

Shifting gender roles: A critical analysis of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and Petina Gappah's *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009)

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Shifting gender roles: A critical analysis of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and Petina Gappah's *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009)

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A dissertation submitted to the Department of English and Communication, Midlands State University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts English and Communication Honours Degree.

November 2014

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DEDICATION

For Moses and Media Gapa, my beloved parents and for Molline, Martha, Tariro, Takudzwa and
Tapiwa, Tichavaka, Mumangi, Tafara, Tawanda, Munashe, Tashinga, Takunda, Tinashe and
Jarrad, whose support I can never fully appreciate on paper.

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ABSTRACT

The subject of gender is an important part in the study of postcolonial societies. Post-colonial societies are the battlefields for the struggle for identity after the culmination of the imperialistic colonial institution. Therefore this study aims to uncover the interconnectedness of gender and culture and how identity informs the course of gender roles. This study advances that the drastic shift of gender roles was first recorded with the inception of colonialism in Africa as women began to reclaim a voice in society by moving from the domestic space to the public workforce and thus defied cultural norms. However the issue of identity is engraved with a violent and chaotic process in the wake of the double consciousness that haunts the postcolonial societies. The main concern of this study is how women are doubly oppressed by both patriarchy and an imperialist hegemony and how Western feminist ideals impart a false awareness in the woman's quest for identity in postcolonial society. Also central to this study is the dawning that this double consciousness affects men as it also affects women and with such inevitable reality, the research traces the changes that manifest due to the commonness of double consciousness in both men and women. The study brings out these subjects through a critical analysis of two Zimbabwean female narratives, Dangarembga's *Nervous conditions* (1988) and Gappah's *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009)

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1.0 CHAPTER ONE: A background of the development of Gender roles in Zimbabwe.

1.1 Introduction

According to Connell (1979) gender is a cultural construct that creates a distinct division of society in line with one's biological mechanism. Webster's New World Encyclopedia (1992) explains culture, as the way of life of a particular society or group of people including patterns of thoughts, beliefs, behavior, customs, tradition, rituals, dress and language as well as art, music and literature. Gender is thus informed by the cultural values of a given society. As a former British colony, Zimbabwe has been subject to cultural invasion through the institution of colonialism. As such, the Zimbabwean society has experienced changes in gendered norms and values proving that as a social construct, gender is subject to change. The effects of colonialism and cultural imperialism have affected society's life styles and, as a result of this, both women and men have been forced to redefine some important aspects of their identities as well as come to terms with losing some of their traditional gender roles. Given the alienation and double consciousness that distinguish postcolonial societies, this process of restructuring gender roles is often mingled with false consciousness. In their postcoloniality, the colonized are still under the miasma of Western imperialist culture and therefore have limited access to their culture such that this process is marked by both psychological and physical violence.

1.2 Background to study

According to Bolivar (1820) Gender is how myth is reinforced on the construction of social roles in order to buttress political hegemonies. This notion explains that, through patriarchal rule, men have reinforced the ideas that women have a weaker physical and mental component to men through institutions of religion and science. As such, women were seen as the weaker sex from

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as early as biblical time. This difference is manifested in the way gender roles are constructed in society. Patriarchy is the social organization where males are the primary authority figures in the organization of society, bracing the political and authoritative faculties while women occupy the subordinate positions. In pre-colonial African society, which was largely patriarchal, certain behaviors and norms were culturally preserved specifically for either a male or a female which could also be referred to as gender stereotypes. This dichotomy meant that certain lines were not to be crossed in terms of division of labour. Men occupied roles in politics and decision making while women were reduced to court entertainers and child bearers with no important role in matters of decision making in society. The man was the head of the family while the women were subordinate to men. Young boys were socialised to be courageous and strong which was typically associated with masculinity as the stronger of the two sexes while female children were confined to the home as was typical to femininity as the weaker sex. For a long time, these roles were not contested as they were nurtured as being natural.

However, with the advent of colonialism and cultural imperialism, there was a drastic shuffle on the African traditional system which had to come to terms with the dominance and intrusion of a new social setting. The colonizers were able to control and impose their Western knowledge systems and culture on the Africans such that their perceptions of the world became the enacted cultural norms. Through such a development, it can be established how gender roles are created upon the notion that where two comparable entities exist, the stronger entity becomes the dominator and the weaker becomes the dominated. Consequently, the men who were once the symbol of African authority were reduced to laborers and slaves of the colonialists. This

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development in conjunction with the Western feminist waves of the 1960's and 1970's, gave birth to new and hybrid gender roles which shook the patriarchal status of the African man .

Following this drastic transformation the impetus now falls on the African woman traditionally oppressed and subordinated who now found herself deep in the throes of yet another set of oppressive cultural system. With the same impositions as of patriarchy, Western imperialism through hegemony sustained and perpetuated the same view that women were to be confined at the bottom of the society in terms of economic and political bearing. However, the creation of Reserves for the black population marked the most colossal shift of gender roles in the African societies which instantaneously changed the traditional family setting. Ironically, this development cut off the man from the family setting and the woman in the reserves assumed the role of the head of the family raising the family on their own and developed means of sustaining a family without the father figure. While the men worked in the towns without their families, young boys were left to look up to their mothers as role models thus femininity began to evolve steadily becoming stronger as masculinities were retrogressed to the extent that fatherhood was no longer revered in society. Young boys were left to look up to their mothers as role models in the same way as girls would look up to their mothers. This witnessed stronger femininities which was a new phenomenon and ushered a transcendence of the woman in the newly set societal order. In the towns, men assumed subordinate roles in the mines which ironically put them in the similar position as that which the women had occupied in the patriarchal setting. With this turn of events, culture began to be redefined as it came to terms with a new culture where African men's authority was diluted and femininities progressed in the role of raising the family. This was

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relatively new phenomenon to the African men who had enjoyed patriarchal dominance over the years and it was an unavoidable circumstance.

In the same way during the Liberation struggle, women took up arms to fight alongside their male counterparts and by the end of the war, previous social constructs that identified women as the weaker sex had been contested and challenged and the subordination of women would no longer be accepted without a challenge from the women who had transcended from assuming minor statuses to occupying important roles in society.

Post independent Zimbabwe still carried the legacy of colonialism and as society attempted to reconcile with their traditional culture and restore the values that had been in existence in the period before colonialism, gender roles continued to take on different turns. Cultural norms had been modified during the course of the one hundred years –experience of colonization. Men's societal status as the stronger and more dominant sex had been contested in the wake of a new societal order.

Having noted that both men and women's traditional roles were lost with the inception of colonialism, it can be noted that women on the other hand began to move from the traditional private spaces into the public workforce. Women began to challenge phallogocentric ideals of culture such that even as men aimed to perpetuate women subjugation through merging Western hegemony and patriarchy, women adopted counter measures to end this subjugation. As a result of the continued war of the sexes, African women applauded the entrance of the feminist movement in Africa. However its inception and its very foundations as a Western concept would

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have repercussions to the African woman who is confronted with her 'Otherity'- her separate existence from the Western woman.

At this point, it is important to establish how this historical development is captured in literature, specifically African literature. The battle of gender roles and identities has come a long way. According to Gaidzanwa (1985) Literature holds the capacity to mirror society. An examination of the first literary encounter in Zimbabwe exposes how men remain the most dominant figures in the field and how they have perpetuated the marginalization of women in Zimbabwean literature. Zimbabwean women therefore in their narratives challenge traditional phallogocentric stereotypes of women by men. However it is imperative to note that postcolonial society is haunted by the fact of double consciousness and the degree to which Western feminist advances influenced women's movement for emancipation is the resultant cause of the violence and false consciousness that hinder Zimbabwean women's access to their emancipation. Hence their failure to create a progressive society with complimentary gender roles.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Although critics have explored the issues of shifting gender roles and the struggle for women's emancipation in contemporary Zimbabwean society very little focus has been put on the ways in which the postcolonial status uniquely affects the Zimbabwean woman. The Postcolonial woman's double consciousness has a direct bearing on the attainment of emancipation and the construction of the women's identity. Nnomlin (2010) contends that African feminist narratives are submerged with excesses of radical practices. Western Hegemony has merged with patriarchy to perpetuate the subjugation of women while Western feminist ideology has influenced women to reinforce and employ radical ideas to challenge male dominance. In the

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process of reclaiming their identities, both femininities and masculinities are faced with inevitable facts of change which are largely characterized by violence and hybrid gender roles whose effects are largely detrimental to the development of the postcolonial woman. This study explores the reasons why post-colonial societies are characterized with violent expressions of gendered identities and how as Fanon (1976) argues, that inversion which is the consequent result of Radical Feminist ideology, reestablishes the oppressive structure of binary opposition that characterize colonial discourse.

1.4 Objectives

Thus, this study aims to:

- Describe the ways in which gender roles shift.
- Explain how patriarchal culture influences gender roles.
- Establish how cultural imperialism is responsible for the violent manifestation of gender roles in female narratives.
- Establish the inter-textual relationship between the two primary texts in relation to their portrayal of shifting gender role in postcolonial society.

1.5 Research Questions

- What are gender roles?
- What causes shifts in gender roles?
- How does patriarchal culture influence gender roles?
- How does colonialism affect gender roles in postcolonial societies?

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- Which of the two primary texts best portrays the reasons for shifting gender roles in Postcolonial society.

1.6 Justification/Motivation

No study has analyzed *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009) in terms of their intertextual relation in the depiction of gender roles in postcolonial Zimbabwean society. These two texts manage to capture how postcolonial women are affected by the violence and chaos of their postcolonial status in their plight liberation. Most female critics in Zimbabwe have tended to adopt mainstream feminism in their conscientisation of women and as a result, it is important to examine the applicability of feminism as a western concept in a culture which is in a continuous struggle to regain its identity. This study echoes Fanon's (1976) assertion that argues that inversion of the oppressive system when women adopt radical ideals to in their plight for emancipation reestablishes the oppressive structure of binary oppositions that characterize colonial society. This study aims to bring out that this Manichaeism (Fanon 1976) which is responsible for the violent manifestations of gender roles is as a result of adopting Western feminist consciousness which does not apply to the construction of a progressive gendered postcolonial Zimbabwean society.

1.7 Literature review

Gender is a prevalent subject in post-colonial discourse. According to Stratton (2002) "While African male writers challenge the racial codes of colonial discourse; they adopt certain aspects of the gender identities of their adversaries in their representations of African women (p171). After a history of subordination and inequalities in patriarchal social settings, female African writers sought to challenge phallogocentric portrayals of women which infested African male narratives. Stratton (1994) counters this notion by asserting that although inversion produces this

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binary status in African women's literary discourse and does not solve the problems of gender in postcolonial societies, it succeeds in unmasking the strategies of the discourse that perpetuated female subjugation (p174) Derrida as quoted in Stratton (2002) describes this process of binary oppositions between African men and women as, "a violent hierarchy".

According to Cornwall African gender studies emerged in the wake of the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Katie Millet (1969) feminists main thrust is centered on defending women against misrepresentation and stereotyping in society, raising women's political consciousness and radically changing power relations between women and men.

According to Cornwall (2004) this set of ideals are linked to the demands of early second wave feminism in the West, which specifically advocated for Western women's rights to equal access to the political and economic spheres. Cornwall argues that the shifting emphasis tells more about the shifting preoccupations of Western feminists than about African realities. WaThiongo's (1987) assertion, could not agree more as he asserts that, the biggest weapon that imperialism managed to maneuver is the culture bomb. Mariama Ba (2002) echoes the same sentiments in an interview where she mentioned the important function of the book as a weapon, she reiterates that women cannot empower themselves if their liberation quest is not informed by their culture.

Literary criticism sheds more light into a given culture's ideology and belief systems. Gaidzanwa (1985) further asserts that, "Literature is an important part of this experience because it mirrors and interprets from the points of view of those who write about it."(p2) In light of this assertion,

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this literature review will give insight on the development of gender roles as depicted by female African writers.

According to Abbenyi (1997) Feminist narratives in Africa serve the purpose of “using writing as weapons to invade the battlefields that had been previously occupied by male writers by way of rewriting and questioning the traditional oppressive conditions specific to their post-colonial heritage in a constantly changing post-colonial context.” (p148) Nnomlin (2010) contends this notion by expounding on how feminism was constructed on the dependency of Western theorists who were mainly concerned with legal rights for the middle class Western women hence the applicability of feminist ideology on African soil becomes questionable. This agrees with Freire (1970) who brings the notion that, the former peasant who becomes the native foreman tends to be harsher towards the other peasants than the previous owner which results in no change on the current oppressive system. At the same time, Freire (1970) offers the solution that the situation can be transformed in the event that the oppressed should come to view their status as an in transit state from which they can change.

According to Gaidzanwa (1985) “Zimbabwe has just undergone a war of liberation and this experience has changed the expectations and behaviors of most groups in society.” (p1) The changes mentioned above are to be examined through female narratives whose reactionary representations serve to describe the dynamics of culture and both the shift and maintenance of gender roles in post-colonial Zimbabwean society.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

There is no one theory that can explain the diversity of gender roles and the ways in which they are constructed. This study is located within the postcolonial and African womanist theoretical

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frameworks in explaining the shift of gender roles in postcolonial settings. According to Tiffin as quoted in Ashcroft et al (2011)

Understandably, then, it has become the project of post-colonial literatures to investigate the European textual capture and containment of colonial and post-colonial space and to intervene in that originary and continuing containment. (Ashcroft 2011, p. 97)

According to John Lye (1998) Postcolonial theory focuses on the way in which literature by colonized people attempts to articulate their identity and reclaim their past in the face of that past's inevitable otherness. This theory adequately enables the researcher to identify the state of double consciousness and lack of identity that is best articulated in the theory. Post-colonial states are in a constant struggle with the intrusion and imposition of a new and foreign culture even after attaining independence. This imposition impacts on the postcolonial society's culture. Central to understanding a people's culture is the way in which gender roles are constructed as their fluid nature assists to give history and describe the various changes that a society has undergone. Post-colonial theory also helps to explain the a cultural gender roles that characterize post-colonial society through its description the changes in cultural and political systems in Zimbabwe has evolved in stages that include awareness of one's cultural "Otherness" and subservience to a growing awareness of one's environment.

Africana womanism allows to critic the influence of radical feminism as a western concept and advances for the need of a complimentary social existence between African women and men. Hudson-Weems (2004) affirms commitment to the liberation of both African women and men from the legacy of colonialism and imperialist culture while offering solutions in an African context without the influence of the West.

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1.9 Methodology

This Research has employed a qualitative textual analysis of the two primary texts, *Nervous Conditions* (1988) by Tsitsi Dangarembga and *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009) by Petina Gappah. According to Nicholas Walliman (2006) Qualitative research focuses on examining non tangible evidence of social phenomena. This also gives room for the description and exploration of the study without being governed by controlled experiments and preexisting standards of collecting and reviewing information. The researcher will examine the intertextuality of the two primary narratives in order to establish the interconnectedness of the themes in the texts.

1.10 Chapter organization

Chapter one

This chapter foregrounds the research by giving the history and background of research. In this Chapter, the study preempts the general direction of the study which includes the aim of research, objectives, and research questions, justification of study, a brief literature review, methodology and the theoretical framework guiding the research.

Chapter two

In this chapter, the researcher will give a detailed review of existing literature around the research question detailing the existing scholarship and evaluating their contribution to the line of research. This chapter will also assist the researcher to identify the problem area that they feel needs to be addressed.

Chapter three

In chronology order, this chapter will examine and critique the first narrative of the two primary texts. This chapter will give a detailed critical review of Dangarembga's *Nervous*

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conditions (1988) by examining the title, thematic setting, characters and overall characterization of the text in line with the question under study.

Chapter four

A detailed analysis of the second primary text Gappah's "*An Elegy for Easterly*" (2009) with close reference to the shifting of gender roles in the complex societal order of postcolonial Zimbabwe. This review will examine the influence of culture on the author's narrative as well as the title, setting, themes and characterisation of the narrative.

Chapter five

This closing chapter is the conclusion and summary of research as well as highlighting the finding of the study under question.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter managed to highlight the historical background of the course of gender roles in Zimbabwe by mapping out the traditional cultural system, down to the colonial and postcolonial settings and how this transition has affected Zimbabwean women and men in their bid to reconstruct contemporary society. The next chapter will thus review the inception and the imports for adopting Western feminist ideals in the conscientisation of African women's plight for emancipation.

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2.0 CHAPTER TWO: Shifting gender roles and the construction of the African woman's identity.

2.1 Introduction

After foregrounding the background of the study from the previous chapter, it has been established how the subject of gender is interrelated to culture such that the two entities cannot be separated. It is important to understand that gender systems are diverse and are best understood in the context of a given culture. According to the Webster dictionary online (2014) shifting can be described as "to move or to cause (something or someone) to move to a different place, position" which implies a change of phenomena from one state to another. Being a patriarchal society, the shift of gender roles in Zimbabwean society is registered when women began to mobilize themselves from the peripheral spaces to public circles such as the workforce as a result of the transition from an egalitarian societal structure to a capitalist imperial cultural system.

Postcolonial refers to the state where the institution of colonialism has culminated and the society is left in need of regaining their identity. In light with the violent transformations that take place in this state of society, this study will examine the influence of Western imperialist culture, the role of patriarchy and the reconstruction of economies and politics in the African woman's fight for emancipation. The postcolonial state of affairs has a unique bearing on the African woman who has a long history of subordination. Spivak (1985) as cited in Ashcroft et al (2011) uncovers how native women are doubly oppressed and are "caught between the dominations of a native patriarchy and a foreign masculinist-imperialist ideology." (p36) African

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women thus have to be aware that their fight for identity and place in society is multidimensional given their postcolonial setting.

Cultural imperialism and all its consequential effects, always affects women in more grave ways compared to men. In their bid to reaffirm a place and voice in society, postcolonial women are bound with their state of 'otherity' and 'double consciousness's such that they never fully empower themselves.

2.3 Under Western eyes: The African woman as the "Other"

The African woman as the 'Other' Said (1978) or as put across by Mudimbe's alternative term "alterity" which according to the Merriam Webster dictionary (2014) means, "the quality or state of being radically alien to the conscious self or a particular cultural orientation." is constantly described as not having a 'self' and thus tends to get represented or spoken for by others. To this view, Ogunde-Leslie (1994) reiterates that;

"Our very view of ourselves, our knowledge of ourselves, has to be constantly queried as not coming from what has been told to us, or from what has been constructed on our behalf." (1994:8)

From the above statement, Ogunde-Leslie (1994) clearly expresses how Western feminism in its attempt to speak for women, poses the danger of representing a universalized concept of interest which if the African woman as the "Other" is not careful, will be lured into accepting the same view of themselves and thereby creating a false consciousness.

In an interview with Harell-Bond (2003) Ba asserts the importance of the book as a weapon to transgress and shatter hegemonic male representation (Abbenyi 1997:14) However as a colonial

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victim the African woman affected by Western feminist ideals fails to consider the impact of race and colonialism on the culture of the African female. Cornwall (2005) echoes this assertion; "the intrusion of foreign influences created situations whereby dual sex systems of power sharing were threatened" (p35)

As much as feminist discourse in Africa deals with reconstruction of women identities and giving voice to women, it is important to uncover how in their attempt of reconstruction of the identity of African women can be hindered by their position of the other. The African female is lured to accept western ideals without conceptualizing its applicability given the history of her disrupted culture as Chitando accurately states,

"Where previously the discipline was dominated by men's voices and visions, they have radically altered the face of the discipline. Women's voices and experiences have become an integral part of African literature. They concentrate on women's struggles against suffocation by patriarchal dictates" (p42)

Chitando (2011) observes that African women writers, by articulating women's voices have managed to counter phallogocentric discourses.

2.4 Representation of African women and the African female writer's dilemma.

There is need to review if the African woman is not entangled herself in false representation of African women. To foreground this development, Ashcroft et al exposes the dilemma of African women writers;

"..whose representations of their societies and of patriarchal oppressions within them, are seen as conflicting with the processes of decolonisation and cultural restitution, not just in terms of images presented to the former colonisers, but more significantly in terms of their own Euro-interpellated popularities." (p249)

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In some African female narratives, the representation of women is soiled with western ideals which are alien to the African setting. Commenting on the feasibility of western feminism in African female narratives, Bekovich (1999) suggests that black women have to come to terms with a triple challenge from patriarchy, from their race and their biological anatomy. Petersen as cited in Ashcroft et al (2011) further addresses the issue from the view on how the African woman is engaged in a double battle for both her equality and cultural imperialism on the other hand;

“from a culture from which at the same time it is trying to disassociate itself and at the same time it has to modify its admiration for some aspects of a culture it is claiming validity” (p254)

However, the African woman needs to undo the Western ideology which informs her feminist consciousness. Memmi (1971) illustrates how colonialism replaces the memory of the African so that he is brainwashed and begins to see his world in the eyes of the Westerner. WaThiongo (1987) addresses the same issue in his assertion that the greatest weapon unleashed by colonialism is the culture bomb which aims to “..annihilate a people's belief in their culture “and in their names and deem their past as a wasteland. Farah et al (2011) further postulates that, “Colonization disrupted the course of cultural growth of Africa.

It is important to examine that the African woman with her newfound emancipation, still entangled with the victimhood of colonialism, is prone to the pitfall of a “false consciousness” Fanon (1961), in a bid to empower herself. Having a double consciousness which as highlighted by W.E.B Dubois in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) as “... a peculiar sensation this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one'sself through the eyes of the other's (1903:5)

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Ashcroft et al (1995) postulate that, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern -which Spivak(1988) described as the marginalized and subordinated group, has no history and cannot speak, the woman thus is even more gravely affected. African men, in their response to colonial discourse always succeeded to produce representations of African women which are denigratory to African women. In a bid to challenge this misrepresentation and giving voice to women, African women fall in the trap of embracing wholesale western feminist ideals. Given the premature integration of African culture, its subordination, the African woman is not affiliated to both the new imperialist culture and her traditional culture that has been snatched away from her. For the African woman to turn to the western feminist ideology spurred in the 1960's which was mainly concerned with voting rights for Western women, creates a hybrid encounter which as mentioned before by Farah et al(2011) creates distorted gender arrangements in the African society.

Nnaemeka(2005) brings to light the different cultural goals that western feminist and the African woman have;

While Western feminist discourse emphasizes the power grabbing that reinforces individualism, African feminist discourse foregrounds the power-sharing that underscores community and human living as they are inscribed in many African proverbs. (p 33-34).

Obadina(2006), in Farah et al(2011) expounds on the idea that "alien models imposed by colonialism laid seeds for a political crisis in Africa." Western Feminism falls in this category as its alien ideals are ahistorical to the African woman's plight.

Thus, the African woman surrounded by a colonial society, and having half access of either the Western culture or the traditional African culture would not find her place in Western feminist ideals. With a detest of her culture as a wasteland, as WaThiongo(1987) asserts as the effect of

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the “culture bomb”, the African female finds herself inclined to the western culture and this phenomenon in itself hinders the quest of self-discovery that the African woman attempts to embark. African women's plights for emancipation have been accused of being muffled by white centered feminism tendencies such that their narrations have failed to promote lasting social change. The fact that colonialism attacks the culture of a people, the transformations that took place have a direct impact on culture and consequently on gender roles. The African woman, who to borrow Said's (1978) concept of the ‘Other’ having been stripped off her identity, alienated, was forced to prematurely adopt the ideals of West feminism. In the wake of a double identity and no complete access to western culture or her traditional culture, the African woman is in a violent postcolonial struggle of regaining identity.

Mohanty (1988) echoes the same sentiment as she opines that there is the danger of intellectuals setting themselves up to speak on behalf of dominated groups. Cornwall (2005) also argues that,

“.. one is terribly disturbed by what has become of African women of today, particularly those whose psyche has been severely damaged in the process of acquiring western education.” (2005:33)

The African woman is aware of Westernization only as a theory and not as a culture. Aneikwu (2011) illustrates how these difference of African and Western culture cannot be ignored .Aneikwu (2011) also clearly states the differences of Western feminism from the feminism that emerged in post-colonial Africa.

The feminist movement that has emerged in post-colonial Africa is basically heterosexual, pronatal and concerned with women's rights, political and economic issues. It differs radically from the Western model which is, by and large, an advocacy of sexual rights, female control over reproduction, choices within human sexuality and essentialism. (p143)

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Maria Lugones (2007) argues that imperialist settings of gender are a violent process used to destroy the colonized people's way of life. This violence can be seen in both the physical and emotional violence that women are often confronted with in their quest to fight patriarchy. Lugones (2007) also argues that the Western concepts of gender introduces binaries with strict gender roles which do not allow for a complimentary existence between women and men. This concept proves that Western feminist ideals do not fit in the history of the African woman. Too radical representations of women are often faced with the reality that African women cannot completely do away and turn the patriarchal society upside down in order for women to earn a place in society.

Hudson-Weems (2004) posits that African men and women need each other for a meaningful existence. In this regard Hudson-Weems (2004) avoid gender discrimination and thus manage to avoid leading women to what Freire (1968) laments as the fate of the once oppressed peasant who becomes a foreman and tends to be harsher toward the other peasants than the owner which does not avail the current status of the peasant.

Western Feminist concepts turn out to be self-mutilating to the African woman and tend to be problematic when it comes in contact with the postcolonial societies who are in a constant struggle to redefine themselves posing more ambiguities than solutions in the direction of gendered identities. Soyinka (1976) in Ashcroft et al (2011) echoes the dilemma of the black African in the process of recovering his /her identity,

“We black Africans have been blandly invited to submit ourselves to a second epoch of colonialism—this time by a universal-humanoid abstraction defined and conducted by individuals whose theories and prescriptions are derived from the apprehension of *their* world and *their* history, *their* social neuroses and *their* value systems.(p256)

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Spivak (1985) as cited in Ashcroft et al (2011) further uncovers how native women are doubly oppressed and are caught between the dilemmas of domination from the traditional patriarchal set up and from the imperialistic racist based oppressive system. Aniekwu (2011) further opines that,

“The imposition of Western capitalism and political hegemonies altered the dynamics of gender and sexuality in many colonised societies with the result that the historical and contemporary dynamics of the African state, and its approach to gender issues, have been different at different times. (p145)

Basu (1995) is of the view that African women's movements need to be defined feminism needs to be defined in terms of the strength and transformative potential of women's organising as it exists in the local African setting which is independent of a Western influence.

Spivak as cited in Ashcroft et al (1986) argues that the construction of a Western cultural identity was inseparable from “Othering” the native as its object. From this statement, it is clear that the feasibility of adopting Western feminist ideals in their representation and giving voice to women is indeed self-derogative as Western feminism was not designed with the racial and colonial other in mind.

2.5 Zimbabwean literature and gender

Zimbabwean literature is generally a reactionary literature, given a background of colonialism.

Male writers dominate the literary space in Zimbabwean literature. Early works in literature were dominated by men which explains the tendency of stereotyping women in their narratives. Shire (1994) contends that colonial legislation transformed Shona traditional ideas of manhood and upgraded the masculinities of the colonial class (p150) However Shire (1994) seems to justify the maledominance in Zimbabwean literature. In a publication introducing Zimbabwean

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literature, Zhuwarara (2001) gives a sound description of the development and background to Zimbabwean literature

Hinfelaar (2001) has described how Shona women have struggled to maintain the ideals of responsibility and respectability in a patriarchal setting. Missionaries sought to socialize African women into virtuous beings who were not aggressive in their response to male aggression. This attempt to represent the plight of women in male narratives was an important turn in Zimbabwean literature. However Gaidzanwa (1985) states that the majority of African male literature was flooded with phallogocentric stereotypes of women.

“The images as presently portrayed need examination in terms of their success, their veracity according to women's experiences and their potential for positive transformation in the future.”(p1)

Stratton (2002) testifies as follows,

“While African male writers challenge the racial codes of colonial discourse, they adopt certain aspects of the gender identities of their adversaries in their representations of African women” (p171)

The notion above is true in describing the position of male narratives in Zimbabwe with regards to their representation of Zimbabwean women. Chitando (2011) asserts that

gender relations in contemporary Zimbabwe are, therefore, distorted in favour of men. Men wield power in the various aspects of life and being at the receiving end, women have struggled for space in a patriarchal system. In a subversion to this view, very little attention has been given to how women need to decolonize their affiliation to western feminism in their representation of gender. (p39)

Gaidzanwa (1985) in her publication, *Images of Women in Zimbabwean Literature* can be said to be the pioneer of addressing gender and the status of women in literature in Zimbabwe. This publication as Chitando (2011) alludes, mainly focuses on exposing the biases against women in

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literary works in English, Shona and Ndebele, laying bare the stereotypes that women are subjected to in fictional works. However, as this study aims to problematise, Gaidzanwa (1985), did not address the theme of western feminism and the influence it would have on redefining women's images in literature.

Moyana (1996) suggests that Dangarembga (1988) brought a new perspective regarding women's status in Zimbabwean society. However, very little has been said on the imperative dangers of how Western feminist ideology -in her approach to the gendered society, excludes the African woman. Vambe (2003) exposes the constraints imposed by African cultural beliefs on the African woman in the process of reconfiguring her identity. However, Vambe's main focus is on how Zimbabwean literature has contributed in the depiction of women in the wake of HIV and AIDS and does not necessarily address the issue of the detrimental influence of feminist tendencies in some Zimbabwean female narratives.

Furusa (2006) suggests that most of Zimbabwean women writers are too harsh in their portrayal of gender relations but does not go further to unveil the reasons behind such harsh tendencies as possibly influenced by western feminist concepts Zimbabwean female narratives.

Shaba (2006) subverts the patriarchal notion that women are docile and rely on men for their well-being and clearly exposes that women have equal potential to leadership as that of men. Shaba makes use of vulgar vocabulary to ridicule and satirize patriarchy and gives voice to the woman. However Shaba (2006), in her use of satire and strong profane language while she does not offer ways in which both men and women can work together for equal human rights. Instead, Shaba (2006) inclines herself to radical feminist ideals which have no intentions of coexisting

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with men at an equal status in society and thus fails to give an authentic testimony of the Zimbabwean woman who needs to engage the man and show that she has similar capabilities. Felix Mnthali, as cited in Ashcroft et al (2011) in his poem "*Letter to a feminist friend*", highlights how the African woman and man must come together to fight the yoke of the legacy of cultural imperialism before they confront each other with false consciousness of their postcolonial situation. He therefore attacks the influence of radical feminist ideals on the African woman's movement for emancipation:

"Why should they be allowed
to come between us?
You and I were slaves together
uprooted and humiliated together
Rapes and lynchings.(p252)

Mnthali advances the view that both African men and women are victims of an imperial culture and the double consciousness affects them equally and should therefore work together to construct and reaffirm their lost identity.

Ashcroft et al (2011) mentions Peterson's notion on Western feminism.

"whereas Western feminists discuss the relative importance of feminist versus class emancipation, the African discussion is between feminist emancipation versus the fight against neocolonialism, particularly in its cultural aspect "(p251)

Gaidzanwa (1985) attempts to tackle the reasons why female writers in their different narratives do not always represent positive images of women, However Gaidzanwa does not account for this phenomena clearly. Gappah (2009) tackles issues concerning this development and exposes

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how patriarchy is at a liberty to choose certain women in order to subtly perpetuate phallogocentric ideals such that women end up oppressing other women.

2.6 Conclusion

From the above review of literature, it can be noted that the Zimbabwean literary experience is a reactionary literature which is dominated by male narratives. Female Zimbabwean writers have braced the stage to reconstruct phallogocentric representations of women. However, very little attention has been given to analyzing the impact of feminist ideals which plague many female narratives in Zimbabwe. It is imperative to have this study in order to examine the space that has not been considered in Zimbabwean literature. The next chapter now turns to the literal representations of the influences of Western feminist ideals in conscientisation of postcolonial women and the consequent violence that ensue as a result of adopting acultural cultural practices.

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3.0 CHAPTER 3: An African womanist reading of the *Nervous Condition* in postcolonial Zimbabwe.

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on a review of literature in Africa and Zimbabwe focusing on the inter-related connection between culture and the construction of gender in society. The chapter reviewed that the changes that took place with the advent of colonialism can be traced in the ways in which gender roles have shifted in postcolonial Zimbabwe. With special attention to the contribution of women in the construction of gender, the chapter managed to bring out how Western feminism as a Western concept given the African woman's race and according to Said as the "Other" has impacted on her consciousness in the double edged fight against patriarchy and colonialism. The previous chapter, as informed by African womanism, puts across the message that only after the African woman discovers herself and retells her story in her own terms, will she be able to see a change in society. It is important for the African woman to come together with the African man to fight cultural imperialism that has stripped the African society of its identity and direction.

Since the members of a society are influenced by the value systems and ways of thinking around them, in postcolonial society where the people who have been stripped of their culture, do not have a fixed and sound cultural systems from which their thinking is informed. This chapter will examine such a state of a 'double consciousness', being torn between two conflicting cultures, and how Dangarembga, juxtaposes this social unrest and double consciousness to the traumatic effects of the inception of a disease on the human brain cells and neurons on the human anatomy. The imagery of disease as Dangarembga alludes in her

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work, affects women who are faced with the dilemma of traditional suppressive system and new Western imperialist culture thus the title of her book, *Nervous Conditions*.

This Chapter proposes a reading of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) paying particular attention to Basu (1995)'s view as cited in Aniekwu (2006) that ;

"if feminism is defined in terms of Western conceptions and forms of activism, not only is there a danger of inappropriately imposing Western priorities and goals on women in diverse contexts, but there is a failure to recognize the strength and transformative potential of women's organizing as it exists in their local settings"(p 150)

The assertion above echoes what Dangarembga perceives as the Nervous condition that affects postcolonial women in their efforts to redefine themselves.

3.2 Synopsis

Dangarembga adopts the above view in her treatment of gender in *Nervous conditions*. Employing an African centered approach, Dangarembga is able to critic Western feminist applicability in the construction of a transformative gendered society in postcolonial Zimbabwe. The author satirically critiques Western feminist ideals for its contrasting contribution to the task of mobilizing the African woman in redefining her identity. She pins the lack of progression of African women's emancipation, the retrogressive gender roles and the violence that embeds the postcolonial society, This Nervous condition on the radical and ahistorical influence of Western feminist ideals which mislead the African woman to underestimate her capability of transforming her society.

The harsh treatment of radical characters such as Tambudzai who shows no remorse towards the passing of her brother Nhamo , Nyasha's disrespectful attitude towards her father and Lucia's prostituting ways in the novel, creates an underlying moral of the text aligning

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Dangarembga as a Western feminist critic of the postcolonial situation, guided by Achebe's (1988) proposition that the writer's role in society functions as a teacher.

Black (2007)'s assertion, supports the reading of Dangarembga's text as a rhetoric, describing the position of the colonized as such,

“having two antagonistic identities means that a lot of time is spent negotiating and enduring the conflicts between [what] one is as a person and how one struggles with the misrepresentations of the outside world” (Black 2007:324)

The researcher concurs with Black's assertion as it affirms the nervous condition that characterizes the postcolonial situation which the Zimbabwean woman finds herself entangled.

The characters in the novel are indeed haunted by “antagonist identities”. Babamukuru's word with Jeremiah confirms this state of bipolar that characterizes the consciousness of the African in postcolonial society “...these whites...you know...you never know...” (p182) Dangarembga's characters especially the female characters fail to achieve their goals, not that it is impossible to achieve them, but because their decisions were informed by Western ideals of feminism and thus hindered them from emancipation that they all strive to get. *Nervous Conditions* thus uses rhetoric to caution postcolonial women to avoid stepping into the shoes of their oppressors, but to look beyond their position and try to reconcile with the African man in order to reconstruct society which has been torn apart by cultural imperialism.

Dangarembga brings out how women as the colonized people are brainwashed and conditioned to mimic the colonized as Baharvand and Zarrinjooee (2012) put across in describing Dangarembga's characters. “Accordingly, they begin to adopt Englishness in all its aspects from education to clothes and behavior. They find themselves in an ambivalent ‘nervous

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condition' after the departure of the colonisers" (p28). In a profound rhetoric, the author encourages women to move away from what Fanon (1968) calls Inversion, which is a characteristic feature of Radical feminist ideals that seeks to perpetuate gender discrimination by eliminating and subjugating men once women have been empowered themselves.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher will identify the state of a 'nervous condition' that befalls the postcolonial woman in the wake of the inevitable influence of a western imperialist culture.

3.3 Reading the rhetoric of Killing Nhamo

To begin with, Dangarembga kills the narrator's brother, Nhamo, on the onset of the novel and the narrator does not feel sorry (pg1). This metaphoric statement that Dangarembga makes, echoes Farah et al (2011)'s sentiments that colonialism displaces the pace and tempo of cultural growth. Tambudzai's deportment towards her brother's death can be read as a metaphor of how radical feminist ideals produce women who will not flinch to completely wipe away men out of existence. Already one witnesses an ahistorical response that does not affiliate to the African woman's culture. To borrow Freire's (1993) notion, this gives room for a cycle of subjugation which does not change the situation. Consequently, Tambudzai is later seen becoming no better than Nhamo, detesting Nyamarira and her rural home once she gets comfortable at the mission. (p59)

By deliberately removing Nhamo who is the supposed stumbling block to the emancipation of his sister Tambudzai, Dangarembga manages to give Tambu, who represents the rest of the Zimbabwean women in general, a clear way to begin to assert her. In a promising start, unhindered by patriarchal subordination Tambu makes her way to the mission, to attain

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education which had once been reserved for Nhamo –and does manage to make a transcendence at this stage, as she notes to herself “thus began the period of my reincarnation.” (p 92) However, Tambudzai's victory is short lived when she later discovers that there is yet another stumbling block, more complex than “*Nhamo*”, that she has to come to terms with before she can find her rightful place at the top of society, it is too late as she too has been trapped as she is now attached to the mission, “I always hated leaving the mission.” (p108)

When Tambudzai arrives at the mission, she is so excited about discovering new things and finally accomplishing the education she has always wanted. As she gloats in the new environment in Babamukuru's home, she cautiously notes how she must be careful not to become like her brother, Nhamo. At this stage Tambudzai is not yet brainwashed and carries with her all the hopes that education would bring back to her rural home. Tambu thus ponders to herself, “some strategy had to be devised to prevent all this splendor from distracting me in the way that my brother had been distracted” (p69) However this strategy of not getting too absorbed in the lifestyle of the mission is fleeting as Tambudzai soon becomes like her brother Nhamo.

Justifying her cousin Chido's refusal to join the rest of the family for the journey to the rural home for Christmas, Tambu explains that “...he was too old now-we all were, and too civilized too-to be amused by eating *matamba* and *nhengeni*, and by trips to Nyamarira” (p120) This statement confirms Achebe's view that cultural invasion results in the colonized to disassociate with their past. This cultural obliteration is seen as early as the day when Tambu leaves for the mission in Babamukuru's car where she begins to reflect upon the squalid lifestyle at the

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homestead and does not hide the joy that she has "...My clothes would be clean too, without fields and smoke and soot to mess them" (p 60) .

Without realizing it, Tambudzai was becoming like the brother that she detested. Tambu becomes the typical African who cannot wait to submerge herself in "civilization". Dangarembga adeptly employs satire and a naïve narrative voice through Tambudzai, in order to portray the gullibility of the African female's consciousness to the "Otherness" that binds her in her search for emancipation in a postcolonial setting. Tambu, like Nhamo becomes *Lucifer Mandengu* (Mungoshi 1975), who has been brainwashed to believe that whiteness is the ultimate identity.

Dangarembga thus reminds the African woman of her double consciousness and how she can easily give in to Western ideology without weighing its contribution to the progression of her society. Tambu gradually becomes comfortable with the Mission than her old home, having no zeal for Nyamarira like she once did when she was young.

3.4 Strangeness and alienation in *Nervous Conditions*

Tambu's recurrent use of the word "strange" to describe her encounter with a new lifestyle at the missionary is symbolic to the circumstances where the collision of Western imposed cultural values bring confusion and restlessness to the colonized who is forced to adopt an alien culture. Dangarembga hence makes a statement that, the assimilation of the colonized into western systems of culture is a half-baked process where the African does not fully access the values of the western culture such that it will always be a strange way of life. Tambudzai is at first aware of this strangeness, and it troubles her the first encounter with the mission, the dance, the food at the table, the switching of the light and the marriage of her parents,

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Dangarembga constantly employs these contrasting values of culture to serve as a reminder to the native to be mindful of her environment.

The word strange has also been employed by Negritudist authors such as Kane (1972) "Strange dawn! The morning of the Occident in Black Africa was spangled over with smiles, with cannon shots, with shining glass beads." (p48) This statement describes how the Western culture is unfamiliar to the African culture. In this sense, one gets to understand that the African does not really get to be accustomed or acquainted to Western culture. Tambu further uses this word to describe the alienation that she felt in the presence of white people, and any other new phenomenon that she encountered at the mission. Describing Anna's new title that she now used to address her, Tambu thinks that "It was strange the way she had begun to call me sisi... it only became important when you considered it with all the other strange ways she was adopting" (p 85)

Tambu goes ahead to describe her new environment, "... I was ashamed of my weakness in succumbing so flabbily to the strangeness of my new circumstances" (p89) For the author, strangeness becomes a recurrent motif which puts across the unavoidable reality of the contrast between Western and African culture. Tambudzai describes the whites on the mission;

"but their behavior remained difficult to understand. What I noticed, very early on was that some of the missionaries were definitely strange, strange in the way that Nyasha and Chido were strange when they came back from England. These missionaries, the strange ones..." (p104).

Dangarembga manages to bring out Tambudzai's feelings of inferiority (p 89) whenever Western cultural values collided with her own culture, proving the point that cultural imperialism succeeds in subordinating the native's culture. Tambu asserts this in her statement, "when the

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surroundings were new and unfamiliar, the awareness was painful and made me behave strangely. (p110) This statement also confirms to the nervous condition that Dangarembga addresses with regards to the state of affairs in postcolonial identity.

3.5 The rhetoric of the nightmare of Nhamo

Tambudzai's dream of her late brother is an mythical allusion to the doom that befalls Tambu and all the other female characters in the novel. Dangarembga borrows the use of the power of myth to reflect on the unavoidable consequences of reality from Romanticism. Dreaming of the dead, in African myth has several connotations and one of which can also mean a sign of ill omen. In the nightmare, Nhamo maintains his metaphoric image of male hegemony, "...he was laughing at me as usual" (p 90). Reality is presented as a haunting element which Tambudzai needs to come to terms with. Tambudzai goes on to narrate her dream as such, "it became a nightmare when I realized that my fountain pen was in fact a long smoking cigarette" The transfiguration of the pen to a cigarette is the reality that Western culture offers a false consciousness on the colonized who are blindly led to believe that Westernization can aid to change their subordinate situation. However, as the colonized later finds out, they fall prey to Parrotry and mimicry of the whites and in the end they never achieve anything. The dream symbolizes the unpredicted dangers that spring from attaining Western education which was a disguise to brainwash the mind of the African than to bring any social good.

Nhamo gives Tambu a glimpse of her future, when he mocks Tambu for "...Deserting my husband, my children, my gardens and my chickens.(p90). In a surprising twist, Nhamo becomes the prophet of doom, if the postcolonial woman does not dislodge herself from the grip of cultural imperialism, she would lose every other opportunity to change her world for the better.

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Mai Tambu also foretells the doom of the characters in the novel, as she warns that "It's the Englishness...it will kill them all if they aren't careful..." (p202.) This 'Englishness' "does indeed destroy Nyasha and her father's relationship, fails to unite the traditional women with the 'modern women'- Maiguru and Mai Tambu, and is responsible for giving Tambu a false consciousness which she finds out too late while at Sacred Heart.

3.6 Permeation of western ideals and the distraction of the African's way of life

Mohanty (2005) states how Western education has damaged the African woman's thinking. The relationship that Nyasha builds with her father while in England is counterfeit such that when they came back to Africa, these ideals would no longer be applicable. Nyasha in this case represents the rigid nature of radical feminist ideals which are selfish and individualistic and not concerned with the liberation of the African woman in a communal setting. Dangarembga deliberately sets the two on each other's throats to show that they are victims of mimicry. Instead of concentrating on building a father and daughter relationship, their time is spent quarreling and challenging each other and yet nothing positive comes out. The same applies to the society, men and women continue to fight each other on issues of gender equity yet they are still caught up in imperialist militancy. In an African Womanist stance, Dangarembga makes it a point that Western cultural values are detrimental to the construction of the African woman and remains the main cause for the nervous condition of the characters in the novel.

Guided by an African Womanist approach, Dangarembga portrays how the African man is also susceptible to racial subjugation and how this affects his attitude towards the treatment of women in society. Babamukuru is bullied at work and is called a "good African" for maintaining his subordinate position and as a result of suppressing his feelings, he exerts his anger in the

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domestic space where he bullies the women at home. Dangarembga highlights the reasons of violent expression of masculinities in postcolonial societies.

Babamkuru's focus on Jeremiah and Mai Tambu's wedding, reveals the level of mimicry that plagues postcolonial society. Babamkuru's addresses petty issues which are irrelevant to his culture. He fails to establish a good relationship with his daughter and his wife which proves how his Western education does not equip him to change his world for the better. Dangarembga probes the African woman to look at these loopholes and as a nurturing and assertive woman, develop solutions that can transform society. Again, Dangarembga addresses an important issue that the African woman needs to uncover the reasons for violent expressions of Masculinity. Western feminist ideals fails to prepare the African woman for such phenomena in a society where the people have been brainwashed to loathe their culture and have been taught to aspire towards the culture they only have half access.

Baharvand and Zarrinjooee (2012) are of the view that,

“The colonizers obliterated local cultures of their colonies and imposed new ideologies on native people. Western cultural hegemony resulted in the formation of a new hybrid identity in the colonized natives.” (p27)

Lucia's prostitute and manipulative ways of getting things done for her by men can be read as a response to patriarchal dominance, subverting the phallogentric stereotypical image of women, (Gaidzanwa 1988) , However, in the process , she loses a sense of herself and dignity just so she can prove a point to men. Lucia just like Martha in *She no longer weeps* (1987), misleads herself that she does not need men, yet she needs a man to satisfy her sexually. These women fall into the trap of reducing their bodies as a willing battle field for gender struggles.

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The irony of Lucia is seen on her admiration of her body which she abuses "Don't you see how strong my body is. I cannot do things that need education, but anything else! Anything else I can do" (p157). Without realizing it Lucia makes an important observation that education is not the only to empowering tool. Lucia is determined to get an education yet one is convinced that she will turn up to be either like Maiguru, Nyasha or Tambu's replica, who are victims of false consciousness. Lucia is blind to the hypocrisy of her radical bearing. At the same time as she acclaims her independence, she also relies on Babamukuru for a job. Dangarembga exposes how the African woman needs to find ways within her culture to emancipate herself. In this case, African women need to come together with the African men in order to find collective solutions in order to rebuild their society.

Of significance to note in the text is the symbolic connotation that both Lucia and Tambu's mother fall pregnant in the novel, which symbolizes the potential of women to transform their world, given their ability to give life and their ability to create, however without realizing their true self, false consciousness will always imbue their progress towards redefining themselves in African terms.

3.7 The things they get up to pull the wool over our eyes. Really!

Dangarembga momentarily portrays Nyasha as a hopeful character in the novel. The author employs Césaire (1969)'s journey motif, when he sets for England in search for "Englishness" but after discovering his false consciousness, began to change his attitude towards his culture. Nyasha's experience with Western culture in England equips her with a sense of alertness that is different from the other women in the book. In insightful intervals, Dangarembga shows that Nyasha's does hold the potential of deconstructing the myths of double consciousness and the

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affinity to be white as she warns Tambu of the dangers of Westernization, "but once you get used to it, well it just seems natural, and you just carry on. And that's the end of you. You are trapped. They control everything you do." (p117). Nyasha goes ahead with the observation that it is a desperate situation when a country gets colonized, "...but when the people do as well! That's the end, really, that's the end" (p147) Nyasha confirms the irony of her observation as she becomes trapped with Western cultural ideals despite her intelligence insights into her situation.

Doris the white lady who donated ten pounds for Tambu's tuition is an example of the hypocrisy of the colonisers, in her statement "Now don't tell me there aren't any schools, young man, because I know the Governor is doing a lot for the natives in the way of education" (p28) In actual fact, the whites who have no intention of educating the Africans, the education structure that exists confines Africans to missionary schools where Africans are fed with half-baked knowledge on Western ideals so that they do not fully become self-sufficient. On another angle, Doris could only provide a short term solution for Tambu who would need to go back on the streets as soon as the funds ran out. This exposes how the whites cajole the African to believe that the white have a plan to improve the life of the native yet it is to perpetuate dependency of the colonized on the Colonizers.

Mr Baker facilitates Chido's entrance into the government school in Salisbury. Knowing well he wanted to feed off his guilty conscience for sending his sons to the government school. He thus made it seem like a charitable and a holy cause when he had his own intentions planned. Mr Baker makes sure he protects his interests without losing his image of "self-denial" and brotherly love" (p103) Nyasha can clearly see through Mr Baker's treacherous intentions as she recalls the conversation he had engaged her father concerning Chido's scholarship. "...you know how it is

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,bwana to bwana: "The boy needs the cash old man!" He's a good boy, what. Pity to waste him. (p106). This confirms Nyasha's statement above on how the whites employ strategies to mislead the Africans into a false awareness of their true circumstance.

3.8 Conclusion

Through this chapter, it has been established that Tsitsi Dangarembga employs the rhetoric of nervous breakdown or nervous condition to interrogate the applicability of Western feminist ideals in the construction of women's identity in a postcolonial society. The researcher brings to light how cultural imperialism continues to haunt the development of postcolonial societies whose consciousness of their environment and identity is soiled by a double consciousness. Although it is too late, Tambudzai grows to understand that her emancipation as a woman and of all postcolonial women in general, needs to be guided and shaped by her knowledge of her culture. Thus at the end of the novel, Tambudzai's consciousness begins to grow through her experience "Quietly, unobtrusively, and extremely fitfully, something in my mind began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed..." (p204) The next chapter will analyze the second primary text and establish further the nature of the construction of gendered identities in a post-independence setting.

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4.0 Chapter 4: The progression of the nervous condition in post independent Zimbabwean society: a reading of Petina Gappah's *An Elegy for Easterly*.

4.1 Introduction

Having addressed Dangarembga's rhetoric response in bringing out the shortcomings of a Western oriented feminist movement in the previous chapter, It has been established that African women are doubly oppressed and must come to terms with their state of double consciousness in implementing ways to transform themselves and regain their identity. The chapter also brought out how women should actively take part in their reconstruction for a progressive gendered society in Zimbabwe through engaging men for a complimentary social organization which is not based on gender discrimination.

This chapter will now turn to analyzing Gappah's *An Elegy for Easterly* with special attention to selected short stories, *An Elegy for Easterly*, *The Annexe Shuffle*, *The Maid from Lalapanzi*, *Something Nice from London*, *The Mupandawana Dancing Champion*, *My Cousin-Sister Rambanai* and *The Cracked*, *Pink Lips of Rosie's Bridegroom*. These stories clearly address the ways in which postcolonial society, submerged in a state of double consciousness and an unending quest for identity, fails to establish transformative progressive gendered identities. Gappah's *An Elegy for Easterly's* use of imagination and metaphorical symbols presents how the chaotic, disillusionment and hopeless situation of post independent Zimbabwe affects women's and man's lives

4.2 Synopsis

The 'nervous condition' in Dangarembga's text extends to Gappah's *An Elegy for Easterly*. The text metaphorically alludes to the perpetuated subordination of women in post independent Zimbabwe to the progression of disease which eventually leads to death- in this case an Elegy, a

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death song, a hopeless situation. Hence these two texts respond to each other in the way in which they draw from the imagery of death and disease to portray the postcolonial situation in Zimbabwe. In light of the view that African womanism protests against racism and colonial rule, Gappah juxtaposes mainstream feminist approach and the African womanist approach in a rhetoric that questions radical feminist ideals. She addresses gender issues and the plight of women in post-independent Zimbabwe. At the turn of the 20th century, Zimbabwe finds itself entangled in post-independence crisis with a crumbling economy. Central to Gappah's text is the ways in which such a current state of affairs affects women. Through the short stories, Gappah addresses the burdens of female roles that were set up as a result of colonization in the urban space such as the rise of prostitution and the spread of the HIV/AIDS disease in the city, marginalization of women in both economic and political participation.

Informed by the reading of Fanon's (1968) 'pitfalls of national consciousness', Gappah is able to bring out the 'pitfalls of national consciousness' where this exploitation is more pronounced on the woman's body. Gappah supports the idea that the crumbling economy and poor state of affairs is not the result of colonialism but the result of the lazy underdeveloped middleclass. In a modernist critique of the postcolonial situation where the Zimbabwean society finds itself confronted by an extension of colonialism through the exploitative ruling political party, a crumbling economy and the consequential poverty and moral decadence that follow, it is important for the researcher to bring out how this developments directly affects Zimbabwean women. The title of the book, *An Elegy for Easterly*, which is taken from the titled story whose main character is a woman makes it clear on how Gappah has the interests of the woman at heart in her text. More precisely, as this study will show, Gappah exposes how post-coloniality as

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defined in previous chapters, affects women in their plight for liberation. Gappah's advances are strongly influenced by an African centered approach to the emancipation of women which subtly questions Western imperial systems of knowledge in the conscientisation of Zimbabwean women.

4.3 The metaphor of madness

Through the metaphor of madness, Gappah manages to create an elixir for Martha Mupengo who represents the Zimbabwean woman in general and thus escapes from her chaotic environment. Madness is a mental illness that causes one to lose touch and awareness of their environment. Madness becomes a window through which one escapes in his/her own individualist space where no one can invade. At the same time as this serves as a coping mechanism this can be read as an extremist way of coping with one's environment. This extreme attitude of completely detaching one's self from reality extends to radical feminist affiliation to women's emancipation, where women concentrate on their own liberation with no regards with her environment. "Her name and memory, past and dreams were lost in the foggy corners of her mind." (p30) Thus by making Martha turn a blind eye on her environment, already Gappah employs a rhetoric to question the practicality of an individualistic approach to addressing gender struggles in post independent Zimbabwe.

Moreso, Gappah through an African womanist evaluation of the situation brings the reality that despite her madness, Martha can still give birth to a child. Gappah sarcastically impregnates Martha just to show the inevitable truth about her environment. Gappah satirically pokes at feminist ideals in the sense that no matter how radical they are, their extremist ideals do not fit in post-independent Zimbabwe and the reality of double consciousness still draws them back from

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attaining their emancipation. Martha's ability to conceive illustrates how Gappah subtly satires radical feminist ideals who despite their extremist notions, they are still confronted with the violence and chaotic reality of their society. In this way, Gappah rules out the idea that radical feminist perceptions can be of benefit to post-independent Zimbabwe.

Following Hudson-Weems (2004)'s contribution that African men and women need each other for the meaningful existence and reconstruction of their society, Gappah forges and fosters a bond between the two by creating a child between Josephat who represents patriarchy and Martha who represents radical feminism advancing the notion that the African women need to transform their society. Gappah brings in Josephat's wife who represents the African woman, who makes it her point to adopt her husband and Martha's child. This shows that the African woman needs to identify the bridges and conflicts between African men and women and mend them for a progressive social transformation, in their own terms and without the influence from Western knowledge systems.

4.4 Death as a metaphor

The death of Martha means the death of radical feminist tendencies and the birth of her child as the new ground for the reconciliation of the African man and the African woman. Gappah makes use of birth and death for their ability to bring change. Gappah kills Martha Mupengo and M'dhara Vitalis, Peter and Sisi Blandina to allow for the transition from fixed cultural values to the construction of new solutions.

Gappah does account how the Western Feminist movement is responsible for the initial conscientisation of women, however its full applicability is questionable given the postcolonial setting and the chaotic process of regaining identity after an imperialist culture, hence post-

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Independent Zimbabwean women must do away with radical feminism and embrace African womanism which is reconciliatory. This is projected in Martha's death and the adoption of her child by Josephat's wife. The imagery of Josephat's wife chewing Martha Mupengo's chord symbolizes how the African woman comes in to break the radical ideas of Western feminism in African societies while at the same time engaging the African men in order to reconstruct society. In an African womanist centered approach Josephat's wife thus becomes the pacifier.

Josephat's wife moved to Easterly to protect her unborn children from her relatives in Mutoko following multiple miscarriages. "Kusvodza, they called it at the hospital, which put in her mind of *kusvedza*, slipping, sliding and that is what was happening, the babies slipped and slid out..." (p38) Josephat's wife's miscarriages can be read as the futile attempts for women liberation. "The winter of Martha's baby was the winter of Josephat's leave from the mine. It was Easterly's last winter." (p45) It is only after reconciling with the positive contribution of feminist consciousness and the engagement with African men, without any Western influence, that the African woman can have a chance at liberation, in this case Josephat's wife manages to hold a child, her empowerment and the transformative development of her society.

Emily finds herself in a state of derangement and the story *Anexe Shuffle*, and Sisi Blandina in *The Maid From Lalapanzi*. Gappah eliminates Martha Mupengo swiftly to show that African women's contribution to the reconstruction of their society entails that they detach themselves from radical feminist tendencies. Gappah uses the transformative ability of death to reconstruct society and allows birth through Martha's child to make room for new ideas. In this way she brings out the underlying theme of death as in most of her stories and how death has the power to create.

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Gappah brings out how deconstruction is necessary in the reconstruction process; WaThiongo (1978) the demolition of Easterly as Josephat and his wife fled is symbolic to this reconstruction process. Easterly which represents the post-independent Zimbabwean society needs to be rearranged in ways that allow for progressive gendered society, and do away with chaos and the institutions that perpetuate colonial rule.

The haunted house of Titus Zunguza who murdered his wife and took his life foregrounds and denotes the traditional conflicts that men and women have always had in a patriarchal traditional society. Gappah, just like Dangarembga in Tambudzai's dream about Nhamo, employs superstition and myth to portray the realities of the contemporary situation.

4.5 Feminisation of postcolonial Society.

Gappah employs the reading of Kanneh's (1992) concept of 'Feminisation of the colonial space' where she shows how women share the intimate experience of oppression with the colonized societies. Women are in a perpetual position of the other which identifies them with the subjugated position of the colonized spaces. The image of Martha Mupengo confirms to this notion as her exposed body becomes a trope for the moral decadence that typify postcolonial societies. Martha is seen "lifting up her dress" (pg28), with children jeering at her. "*HeeHaanaBhurugwa*" (p28) image of children jeering at Martha also shows the extent to which society has lost sanity.

Easterly Farm becomes the metaphor of the squattered existence that the majority of the population finds itself in post- independence betrayal. Easterly is the hub where hybrid gender interactions exist. The women characters depict the life and organization of society. Women are located at the forefront of the day to day activities of society as they thrive to sustain families by

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taking to creative works such as sewing, "So it was that in the mornings, the women of the markets rose early and caught the mouth of the rooster" (34) Mai James and Mai Toby adopt survival mechanisms. Easterly Farm, just like a disease infested area is quarantined and consequently its destruction is indeed necessary.

4.6 Exploitation of Rural women by Urban women

In *The Maid from Lalapanzi*, Gappah brings the subject of how women are affected by the transition from the rural area to the urban space. Women from the rural areas are exploited by both men and women from the urban area where they move in to occupy household labour. Chenai recalls the reasons why her mother had fired Sisi Dudzai, 'housemaids should not be too pretty', 'housemaids should not enjoy themselves too much' (p159) Sisi Blandina had so much potential for liberating herself after her experiences with the war but she falls into the Postman's trap, who deceived her into sleeping with her and later denied having impregnated Sisi Blandina. In the end, the prevailing theme of death takes charge as Blandina takes hers and her unborn baby's life. The imagery of the unborn child as previously mentioned in Josephat's wife's case symbolizes the lost hopes in post independent Zimbabwe.

4.7 Extension of the nervous condition to both men and women

In the short story *The Mupandawana Dancing Champion*, M'dhara Vitalis has been reduced to a puppet, a mimic man through his fleeting and playful character. This confirms the idea of Apemanship which is as a result of the disruption of the African culture by the colonized whose effects still persist in post-independence. M'dhara Vitalis was forced to retire three years earlier from his job and his employer had him sent off on a package of three pairs of shoes. "You work thirty years for one company and this is what you get. *Shuwa, shuwa, pension*

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yebhutsu. Heh? Shoes instead of a pension. Shoes. These, these..." (p117) M'dhara Vitalis's rant can be seen as an escapism from his environment.

In *Something nice from London*, Gappah addresses the nervous condition that affects both men and women in post-colonial society. Peter threatens to kill himself in the event that his mother fails to send him money from Zimbabwe to London where he lives. This proves the vanity of depending on the West to achieve positive social transformation. To borrow the message from Oliver Mtukudzi's song *Izere mhopo* (2005), Peter cannot afford to sustain himself yet he is in a "better economy". Peter fails to cope in London because the colonial education that he receives does not accommodate him in the English society such that he keeps on leaning on his past. Instead of upgrading his family's livelihood, Peter only succeeds to drain his family financially. On a metaphorical level colonial education is attained at the expense of the African's mental and spiritual wellbeing. This in a sense is the double consciousness that haunts him and might be the reason why he could have taken his life.

For Peter, like many Zimbabwean people who relocated to England during the post 2000 crisis are in search of greener pastures in England only to find out that they are alien to the European society. England is the dream for his success while home is the past from which he tries to run away. Peter's death also worsens the financial strains on his family back home in Zimbabwe which signifies the ability of colonial education to disrupt not only the individual but the whole society. Gappah employs an African centered approach to the construction of gender in post-independence situation which remains the most important part of African womanism. One needs to keep in constant check with his/her culture. Peter feels alienated and the only place

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where he can find survival is home yet he cannot find himself coming back. Gappah again uses the metaphor of death in order to allow for new solutions to the problem.

Gappah also addresses issues of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and how it affects women in postcolonial society. Women are used as agents of spreading the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

There is only one illness that pushes both the well-heeled and unwell-heeled to seek out the prophet. It is the big disease with the little name, the sickness that, no one dies of, the disease whose real name is unspoken, the sickness that speaks its presence through the pink redness of lips, the slipperiness of hair through the whites the eyes whiter than nature intended. (202)

Gappah also alludes to the gravity of HIV/AIDS to the decay of society and thus extends this phenomena to the nervous condition that hinders the progress of women emancipation. Women are constantly victimized as in the case of Rosie 'Bridegroom' in *'The cracked. Pink Lips of Rosie's Bridegroom'* who is responsible for infecting a number of women with the disease and upon each woman's death, the man goes ahead to take another lover. Women are thus vulnerable to contaminating the HIV/AIDS disease. Gappah employs a Marxist feminist reading of the reasons why women suffer the most in the spread of HIV/AIDS. Most women are confined to domestic labour which does not sustain their upkeep while men brace the industrial sector and thus own more income than women. As a result, men lure women with the materials they do not have and these women are forced to prostitute. Manyara in *My cousin sister Rambanai* decides to leave prostitution and start her own business proving how women can empower themselves in other ways than selling their bodies.

4.8 Conclusion

Through this chapter, the researcher established that Western imperial systems which perpetuate mimicry and double consciousness in postcolonial societies still form the main hindrance for the

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reconstruction of postcolonial society. Gappah brings forward the argument that, Western feminist ideals cannot be separated from Western imperialist ideology which was a consequence of colonialism and although it is responsible for the early conscientisation of women movement for emancipation, it fails to locate itself within the plight of the postcolonial Zimbabwean woman. This chapter also brings forward the finding that men are also affected by the violence of postcoloniality.

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5.0 CHAPTER 5 :CONCLUSION TO STUDY

5.1 Introduction

The main aim of this study was to examine the phenomenon of shifting gender roles from a historical background to the contemporary situation in Zimbabwe, with particular interest in the effects of this change on women. The study foregrounded the influence of colonialism and the consequent cultural imperialism on the course pattern of gender roles in Zimbabwe. The study also examined the impact of cultural imperialism in the construction of gender roles and patterns in postcolonial Zimbabwe and established how the legacy of colonialism is responsible for the violent manifestation of gender roles in female narratives as informed by postcolonial theory.

The study managed to establish that colonialism indeed influenced gender roles as it prompted the transition of women from the domestic space into the workforce and thus witnessed a drastic overturn from the traditional norms. Through tracing through history, the study established that colonialism triggered both men and women to redefine core aspects of their identities. In the wake of a double consciousness and a loss of culture, women face double oppression from both patriarchy and from a racist hegemonic imperial culture which is the reason why they are at the bottom of society.

Having noted the violence and chaotic state of postcoloniality the researcher identified the influence of feminism as a Western concept in the conscientisation and liberation of women in postcolonial society. Through an African womanist approach, the study critiqued radical feminist ideals which according to Abbenyi (1997) are deeply rooted in Eurocentric biases and

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have neglected to problematize the position of postcolonial women as subjects in most theoretical representations on the post-colonial condition. (p149) . In the endeavor to bring out this argument the researcher was guided by the question posed at the beginning of the study which will be restated below.

5.2 Reassertion of research questions

- What causes shifts in gender roles?
- How does patriarchal culture influence gender roles?
- How does colonialism affect gender roles in postcolonial societies?
- Which of the two texts best depicts the influence of cultural imperialism on the shifts of gender roles in their works?

In answering the above questions the researcher devoted specific chapters in order to fully elaborate and address these questions effusively. Chapter one introduced the topic under study with special attention to the background of Zimbabwe as a former British colony and how colonialism affected the development of gender roles. In order to give an in depth analysis of the development of shifting gender roles, the first chapter managed to advance the statement of the problem, foreground the objectives of the study, pose questions that guide the research, give the motivation of the study, and introduce the theoretical framework and to break down the Methodology used and the chapter organization.

The second chapter through a literature review foregrounded the impact of cultural imperialism and the development of gender roles in Zimbabwe thus confirming the interconnectedness of gender and culture. The chapter managed to evaluate existing literature from Africa down to

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Zimbabwe, on the development of Feminism and how it is responsible for influencing African women's movement for emancipation. This chapter highlights the noble goals of the Western feminist movement and captures its shortcomings in terms of its applicability to the postcolonial African woman as it draws its influence from Eurocentric ideals of feminism which do not apply in a postcolonial Zimbabwean context. The chapter established that radical and extremist feminist tendencies remain the main hindrances to the emancipation of Postcolonial Zimbabwean society. This chapter proposes that African women need a complimentary existence with men. As such African women must be aware that their double consciousness is not accounted for in the Western oriented ideals of women liberation and that, men are also affected by their post-colonial situation.

The second and third question were answered in the chapters three and four by way of a textual analysis of the two primary literary texts Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and Gappah's *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009) In chronological order of the periods in which the texts are set, Chapter three analysed Dangarembga's *Nervous condition*. Dangarembga (1988) manages to portray through her characters that colonialism is responsible for the hybrid gender roles and the chaotic environment which extends into post independent Zimbabwe. Dangarembga focuses on how women are affected by the nervous condition of being caught up between two cultures the Zimbabwean and the English culture. The chapter also brings out how literature has the ability not only to reflect society but to teach and impart cultural values of society. As such, the study expounds that the main message put across in the text is that the emancipation and freedom of the Zimbabwean women from subordination can only be solved if they realize their identities in their own African space and not as influenced by Western radical feminist ideals which are

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individualistic and fail to end the violence associated with the reconstruction of the postcolonial woman's identity.

Gappah's text *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009), also answers the question on the influence of colonialism on the shifting of gender roles through its depiction of a chaotic and violent post-independence gendered society. Chapter four critically analyses Gappah's portrayal of women's plight in post-coloniality. Gappah concentrates on the contemporary post independent Zimbabwean society and highlights how the 'nervous condition' that has diseased society has become so grave and hopeless that it ends up in death as is depicted by the title of the short story collection an *Elegy* which means a funeral song. Gappah employs the female figure as a metaphor for the Zimbabwean society. Confirming an inspiration from having read Dangarembga's text, Gappah brings out the implications of false consciousness with the image of madness and death as escape mechanisms employed by radical feminists to cope with their immediate environment. Through *An Elegy for Easterly*, she manages to bring out how postcolonial women and men adopt survival strategies in order to cope with a crumbling economy and still maintain the role of breadwinner in the wake of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

5.3 Dangarembga and Gappah's contribution to the research.

Both Dangarembga and Gappah attempt to deconstruct and challenge the radical excesses that are prevalent in most postcolonial female narratives through employing rhetoric imagery and symbols. Dangarembga's contribution provides the basis of the research. She manages to clearly elaborate the postcolonial situation for the Zimbabwean woman whom she views as having a perpetual nervous condition in her struggle for place and identity in society. Dangarembga's strength is that she manages to focus on the family. The family as the basic unit of society is the

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battlefield from which all transformations must take place if positive change is to be achieved in society.

Gappah also draws powerful imagery through the metaphorical allusion of the postcolonial society to the woman's body where all gender struggles are played out. Feminization of the colonial space Kanneh (1992) allows her to relate how women cannot be separated from the construction of a society. Gappah brings out the understanding that men are also affected by the postcolonial status as the women and as such both men and women must find ways in which they coexist without an invasion of gender discrimination.

5.4 Recommendations

- Literary critics should pay more attention to the subject of shifting gender roles in the wake of postcoloniality.
- More studies should analyse shifting gender roles in postcolonial settings in order to understand the violence associated with gender identity in postcolonial societies.
- Postcolonial societies should aim to establish complimentary relations between men and women.

5.5 Conclusion

This study managed to contextualize the effects of double consciousness to the phenomenon of shifting gender roles in a postcolonial Zimbabwean setting and bring out the violent and chaotic process of redefining identity for both women and men in society. This study having managed to bring out the above findings concludes the research in line with Spivak's (1985) assertion that African women are faced with a double yoked dilemma of oppression from both traditional patriarchal institutions and cultural imperialism in postcolonial societies. This study has paid

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special attention to Zimbabwean women's attempts of emancipation given the realities of their postcolonial double consciousness. The researcher argues that the creation of hybrid gender roles in postcolonial Zimbabwe is as a result of the interaction of Western culture and remains the main reason for the violence in contemporary Zimbabwean society where women face these challenges in complex magnitudes. This study deconstructs the idea that women should blame everything on men but should also realize that both men and women are victims of an imperialist culture and thus must come together in order to transform their society

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