conditions* (1988), in which she highlights the tissue of the African community between 1960's and 1970's. Standing as a political novel, it lays claim to re-questioning and re-defining the societal conceptions, stereotypical roles, hierarchy, impositions, inhibitions, and socio-cultural dictations of rights and duties of both African men and women.

However, though set in a Zimbabwean village, the intent and pretext of the narrative go beyond the frontiers of the African context and claim to be universal, for, as evidenced by Ouahmiche and Boughouas (2016) "*matters of discrimination and undervaluing the other are not of late claims; unfair treatment of women had shaped literary debates since early times*" (p. 2). The fictional representations of women's plight in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) denotes the factual stories and ironies of discrimination and disempowerment. Dangarembga, the author herself, has fallen a victim to in her community on the part of some macho counterparts prone to negate her academic literary skills along with her merit as a writer. This obvious power structure and essentialization partly modeled by the influence of colonization on Zimbabwean indigenous people, is intrinsically associated with some cultural ideologies embraced by a biased educational system, as Sarah Miller (2017) bears it out: "*education occupies a paradoxical position; it both promotes the values of the dominant culture and uncovers injustices of the culture toward its victims*" (p. 3).

In providing a rhetorical and satirical narrative as *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Tsitsi Dangarembga summons the reader to revisit the circular arguments that commit the logical fallacy of assuming what they are attempting to prove of Zimbabwean patriarchy and the narrowed spaces created for women as they struggle against colonial and social subjectivities, oppressions and the “*artificial binaries of good and evil*”(Kaur 2008: 03) imposed upon them. Indeed, from those entangled dualities result deviant impulses, counter-offensive discourses to question the dogmas and stem the tide of subjugating male-centeredness. Jaspal Kaur (2008) contends that one of the rationales behind these rebellious minds of female characters in the novel is:

To recast female subjectivity and agency by allowing women to name the structure of oppressions in order to resist certain patriarchal oppressions within postcolonial frameworks. They try to show alternate spaces within global capitalism where identities can be refashioned for selfhood and empowerment, where women work toward social change and expansion, and where multiple identities can be incorporated into old ones, not simply by disrupting or dismantling pre-existing social structures but by altering and expanding them (p. 4).

The stratification of the patriarchal system of the Shona community in *Nervous Conditions* into so-called (il) legitimate ideologies creates two entities, each of which expected to be the advocate of the law that dictates “*he is subject, the Absolute; she is the other*” (Susan 2003: 4) as Simone de Beauvoir sarcastically puts it through the character of Susan (2003). Therefore the systematicity of ‘master-slave relationship’ in the novel gives rise to a critical bone of contention. Drawing on theories such as, psychology, deconstruction, feminism and queer, and literary paradigms like dialogism and axiology allows to unravel the rhetoric of propagandas, discourses, and binary oppositions of Dangarembga’s female and male characters as they engage in intricate battles of dichotomic ideologies to reclaim agencies, problematic of culture clash, hybridity, the quest for selfhood and identity within the social matrix of pre-established versus nascent powers. To this end, the article scrutinizes the patriarchal ideology and the systematization of being and becoming and between ‘solipsism’ and utilitarianism to go against the stream of subalternity are being scrutinized.

## **2. THE PATRIARCHAL IDEOLOGY AND THE SYSTEMATIZATION OF BEING AND BECOMING**

Being and becoming are grounded in how the patriarchal ideology and its systematization are socially and culturally determined in community and the individual’s life is conceptualized in society (Jingyi Huang 2019). From a sociological perspective, people are socialized with some meanings that serve as behavioral and attitudinal indicators and criteria. Gender, which refers to one’s maleness (masculinity) or femaleness (femininity), defines the nature of roles which both female and male characters are attributed to in *Nervous Conditions* (1988). The offshoot of the distinction is noticeable through the multi-edged experiences that follow the stories of the different characters in Dangarembga’s narrative.

Indeed, the opening sentences uttered by the protagonist, Nyasha, set the tone and pinpoint the rhetoric, irony, and satire of the novel’s feminist allegories: “*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, my uncle’s daughter, whose rebellion may not in the end have been successful*” (Dangarembga, 1988: 1). Symbolically, the term ‘escape’ voiced by Nyasha is all the more meaningful as it portrays the discriminating conditions women are entrapped in and speaking out against being at the mercy of their patriarchal community. Therefore, they rise against the social roles and functions ascribed to them after finding them biased and contradictory. In fact, their negation of those social artifacts hails from the falsehood that only men should hold the gratifying title of household breadwinners. However, paradoxically, when at some point in the novel Nyasha’s brother Nhamon has to carry on his studies but their father Jeremiah cannot afford the high fees, it is their mother who takes it upon her to toil and moil and come up with a solution:

Fortunately, my mother was determined in that. She began to boil eggs, which she carried to the bus terminus and sold to passengers passing (this meant that we could not eat them), she also took vegetables—rape, onions and tomatoes extending her garden so that there was more to sell (Dangarembga, 1988: 15).

In addition, the other part of the quotation hints at the unheeded endeavors of female characters in the farms, like Tambu and grandmother Mbuya working in the fields when she tells her the story of the forced land usurpation by British colonizers and settlers referred to as “*the wizards who [...] came from the south and forced the people from the land*” (p.18). Ironically, Nyasha’s argument that “*this business of womanhood is a heavy burden*” is allegorical as it testifies to the subjectivities and contradictions of the patriarchal ideologies since they pre-condition the essence of being, becoming, and selfhood in the society. In the Shona community, ideology accounts for every pattern of behaviors and actions, which tallies with Ahsanat Moazzam (2017) who argues that “*an ideology gives ideas and concepts in order to explain the existing reality*”(p. 2). Women firmly cling on to this belief, but their contribution to the fight against the precariousness and squalor their homestead is suffering from fades into the background of isolated actions worthy of celebration. This distorted notion of being and becoming, thus of self, are enshrined in the psychologically outraged social realities, which strengthens the power of the patriarchy perpetuators. D. A. Odoi et al. (2014) substantiate the idea, stating that “*such a transfiguration of the traditional notions of being [...] afford a ‘new’ image in the eyes of agents of aberrant patriarchy like Babamukuru and his fellow villagers*” (D. A. Odoi and al., 2014:4).

Being and becoming are interwoven with how the conception of ‘self’ is constructed in society. The idea is substantiated by Paul K. Piff according to whom “*self and identity researchers have long believed that the self is both a product of situations and a shaper of behavior in situations*”(2014: 2). Thus, the very products of the patriarchal situation in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) are women like Lucia, Maiguru, Nyasha’s mother and Tambu’s mother whose self-consciousness is negated and narrowed to mere observers of the configuration of their society. Maiguru, *Babamukuru*’s wife is an epitome of women’s victimization by the macho system, despite her being lucky to get educated and have degrees. As a matter of fact, she feels betrayed by her community’s contradictions with regard to the place and consideration given to women, which stands as blockades preventing them from fashioning their own dreamt-of ‘beings’ and ‘selves.’ And this irony shows how much the patriarchal ideology navigates their lives as it seals their fate as females in their social environment. It deviates them from their entertained image of themselves that aims for what psychologists like Mustafa Njozi (2005) refer to as the “*ideal I*” (p. 2). Maiguru’s ‘ideal I’ in Jeremiah’s and Babamukuru’s patriarchal ‘enslaving world,’ which reminds one of Hegel’s opinion<sup>1</sup>, is redirected towards the inclinations of their males’ vicious cycle of oppression. Her remorseful words are symbolic:

What it is [...] to have to choose between self and security. When I was in England I glimpsed for a little while the things I could have been, the things I could have done-if-if-if things were different—But there was BabawaChido and the children and the family. And does anyone realise, does anyone appreciate, what sacrifices were made? As for me, no one even thinks about the things I gave up’ (pp. 101-102).

Essentially, Maiguru’s words set the feminist perspective of Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* (1988) as they pave the way for Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s pretext in *Why We Should All Be Feminists* (2014) where the young Nigerian writer spotlights the problematic of gender and warns:

The problem with gender is that it prescribes how we should be rather than recognizing how we are. Imagine how much happier we would be, how much freer to be our true individual selves, if we did not have the weight of gender expectations (p. 13).

Even so, as it turns out, the patriarchal system and its operating mode in Tambu’s society do not seem to condone such notions of women’s ‘true individual selves’. This is justified in Mashingua’s assertion that “*this business of womanhood is a heavy burden*” (Dangarembga, 2018:16). Moreover, the issue of ‘true individual selves’ denied to women by male supremacy has already been dealt with in Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru* (1966) and *Idu* (1970). Both novels offer a microscopic diagnosis of realistic representations of gender issues in patriarchal society shaped in the history of colonization and by male chauvinism. In fact, Nwapa’s female characters Efuru and Edu foreshadow Dangarembga’s

---

<sup>1</sup>“*becoming consists on the contradictory notions of being and the negation of being simultaneously*” in Huang : *Being and Becoming: The Implications of Different Conceptualizations of Children and Childhood in Education* (2009: 2).

cases of female characters like Nyasha, Maiguru, Mashinga who are subjected to their societies' definitions of being and becoming a woman. The patriarchal ideology then sees to it that they take it indisputably for granted that womanhood is limitedly linked with sheer production and childbearing and motherhood.

Indeed, the intensely chronicled events women go through in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) are crucial in figuring out how the systematization of being and becoming is oppressive to the female subjects as they result from "*ritualized atrocities that are unspeakable also in a second sense; that is they are strong taboos against saying [...] the truth about them*" (Morrison, 1991:55). Dangarembga's narrative is polysemantic insofar as it uncovers the multifaceted aspect of the subjugation of the patriarchy system as it brings the thematic of education to the fore. Indeed, Maiguru's lamentations over the prejudice related to the lack of choice they are faced with are evocative of women's nervous conditions as evidenced by the following question and the comment on it: "*how could it not be? When it is like that you can't just decide today I want to this, tomorrow I want to do that*" (Dangarembga, 1988:16).

Nonetheless, the male-centeredness embodied by Bamamukuru, Jeremiah and associates is an ideology which tries to create a submissive mindset that is capable of framing a female character that acts through men's lenses and accept that women's education is of no avail, for it is a dead-end undertaking. This accounts for the reason why Tambudzai's father is being ironical saying that women cannot cook books and feed them to their husbands; therefore they have to learn to cook, clean, and grow vegetables (p. 15). This fabrication of an obedient-and-static-becoming 'being' is premised in the intent of "*the creation of a consciousness and self*" (Lisa Eck, 2008: 10). Along the lines, it is implied that the shaping of consciousness and self is expected to operate on the psychology of its victims such as Tambu and Nyasha. In the same vein, K. Williams (2012) argues that the purpose of this just-mentioned creation is to enable *acceptance* to take root. The author refers to it as "*the ways members of subordinate groups consciously or unconsciously accept and/or acquiesce to the limitations and subordinate roles required for systems of oppression to exist*" (K. Williams, 2012:26). Tambu, the main character, at some point, comes close to accepting that her potential as a woman is restricted to staying at home, cleaning, and growing vegetables; she believes that she is not as intelligent as her brother Nhamo to succeed in her studies. Thus, she regretfully laments: "*I thought about this for several days, during which I began to fear that I was not as intelligent as my Sub A performance had led me to believe*" (Dangarembga, 1988:15).

Therefore, Dangarembga seems to call [our] attention to the consequences of the patriarchal ideology that creates asymmetrical structures seeing the rights of women negated. This gender segregationist configuration they fall prey to is meant to tilt the balance of agency in male characters like Jeremiah, and especially Nhamo who, despite his young age, is indoctrinated to perpetuate the dogmatic traditions and laws of his community.

In addition, on analyzing how patriarchal ideology runs in the blood of the Shona community, it appears that male hegemony seeks to instill in youngsters like Nhamo a culture of leadership that falls on men's shoulders only. As such, they have to internalize their born-with roles, functions, and identity, and bear as well the responsibilities as providers for their families. Young men are thus taught not to give women any margin of power to circumvent this system which keeps them aware that "*you cannot just decide today I want to do this tomorrow I want to do that*" (Dangarembga, 1988:15). The move is evidenced by Minna Salami (2017), who confirms that "*they assumed 'man' to be the agent and the standard beneficiary of development. Women's priorities and needs were subsumed under a welfare orientation limited to their reproductive roles or totally excluded* (p. 43). Basically, women's longed-for being and becoming through education, judged from some men's standpoints, does not contribute much to the economic blossom of the homestead because as Jeremiah puts it forth, it will profit others insofar as "*Tambudzai's sharpness with her books is no use because in the end it will benefit strangers*"(p. 59).

Inherently, the Shona community's unfair treatment of women envisions safeguarding a system of (dis)order and dis-ease embedded in the alleged biological assumptions of masculinity and femininity. As a matter of fact, the patriarchal metonym does not allow for redefinition of conception on 'order' on the part of female subjects who are committed to leaving no stone unturned to break through the shackles of disorder and subalternity.

### 3. BETWEEN 'SOLIPSISM AND UTILITARIANISM': GOING AGAINST THE STREAM OF SUBALTERNITY

In *Nervous Conditions* (1988), the patriarchal notion of hierarchy fetched from 'values' and determining women's and men's social roles and stations in life is considered discriminatory, for as Beauvoir satirizes, it eschews the issue why a woman has to be seen as different from a man, not a man as different from a woman; why represents the inessential in relation to the essential (Susan, 2013) In fact, such paradoxes wake some female characters up to the partiality of the system that fosters man's interests at their expense. Therefore, they engage in a battle to re-define the patriarchal notions of meaning, roles, worth, superiority, inferiority, in relation to femininity and masculinity. As a result, this gives rise to contending ideologies to re-claim and perpetuate agencies in the novel.

In fact, Mustafa Njozi (2005)'s utilitarianism refers to a doctrine which regards human comfort as the ultimate good. As a philosophical outlook, it encourages human beings to take positions that will maximize their comfort and minimize their sufferings. It judges the correctness and incorrectness of ideas in terms of their results or consequences. As for solipsism, it is viewed as the doctrine embodying that existence means for my existence only and that of my mental states. It is everything I experience. It maintains that other people, events etc., anything regarded as constituent of the space and time in which I coexist with other is construed by me as part of the content of my consciousness (Stephen P.Thornton 1972). Dangarembga's characters Bamamukuru, Jeremia, Nhamo, and Takesure are the patriarchal apostles of the solipsist ideology which tries to stifle the voices of women like Nyasha, Maiguru, Msahingua, Lucia who attempt to subvert their biasedness. To this end, they [Women] resort to another definition of ideology which "*offers a critique of the existing ideology and proposes a path forward. i.e., a manifesto to be followed in order to achieve the desired goal in the future that has been identified by the ideology itself*" (quoted in AhsanatMoazzam, 2017: 2).

In delineating the issue of dichotomic ideologies, Dangarembga briefs the reader with the distinct personalities and peculiarities of some women characters who struggle for emancipation. Through the re-claiming of agency which refers to the faculty to act or perform an action and whether the individuals can autonomously, initiate action, or whether the things they do are in some sense determined by the ways in which their identity has been constructed (Ashcroft and al.2000:), is displayed how cultural imbrications influence the ways female characters like Nyasha, who is a victim of western education, behave in contrast with her female counterparts. In fact, Nyasha, as a character, at first value, appears disdainful as she plunges into the judgmental culture of her father Babamukuru and Jeremia, which expects some behavioral standards from every child to abide by. Indeed, a lot of incidents have taken place to bear witness to her 'disrespectful' attitudes. When she wishes to be as free as she used to be in England "*look at me now. I was comfortable in England but now I'm a whore with dirty habits*" (p. 17), she faces the warnings of her father who does not condone such a mischief and threatens her that "*anyone who defies my authority is an evil thing in this house, bent on destroying what I have made*" (p. 167).

Still, the understandable paradox of education as a double-edge sword is epitomized through the case of Tambu who disapproves of Nysha's strangeness. At this juncture, she serves as the mouthpiece of that positivity in Shona culture which shapes the image of the obedient child. She reminds her that she should respect her mother even if she has been to England, and she would not speak to her the way she has done. Nyasha's confused identity stems from hybridity and ambivalence. Her benchmark of identification is the influence of what the Shona community regards as a form of acculturation/uprootedness caused by her encounter with the 'Other,' the Westerner or the 'West-Other.' A situation that Bhabha specifies writing that "*hybridityconfuses the signs of difference as signs of authority*"(Rothenburger 2001: 3-4). Nysaha's sense of place and home has been corrupted by her western education, which puts her in a state of psychological loss and dis-ease as she strives to re-find her way through, to reconnect herself with her lost [mixed] identity. Being conscious of it, she implicitly blames her parents for having gone to England, regretfully blasting that "*we shouldn't have gone*" (p. 76). For Iran (2017), this phenomenon is related to the theory of homeliness and unhomeliness developed by Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994). The same idea is reproduced by Tyson who argues that "*to be unhomed is to feel not at home even in your own home because you are not at home in yourself: your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee*" (Iran, 2017: 14).

However, through Nyasha's being considered a 'psychological refugee' (Iran, 2017:14) as she struggles to stand up to her father's hegemony, Dangarembga expects the readership to re-consider the thinking and behaving patterns of Nyasha, Tambu Lucia Muguru; for, behind their stringent unsubmitiveness lies their feminist ideologies to see the fulfillment of a dream about or plan for a different world as idealized by Adichie (2014). They question the patriarchal socialization of functions, roles, and agency that perpetuates dominion discourses through the power of men; and then devote themselves to breaking the chains of subalternity which, as Tambudzai puts it, ensures that "*the needs and sensibilities of women... (are) not considered a priority, or even legitimate*" (p. 14).

Indeed, the climax witnessed in the narrative is typified by means of dialogic representations. Thus, Dangarembga, in pointing out the male-chauvinistic discourses, creates spaces and scenes of confrontations where the female character refuses to keep being, as Spivak backs it up, "*the sexed subaltern which is trapped by the ideological representations of radical as well as powers which essentialize them in order to appropriate their voices*" (Parvaneh, 2016:12). Female characters rather choose to confront men's ideas, decisions, orders, and tyranny which are sometimes aggressively utilized to gainsay their subjectivity and claim their individuality as women. They work towards achieving their agency in matters concerning them. To unearth this aspect of women's subjectivities, the Zimbabwean novelist resorts to rhetoric to alter the social reality by countering the other discourses that contribute in shaping that same reality. That is the reason why, in *Nervous Conditions*, the relationship between power and discourse in women's sufferings is very apparent. More importantly, power as a domination paradigm (Karlberg, 2005: 5) is what feminist characters rebel against as they speak to men. Nyasha and Lucia are cases in point with the latter entering into verbal conflict as her father tries to restore authority. When he hurls at her these words, "*what is this you're saying, this nonsense you dare put in my ears!*" (p.113); she fights back: "*what do you want me to admit I'm guilty, don't you. All right then. I was doing it whatever you're talking about*"(p. 113). MeyreIvone Da Silva (2019) associates this kind of language and discourse with the notion of *linguistic violence* (p. 3) through which female characters question the rules of the society in which they live. Nyasha's ultimate fight with her father being hyperbolic is an indicator as to the psychological violence that affects women, thereby leading to their loss of composure in front of men.

In *Nervous Conditions* (1988), the power of female characters' discourses is strengthened by the rhetoric of violence it is interwoven with. Lucia and Tambu are peculiar characters whose tone of language is harsh and sometimes violent. In fact, in the scene involving Lucia and Takesure, Babamuruku summons a family *dare* uniting only the patriarchy without women. Lucia violates this alleged men's privacy considering it abnormal and discriminatory. Her words are telling: "*I don't know what frightens them about coming out in the open, but everything they do is hushed and covered. Hidden even from us as though we were children*"(p. 137). She ends up labelling Jeremiah as a 'lazybones,' incapable of taking care of her sister. Her discourse is powerful as she tries to convince her sister to stop being with an irresponsible husband. For her, Mashinga should leave the homestead. Actually, the women in the novel seek to snatch back their agency, and are strongly committed to deconstructing the misconceptions and so-called facts piled up on them, which set them apart as a group restricted to playing subaltern roles. Lucia's discourse attempts to tear down those myths on women. Robert Young's analysis of Foucault's theory on discourse and its role in the process of deconstruction can evidence this insofar as "*we must conceive discourse as a violence which we do to things, or in any case a practice which we impose on them*"(Young, 1981: 66). Lucia and Nyasha are the embodiments of the utilitarianist women who fight for freedom of expression and action in the midst of male-centeredness and solipsism.

Furthermore, the rhetoric of violence in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) can be viewed a literary weapon for debunking the patriarchal *clichés* that are fabricated on women. In point of fact, Tambu, the narrator, at the very outset of the narration, provides omen with the aspect of linguistic violence of the novel when admitting to her imperviousness to the death of her own brother Nyamo: "*I was not sorry when my brother died. Nor am I apologizing for my callousness, as you may define it, my lack of feeling*" (p. 1). Nhamo's callousness is justified in her brother's solipsist mind, which turns a blind eye to her rights to education and intelligence. He participates in edging the patriarchal ideology which holds femalehood in a cage of "*social paradigm of productivity*"(OuahmicheBoughouas, 2016:2). Babamuku, Takesure and other male characters, portrayed as dictators, refuse to allow room

for women to voice out their grievances. Similarly, in Ngugi's *The River Between* (1974) this issue of dichotomic ideologies is foreshadowed through Johsua and his daughter Muthoni. Their opposition surfaces when her father bans her from participating in the circumcision rite because of his faith in the Christian religion. Despite her father's refusal, she resolves to take part in it. She reclaims her agency as a woman in the following words, proclaiming "*I want to be a woman; I want to be a real girl, a real woman*" (p. 26). Muthoni cultivates an ideology which tunes with Nyasha's and Tambu's oppressive status by their macho society.

Like Dangarembga's spirit of feminist dynamism, Ousmane Sembene's *L'Harmattan* (1964) epitomizes gender issues in Tioumbe's patriarchal community. In this society men are granted absolute authority. In fact, Joseph Koeboghi is the representation of Babamukuru in his ways of imposing his tyranny upon his wives and daughters. When he declares "*this is my house, I must be obeyed*" (Sembene, 1964: 239), his grabbing their voting cards alleging that only men vote in his house is symbolic of his being intoxicated in the ideology of their society. Interestingly enough, while her mother complies with the husband's discriminatory law, Tioumbe's nascent ideology, akin to Nyasha's and Tambu's, energizes her to speak out against it. She overtly criticizes her father: "*father, you have no right to treat me like this*" (p. 245). Therefore, it is clear that both writers have spotlighted the instinct of patriarchy, of men who make use of violence to have their ideologies respected.

Since violence, according to Cronje, provides a relatively easily accessible means of asserting and maintaining a masculine identity (Ajala, 2016: 6), beyond the battle of oppositional ideologies for agency, both male and female characters in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) embark on asserting their identities in the Shona patriarchal community. In effect, as it turns out characters like Nyasha and Tambu are representatives of women seeking to claim and reshape their identities in a world where identification norms are already set and strongly shielded. As for Nyasha, it is her possessing a Western education that shores up her utilitarianist ideologies. According to J. Mountain (2017) Fanon brands them as "*native intellectuals*" (p. 7). Nyasha's status of 'native intellectual', as it were, allows her to further counteract her society's realities and law of order. Likewise, Tambu, when quitting her place for Bamamuku's to get educated, rationalizes it as an escape to reach out for a new identification. As such, she hankers after a new self, a new world of freedom, self-actualization, and empowerment. Her words are allegorical: "*at Babamuku's I expected to find another self*" (p. 59). Basically, these points to the agenda of postcolonial women writers who seek to re-define the regulatory power and discourses of the patriarchal ideology which systematizes supremacist order of being and becoming, their narratives' pretexts encompass the politics and rhetoric of molding a new self and identity, a move that is justified in the claim of rights and considerations, especially agency, and nurtures the continuous battle of dichotomic ideologies in *Nervous Conditions* (1988)

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

*Nervous Conditions* (1988) by Tsitsi Dangarembga is a poignant narrative with a powerful representation of gender issues in the Zimbabwean context in particular and African one in general. The evocative title of the book brings home the nature of events unfolding in the novel. Thus, in analyzing the polysemantic implications of the work, one has grasped its pretext and how Dangarembga has unraveled the miscellaneous ordeals women are forced to come to grips with by the Shona society. In fact, the writer has offered a critical and ironic view of this community within which men's and women's worth, self, choices, roles, discourses, power, and identities are socially conceptualized and at the latter's expense. It has been crucial to ascertain through the bitter experiences of female characters in the novel, the extent to which women like Maiguru, Mashiinga, Lucia along with ladies such as Nyasha and the protagonist, Nyasa, have suffered at the hands of their macho counterparts.

In fact, dissecting the workings of Babamukuru and Jeremiah's patriarchal community has been pivotal to understand the binary opposition and biased nature of that system that has instinctualized paradoxical concepts of being, becoming and of behaving. The so-called definitions of femalehood and malehood have seemingly sealed the fate of women like Mashiinga, Lucia, Maiguru, and especially Tambudzai. Their own conception of self and Identity has been shaped by the patriarchal ideology that has made sense of them from the alleged social and cultural norms, mores, and laws.

Therefore, it has been vital to pinpoint that being and becoming, and behaving regarding women, taken from men's standpoint, must be undeniably and restively defined through their social roles as housewives. As it has turned out that the writer has spotlighted the enslaving character of these (mis)representations that have molded a submissive 'being' with no margin, choice, and agency.

It is worth pointing out that the analysis of Tsitsi Dangarembga's text from a feminist point of view, has allowed casting light on the subjugating rhetoric of patriarchy that has fashioned an ideology entitled to warrant the perpetuation of a female mindset that succumbs to the discourse of Babamukuru and his likes. Women in the novel have found nearly impossible room to assert themselves as individuals with rights and duties under the dominion of their men.

However, it has been fundamental to the reader to witness the climax of the narrative as the female characters attempt to subvert the cult of acceptance and submission. Nyasha, Tambudzia, and Lucia have been symbolic in that point insofar as their attitudes towards male-centeredness come down to the writer's political activism to question the alleged legitimacy of patriarchy in the Shona community. They have stood up to the status quo through ideological assets and at times physical confrontation to reclaim their agency and identity. The resort to linguistic violence as a retaliation weapon against the male supremacist power of subordination has been crucial to highlight, for it foreshadows the psychological impact it has upon women and their lives.

Again, there is no doubt whatsoever that the battle of solipsist and utilitarianist ideologies has stemmed from the noticed paradoxes of the patriarchal system which disregards women's contribution to the fight against poverty. This has been the case with Mashiinga. Dangarembga's empowering female characters and ridiculing some men like Jeremiah have enabled the reader to figure out the injustice women have been victims of. Hence, her molding of some strong-minded female characters to take up the gauntlet and confront the patriarchal partiality and contradictions for the end of subalternity and dawn of emancipation.

#### REFERENCES

- ASHCROFT, Bill et al. (2000), *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, Routledge.
- ADICHIE, NgoziChimamanda (2014), *We Should All be Feminists*, London: Hammersmith.
- BAHARVAND, PeimanAmanolahi and Zarrinjooee Bahman (2012), "The formation of a hybrid identity in TsitsiDangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*", Vol. 4(3), *African Journal of History and Culture*. pp. 27-36.
- BHABHA K., Homi (1994), *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge.
- BORBOR, Taraneh (2010), *Towards a New Geographical Consciousness: A Study of Place in the Novels of V. S. Naipaul and J. M. Coetzee*, University of Sussex.
- DANGAREMGBA, Tsitsi (1988), *Nervous Conditions*, The Women's Press.
- ECK, Lisa (2008) "Thinking Globally, Teaching Locally, the NervousConditions of Cross-Cultural Literacy", 70, no. 6, *Framingham State University*, 578-598.
- FARAHBAKHSH, lireza (2016), "Bhabha's Notion of Unhomeliness in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*", Volume 4, Issue 7, *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, pp 105-112.
- J. MOUNTAIN, Alyssa and Fisher J. Mountain, Alyssa and Fisher (2017), "The Intellectual Woman's Cage: Complicating Ideals of Fanon's "Native Intellectual" in *Nervous Conditions*", Volume 18, Issue 5, *A Journal of Undergraduate Student Research*
- St. John (2017), "The Intellectual Woman's Cage: Complicating Ideals of Fanon's "Native Intellectual in *Nervous Conditions*", Vol. 18, Issue 5. *Islamic Azad University A Journal of Undergraduate Student Research*.
- LINCY, P. (2017), "Gender Construct in *Nervous Conditions* by TsitsiDangarembga", Vol. 4. Issue. 4. *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Translation Studies*.
- MILLER, Sarah (2018), "Self-Destructive Education in TsitsiDangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*", vol-5 issue 6, Wright State university.
- MOAZZAM, AreebaAhsanat( 2017), "Understanding "Ideology": Its Aspects, Features, Dimensions and Types, 4th International Conference on Humanities", Social Sciences and Education, 13-14.
- MUSTAFANjozi (2005), "Utilitarianism versus Universalism in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*", 14(1), *Nordic Journal of African Studies* pp.1-14.



**Dichotomic Ideologies in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) by Tsitsi Dangarembga: Claiming and (Re) Shaping Identities and Agencies**

---

NWAPA, Flora (1966), *Efuru*, William Heinemann.

.....(1970), *Idu*, London: Heinemann.

ODOI, D. A. and al (2014) “*Negotiating Social Change in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s Nervous Conditions*”, 38(2), Language Centre, University of Ghana, 151-158.

OUAHMICHE, Ghania, Boughouas Lemya (2016), “Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*: A Quest into the Time-honoured Mindsets About Feminineness Scuffle in the Context of Colonization and African Patriarchy”, vol. 4(6): *International Journal of Literature and Arts*, 104-112.

ROSTAMI, Ali Akbar Moghaddasi (2016), “The Notion of Unhomeliness in the Pickup: Homi Bhabha Revisited, Centre”, Vol. 7. No. 1. *Australian International Academic*, 2203-4714.

SEMBENE, OUSMANE (1980), *L’Harmattan*, Présence Africaine .

FANON, Frantz (1961), *The Wretched of the Earth*, Penguin Harmondsworth.

SMITH, Ann (2000), “Girl Power in *Nervous Conditions*: Fictional Practice As A Research” *Site*. Vol. 35, n° 3. *University of Witwatersrand journal*.

THIONG’O Ngugi James wa (1965), *The River Between*, African Writers Series: Heinemann.

**Citation:** Saliou DIONE & Mamadou DIOP. “Dichotomic Ideologies in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) by Tsitsi Dangarembga: Claiming and (Re) Shaping Identities and Agencies” *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)*, vol 10, no. 4, 2022, pp. 11-19. doi: <https://doi.org/10.20431/2347-3134.1004002>.

**Copyright:** © 2022 Authors. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.