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**DISSERTATION TOPIC**

**Contesting the Feminist paradigm in Tsitsi Dangarembga's texts: An Africana Womanist reading of She No Longer Weeps, Nervous Conditions and The Book of Not.**

**By**

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## Abstract

Most often, Tsitsi Dangaremba is referred to as a feminist writer. Her works have been categorized as written in a feminist tradition. This research seeks to contest the notion that she is a feminist writer and that her works are feminist. Rather than having her texts read from a Feminist perspective, this study intends to read Dangaremba's works from an Africana Womanist perspective. This research will show that the African woman does not view her male counterpart as the enemy, but as a victim as well, echoing the co-existence of the male and the female, the existence of healthy families, genuine sisterhood, flexibility in role playing, respect for elders and strong observation of African tradition and culture.

# Dedication

To my sisters and all the selfless people who have made me what I am.

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## 1.0Background of study

This study is in the field of literature. It is inspired by the observation that there has been a tendency of reading Tsitsi Dangarembga's texts from a feminist viewpoint. Looking at Dangarembga's texts from a feminist point of view limits the reader's scope of reading and analysis. In her texts women are viewed as second class citizens, seeking liberation from the oppressive patriarchal system and thus resorting to rebellion. However, the rebellious female characters in her works emerge as losers at the end of the day, thus triggering the need to look at Dangarembga's works from a different perspective. Basically men are viewed as a stumbling block in the lives of women and play the role of the oppressor. Nevertheless, studies have shown that men suffer oppression as well from different dimensions and are trying to fight oppression that comes through racism, classicism and colonialism. Colonialism altered the mindset of the African and brought about changes in the way of life of the African. The whiteman came with solutions for the African and at the same time advancing his interests. In this case, for the different problems faced by different women, the white brought Feminism. However, due to the fact that women are not a homogenous group, the white man's solutions are not applicable to the situation of the African. Ngugi wa Thiongo (1987) once said that in order that one nation or group can have dominion over another group, the oppressing group must discourage and disparage the culture and value systems of the group that it seeks to dominate. The misconceptions and desecration of African traditional and cultural practices were just attempts intended at paralyzing the African traditional institutions and not meant to give solutions that would ensure harmony in families and society at large. Feminist ideology offers little solace to the African woman, it entails fighting for gender equality for women. Its goals are:

- To demonstrate the importance of women
- To reveal that women have been subordinate to men



- To bring out gender equity.

The origins of feminism can be traced back to Britain and the United States. The pursuit for equality was driven by patriarchal oppression, whereby the woman always found herself as a subordinate of the male. The feminist movement thus seeks to establish a strategy to curb the common cause which is the patriarchy. Kate Millet in Bryson (1999:27) argued that in all known societies, the relationship between the sexes has been based on men's power over women; it is therefore political. Of noteworthy is the fact that feminisms differ and they address different needs of different women as articulated by Grown, Cagatay, and Santiago (1986:41) who assert that, "Feminism constitutes the political expression of the concerns and interests of women from different regions, classes, nationalities and ethnic backgrounds. There is, and must be, a diversity of feminisms responsive to the different needs and concerns of different women, and defined by them for themselves. This diversity builds on a common opposition to gender oppression and hierarchy which, however, is the first step in articulating and acting upon a political agenda".

Dangarembga employs Radical feminism in creating characters and articulating the major issues in her texts. Radical feminism aims to challenge and overthrow patriarchy by opposing standard gender roles and oppression of women and calls for a radical reordering of society. Hartman (1997:63) contends that the point of departure for Radical Feminism has been captured in the slogan, "the personal is political". In this case men are viewed as the domineering over women. These women have also campaigned for an end to discrimination against lesbianism, rape, violence, pornography and also campaigned for access to free abortion.

Radical feminism emerged in the late 1960s. It emerged as a western ideology with its roots in countries whose population is largely White like the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia.

Feminism has racist origins however, feminists argue that race is not a meaningful biological category and many avoid the term or choose to place it in inverted commas, to distance themselves from those who believe that people can be classified into a number of distinct races, with particular attributes and abilities as cited in Bryson (1999:50). She further says terms such as 'colored', 'nonwhite', 'black' or 'people of color' can be the product of unreflecting white perspective which labels such groups undifferentiatedly 'other', and leaves white identities unquestioned and unexplored. Black has however been used as political term to identify groups which are on the receiving side of white racism and imperialism. However it can be noted that amongst the feminisms available there is Black feminism which identifies with the woman of color. The issue of racism one way or the other cannot be done away with for it exists as evidenced by the existing theory of Black Feminism. Maybe it came as a way of accommodating the woman of color but then from the term 'Black' the notion of racism comes to light and this reinforces oppression on the othered therefore living the white privileged. Such analysis led to the rise of Africana Womanism, coined by Cleonora – Hudson Weems in 1987. She noted that feminism was not suitable for the woman of African descent and that black women needed a theory suitable to them that would address the specific issues of the African woman. However, the theory will not be discussed in this section but rather in the theoretical framework for it is the basis of this study.

## 1.1 Aims of the study

- ❖ To develop an open minded appreciation of literary texts.
- ❖ To contribute to the existing body of knowledge in Tsitsi Dangarembga's texts.

## 1.2 Objectives

- ❖ To establish an Africana Womanist ideology in Tsitsi Dangarembga's texts.
- ❖ To challenge the Feminist paradigm in Tsitsi Dangarembga's works.

## 1.3 Research Questions

- Is there an Africana Womanist ideology in Dangarembga's works?
- What are the feminist paradigms that can be challenged in Dangarembga's texts?

## 1.4 Research Methodology

This section gives a description of the methodology that will be used to execute the study. Denscombe (2007:2) defines research methodology as an analysis of the principles of methods and rules employed in a discipline of study. Desk review of literature will basically make an analysis of documents concerning the three primary texts; *She No Longer Weeps*, *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*. Content analysis of secondary texts which deal with feminist issues and those that deal with Africana Womanist issues will also be done.

## 1.5 Significance of Study

In the realm of knowledge, this study reveals the benefits of attacking texts with an open mind, not confining one to a certain tradition of approaching texts. The study reveals that not much research has been conducted in the field of literature with special emphasis on the Africana Womanist perspective of looking at Tsitsi Dangarembga's texts.

This research will contribute to the field of literature in general and women's studies, hoping to raise awareness of the theory with the interests of women of African descent. From this study it is anticipated that the reader will advance his/her knowledge and analysis not only in Dangarembga's texts but in all possible texts that the reader may lay his/her hands on. Hopefully the reader will find it possible that the male be compatible with her female counterpart, for men are viewed as the enemy of progress in the lives of women.

## 1.6 Justification of study

The topic of this study was chosen after realizing that Tsitsi Dangarembga's texts are read from a feminist perspective. However, from the perspective that her female protagonists do not claim victory over their male counterparts as some feminist theories entail or suggest, the imperative to read them from an Africana Womanist perspective arises. While feminist arguments may still have considerable sway in understanding Dangarembga's works, reading them from an Africana womanist perspective will offer more insights into the workings of her characters and their relation to the patriarchy.

## 1.7 Literature Review

Tsitsi Dangarembga's works as a novelist, playwright and screenwriter have been critiqued by various scholars. Most often her works are regarded as feminist and this research seeks to establish an Africana Womanist ideology in her texts, hoping to develop an open minded appreciation of Dangarembga's texts. This literature review is of relevance in the understanding of her works. Outlined are other scholars' perspectives on her texts *Nervous Conditions*, *The Book of Not* and *She No longer Weeps*. However, *Nervous Conditions* has received wider literary criticism as compared to *She No Longer Weeps* and *The Book of Not*.

Moyana (1994) takes the stance that *Nervous Conditions* is written in feminist tradition and the woman's voice in the novel is significantly feminist. Justifying her stand, Moyana (1994:26) says, "I would argue that Dangarembga's novel is in the feminist tradition. The author does not merely state women's experiences and leave them there, neither does she describe the socialization of women into their roles, rather she depicts some women who try to protest against their usual socially accepted roles while others engage in a debate on how they are being used or misused by the menfolk". P Mbatha (unpublished) explores *Nervous Conditions* from a feminist point of view of women subjugation. However Moyana and Mbatha dwell much on the negative aspects than the positive. The oppressive nature of men is brought out; we get to know a lot about women experiences than men's experiences. However, in her conclusion, Moyana (1994:41) admits that it should not be about the sexes fighting for dominance but about them working together to do away with the stifling traditions. Less emphasis is put on the aspect of cooperation in the males and females; this is a sign of the little importance attached to the subject.

Anderson E (2010) mainly focuses on tradition. In her paper (2010:4), she brings out the desire by women to break away from tradition and at the same time holding on to it as exemplified by Tambu. She states that Tambu departs from tradition early by attempting to fulfill her own aspirations of education. She further goes on to say in her paper (2010:5), it was Tambu's adherence to tradition that made Tambu more successful in a familial way than her cousin Nyasha who was plagued in the end with self-doubt and mental illness due to her inability to reconcile herself with tradition. Uwakweh (1998:13) also talks about education and gender in her paper, noting that, "education is critical to female independence. Socially, and often symbolically, it transports women beyond the reach of traditional shackles". She makes an observation that male children have the advantage of acquiring education as compared to the female, as noted in Dangarembga's texts; education becomes the source of conflict in the families in her texts. This could be due to the fact that Western education opens the eyes of women, making them rebellious, thus making them forsake their native cultures and traditions. However, society expects them to be silent while through education they are empowered, resulting in them voicing out. An educated woman becomes a threat to the menfolk.

Arguing in her paper, Uwakweh P Ada (1995:75) asserts that the self-referential nature of the autobiographical mode adopted by Dangarembga as a literary strategy marks her attainment of voice in a male dominated Zimbabwe literary arena; she continues to say that voicing is self-defining, liberal and cathartic. Having noted that the female in the Shona culture is silent, Uwakweh(1995:76) asserts that "The female voice promises a fresh insight on women's reality and experiences that are generally inaccessible to the male tradition. Significantly, it debunks the patriarchal social structure and demystifies the idealized traditional images of the African woman". Ada notes that despite the woman's participation in national struggle, the Zimbabwe

male attitude to their women remains unchanged in the post war years. Indeed Dangarembga's decision to speak against the oppressive nature of the patriarchal system is a good move that however should not put men on the periphery for men are also concerned in issues of struggle and issues of seeking liberation. Voicing with particular focus on Nyasha proves risky; maybe the question may be on the strategies and or tradition adopted in the voicing, for Nyasha's radical approach works against her.

Demystifying the traditional images of the African woman calls for adoption of ways that would suit the struggle of the African woman, with African origins and specifically with the woman of African descent in mind. It would be inappropriate to adopt foreign ideas in trying to solve the problems of the local, especially those that do not fully address the struggles of the local. This is also seen in Hill's article (1995).

Hill (1995) in '*Purging a plateful of colonial history of the silent girls in Nervous Conditions*' exposes colonial education and adoption of Western ways as bringing painful consequences for the modern African woman. As has been said above the title of the novel comes from Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, in which he writes about the psychosocial effects of colonization. Hill (1995:78) states that in the novel however the cultivation of the voice and the mind through education is inextricably connected with problematic silencing that is manifested through symptoms of illness because Nyasha is the character who articulates most of the historically real political events mentioned, she expresses most clearly Dangarembga's thematic articulation of illness as a colonial condition. She goes on to say that on a metaphoric level colonialism and Western influence are presented as contaminations that infect and threaten the lives and health of the colonized. If physical and psychological illness can be read as symptomatic of colonialism, it can be cured by independence as viewed by Hill. In as much as the nation is fighting for

independence from the West, Nyasha who articulates Dangarembga's concerns, adopts Western ways in dealing with her problems, which is why she cannot get support from people around her, they simply cannot understand her.

On the same note Derek Wright (1997) in his essay considers how images of eating, digesting, vomiting and rejecting food are used in the novel. In the African culture it is basically believed that a woman should have flesh on her body a sign of good living and happiness, however Nyasha is Anorexic, totally the opposite of what an African woman is expected to be. Anorexia and Bulimia are not so common during the time Dangarembga writes her novels. However Nyasha expresses her rebellion through rejecting food which leaves her battling with Anorexia and lonely.

Sexuality, feminist consciousness and post-colonial politics are examined in Shaw's paper (2007). Shaw (2007:7) declares that, "in *Nervous Conditions* and *She No Longer Weeps* sexuality offers the promise of freedom entails a loss of security and delivers punishment". Furthermore, Shaw (2007:7) asserts that "reading the novel in light of the play provides insight into sexual tension in the father-daughter relationship and suggests that Nyasha's nervous condition in good part derived from the opposition between becoming a woman and being a daughter". Women remain a property of men throughout their lifetime as demonstrated by such traditional practices as lobola. However, Dangarembga's characters feel they should break away from the men who are the problem in their lives.

Space matters are discussed in detail in Okwonko's paper (2003). He looks at space from different angles encompassing physical space, tertiary space of the homestead, the mission, and the Convent, structural space, ideological and narrative spaces.



Vambe.T.M says in his unpublished paper that the publishing of *Nervous Conditions* in 1988 can be seen as a crucial political intervention aimed at revising the marginal roles which women have been assigned under colonialism and continue to perform in the new dispensation of independence. Ways in which the new “truths” are characterized in *Nervous Conditions* are examined in his paper. In a way the text brings out the problems experienced by women but however does not suggest any solutions for the solutions suggested seem to fail.

As has been shown above, various scholars have critiqued Dangarembga on various subjects, however one may find it inevitable to read her texts from an African womanist’s view. The scholars cited above have looked at issues like feminism in Dangarembga’s texts, matters of space, and so on therefore one may be justified to critique Dangarembga’s texts basing one’s argument on that they are written with the African woman in mind and for the African woman.

## 1.8 Theoretical Framework

This study uses Africana Womanism as a theoretical framework. The term Africana Womanism was coined by Clenora Hudson Weems in 1987 out of the realization of total inadequacy of feminism and like theories as cited in Hudson Weems (1993:8). She noted that feminism did not suit the situation of the Africana woman let alone Black Feminism. Hudson Weems (1993:32) contends that, “Black feminism’is some Africana women’s futile attempt to fit into the constructs of an established White female paradigm. At best, Black feminism may relate to sexual discrimination outside the African community, but cannot claim to resolve the critical problems within it, which are influenced by racism or classism. She further alludes to the fact that for many White women, Africana women exist for their purpose – a dramatization of oppression. Hudson Weems(1993:4) therefore concludes that, black or African feminism that originates from mainstream feminist theory is in a sense a postscript or afterthought, and therefore “extremely problematic as labels for the true Africana woman”.

Hudson Weems (1993:1) notes that for years Africana women have found themselves in a serious ideological predicament. In the absence of viable organized women’s groups they have been invited to embrace feminism as an instrument of emancipation and as new found source of empowerment and status building .However the majority of Africana women on public platforms have rejected feminism for a multiplicity of reasons. First there is unquestionable need to reclaim Africana women; second, they are perplexed over the racist origins of the feminist movement; third, they have found little solace in the doctrines and mission of the feminist movement, andfourth, therealities, struggles and expectations of the two groups remain on different planes.

Clenora Hudson Weems (1993:5) notes that Africana Womanism is African centered and can be defined thus: “An ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in our culture and therefore it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs and desires of Africana women”. The theory views the African woman as: a self- namer, self- definer,in concert with the male in struggle, strong,a flexible role player, spiritual,male compatible,ambitious, nurturing and mothering, respected, recognized, whole, authentic and adaptable. In this Theory as noted by Lanford in Hudson Weems (1993:15) Clenora Hudson Weems is helping Black women relocate themselves from the margins of white feminism to the centrality of their own experiences. This theory will therefore be used in this study in analyzing Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *She No Longer Weeps*, *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not* which have been widely read from a feminist view point.

## 1.9.1 Provisional Chapter Breakdown

Chapter One provides a preamble of the study highlighting its aims and objectives. It gives the background of the study, the literature review and the theoretical framework amongst other things.

Chapter Two gives brief biographical information about Tsitsi Dangarembga and looks into the text *She No Longer Weeps*, analyzing it using selected key features of the true Africana womanist. This chapter will lay emphasis on the following features of an Africana woman as: family centered, a woman in concert with the male in struggle, spiritual, ambitious, adaptable and as a self-definer.

Chapter Three is an analysis of *Nervous Conditions* from an Africana Womanist viewpoint. It pays special attention to the features of the true Africana womanist that include seeing the woman as nurturing and mothering, respected, a flexible role player, with genuine sisterhood, respectful of elders, whole and authentic, a self-namer and full of ambition.

Chapter Four analyses The book of not using the Africana womanist theory. The features of a true Africana woman that will be looked at in this chapter are the woman as: strong, in concert with the male in struggle, flexible role player, compatible with males and ambitious.

Chapter Five concludes the research, it summarizes and gives recommendations.

## 1.9.2 Conclusion

This introductory chapter has stated the background of the study of study which basically talks about what inspired the researcher to carry out this particular research. It has been noted that Dangarembga's texts are widely read from a feminist view point, hence in the study, her texts will be read from an Africana womanist perspective. In order to achieve aims and objectives of the study were brought out.

The aim of this research is to establish an Africana Womanist ideology in Tsitsi Dangarembga's texts. The research was premised on the fact that her texts are widely read from a feminist perspective, raising the need to read it from an Africana Womanist perspective. Its significance is that it will add to the existing body of knowledge in the field of literature.

### **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

Colonialism : policy of acquiring or maintaining colonies.

Feminism : advocacy of women's rights and sexual equality.

Gender : classification roughly to the corresponding to the two sexes and sexlessness.

Oppression : govern or treat cruelly by weighing down the inferior

Patriarchy : male dominated social system.

# CHAPTER TWO

## 2.0 Introduction

This chapter gives an analysis of the text *She No Longer Weeps*. Selected Africana Womanist features are used in analyzing the text. In the analysis, Africana Womanist traits will be established. The researcher has chosen to establish features of an Africana womanist as: a family centered person, in concert with the male in struggle, spiritual, ambitious, adaptable and as a self-definer. It will be noted that women suffer because of the colonial stereotypes that came with the white colonialists and Missionaries and the imposed Victorian ideals concerning womanhood. Prior to the analysis some biographical information about the author will be given.

## 2.1 About the Author

Tsitsi Dangarembga a playwright and novelist was born in 1959 in Mutoko in Zimbabwe which was at that time known as Rhodesia. At the age of two she went to England with her family where she began her education in a British school. She returned to Rhodesia at the age of six to conclude her early education. Dangarembga returned to England in 1977 to study medicine at Cambridge University, hoping to save people of her society; however she did not complete her studies. She then returned to Rhodesia just before it attained independence in 1980. On her return to Zimbabwe she continued with her studies, enrolling at the University of Zimbabwe to study psychology. At that time while studying she held a job at a marketing agency as a copywriter. She wrote many plays that were put into production at University of Zimbabwe. Among her works are: *The Lost of the Soil*, a short story entitled *The Letter*(1985), a play called *She No Longer Weeps*, a novel *Nervous Conditions*(1988) which was the first novel to be published in England by a black Zimbabwean woman. In 1989 *Nervous Conditions* was awarded the

Commonwealth Writers Prize. Dangarembga continued her education in Berlin, studying film directorship. She made among her productions a documentary for German television and a film entitled *Everyone's Child* (1996). In 2006, a sequel to *Nervous Conditions*, *The book of Not* was published.

From Tsitsi Dangarembga's biographical information, we can tell that spending her early childhood years in England, implies that she was first exposed and socialized into a foreign culture and tradition; however, she came back to Zimbabwe to continue with her studies. She had a successful writing career through which she gained fame. Her works have been embraced and understood in different ways, some arguing that she is a feminist writer. However, this research would argue that she is a womanist writer.

As a starting point, Dangarembga, as cited in Marangolyet al(1993:311) says that she believes that women's issues can be fully understood and adequately addressed in a historical and cultural context. For this reason she disagrees with other Zimbabwean women writers and critics who search for liberating ideas and concepts within western theoretical frameworks as cited in Furusa M (1996:9). Furusa further states that she proposes that Zimbabwean writers and critics should define their own structure of gender relations instead of relying on Western Feminist thought. As cited in Furusa (1996:9) Tsitsi Dangarembga argues that Western derived feminism is, So alien to the thinking of many black women because it...[Comes] from

A foreign culture, that they are not even able to assimilate it to the extent

Where it would give them that initial liberation which ... [is] necessary as

Something to start building on.

In this way Dangarembga reinforces pride in one's native culture and tradition noting that the African woman is hopeless in finding solace in foreign cultures and traditions, in this case the Western culture.

After reading what Dangarembga says above one would thus deduce that Dangarembga dismisses western feminism and celebrates African culture. Looking into her works one realizes that radical feminism is dominant, her female characters impose radical strategies of changing the society. The radical characters do not succeed in their endeavor though, which draws the view that she is raising awareness as to the negative implications of embracing western ideologies in a bid to liberate the African woman and to condemn and dismiss the claims of the western people that they are the pioneers of civilization. She brings out the fact that the coming in of the colonizer has brought with it colonially constructed stereotypes. Achebe (1964) in *Furusa* argues that an African writer cannot be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. The colonized person has to regain his/her dignity by rising above the colonially constructed stereotypes.

Basing part of this argument on historical facts one would find it important to state that, the coming in of the missionaries and the colonizers in Zimbabwe brought about Victorian ideals to the Africans and the colonized people began to think that these were traditional standards of living. Tsitsi Dangarembga in her play *She No Longer Weeps* (1987), introduces us to two generations of women, that of Martha's mother and that of Martha.

Martha is a kind of woman who believes in herself, a woman who believes in change and very outspoken. She is in her ways calling for change in society and has different views with those of



her mother. She symbolizes the new woman who wants to represent and define herself as opposed to being represented by the patriarchy in post-colonial Zimbabwe.

Martha goes against colonial ideals womanhood as she resents domestication. Furusa (1996:3) asserts that, “colonialism bracketed the Zimbabwean woman into restricted roles of wife and mother. Her performance space was the home, with her major staging area as the kitchen”. Confining the Africana woman to the kitchen suggests that she was passive in other areas of life encompassing the economic sphere, political arena and in decision making processes. The attainment of independence marks the beginning of a new era in the lives of women and the society at large, implying an end to the ‘old master’s ways’. Such negative representation of the Africana woman as that which has been mentioned above is countered by Morgan (1984) in Dube (1996:26) who shows how throughout pre-colonial Africa women participated actively in the economies of their societies. Morgan says that in Ghana, women were fully involved in the economy as traders and cultivators, in Kenya, Masai and kikuyu women dominated trade.

Elizabeth Schmidt (1992) in Dube (1996:26) also shows how Shona women went out hunting with their men and worked alongside them in the iron smelting. On the other hand Kuzwayo (1985) cited by Dube (1996:26) also argues that Nguni women herded cattle with their men. This shows that in the history of Africans, women have not been passive as compared to English women who left economic activities to their husbands. Women also had power politically as evidenced by mbuya Nehanda’s works which are still recognized up to now.

Victorian ideals of womanhood imposed on Africa by the colonizers were interrupted by the attainment of independence in Zimbabwe when women emerged as career centered rather than

domestic oriented, from then, women seek to re-define themselves in their own ways, different from the ways in which patriarchy would define them.

## 2.2 The Africana Woman as a Self-Definer

Martha goes against the expectations of the colonial ideals of womanhood by defining herself in an unexpected manner. The process of self-defining sets off when she begins to wonder if she is going to spend the rest of her life knitting 'like her mother and her mother and the rest of them' and eventually decides she cannot. She says, "... but no, I can't. I don't have time to knit or look after Freddy. I haven't got time to look after Freddy's baby either" (pp. 6). Hudson -Weems (1993:57) says, "From a historical perspective, the Africana woman has always managed to eke out a separate, private reality for herself and her family, regardless of that defined by the slave master, for example". Martha manages to draw out reality for herself, a reality contrary to the Victorian ideals of womanhood.

The duties she mentions above, knitting, looking after Freddy, having and looking after babies symbolize domesticity which was imposed on African women by their colonial masters. She thus distances herself from such roles that reduce her to being passive and being confined to the kitchen and the bedroom making babies. In the Victorian era, women owned nothing and their husbands everything even, the baby that she carries; she feels it belongs to Freddy not her. She later says, "The child is mine" (pp.6). This clearly shows that she begins viewing things differently; she wants a part for herself as well in terms of what is to be owned. She thus wants to do away with domesticity which deprives her of the right to own and establish a new life in a post-colonial Zimbabwe that would give her the chance to fully express herself. 'Her mother and her mother and the rest of them' symbolize the Africana women under the heavy weight of

colonialism. They have historically been defined by patriarchy and through socialization; the patriarchy continues to define them. Freddy says to Martha, “What sort of a woman would drink? You are a bitch Martha...You wear trousers like a man, you argue and challenge men as though you were a man yourself”. (pp. 8)

From what Freddy says above, it is clear that there is what he views as an ideal woman and Martha is not. He seeks to define his female counterpart himself thereby denying his counterpart the right to define herself in her own way, he further says that, Martha thinks fast and talks too much, which clearly shows that he feels intimidated by her assertiveness. To him an ideal woman is characterized by silence, thus voicing becomes problematic due to the fact that colonialism which was characterized by female subjugation is deeply embedded in his mind.

It is the duty of the African woman to define herself and her movement, as foreign eyes cannot fully define her. Martha is determined to define herself, despite the fact that Freddy says that he married a good wife who obviously does what he wants. This is evidenced when she says to Freddy, “Whatever I am, or whatever I do it’s what I believe is right” (pp.9). She has decided to see herself through her own eyes not to see herself through the eyes of the patriarchy. Her mother as well is in support of patriarchy. She re-enforces her husband’s words. However, at some point she realizes that what her daughter is saying makes sense but feels she has no power to implement it. She further defines herself in terms of sexuality when she says to her father, “No, today I will tell you had a daughter, but, I am becoming a woman and things are changing.” (pp.27) Colonialism impacted negatively on the black woman and the society at large. Osrin (2005:5) in Dube says that, “settler colonialism in Zimbabwe (Rhodesia ) took a severe toll on black women and exacerbated the gender based division of labor , unfortunately for the black

woman, the black man ,fearful of his woman collaborated with his settler government to strip the woman of almost every right she had enjoyed prior to colonialism.

Being a daughter is symbolic of the image of women as perpetual minors. Women are viewed as legal minors from the time of their birth to the time of their death. In differentiating being a daughter and being a woman she is articulating her concerns about the kind of treatment that women receive in the hands of men. She seeks to rub off the status of women as perpetual minors. In this way she defines herself and women in general.

## 2.3 An Africana Woman is Ambitious

An Africana woman is ambitious. One who is ambitious is determined to succeed and this implies that they may go through challenges but nothing hinders them. They are full of hope for better things to happen, this is characteristic of Martha. She displays her ambition from the time she is staying with Freddy to the time when she goes to her parents' house. She says to her mother, "I have my priorities and I know my limitations. I know I must work hard. I must get my degree and live a productive life". (pp.25)She goes on to say that, "I am as much a part of society as any one of you and when I see that change is needed, nothing will deter me from working towards achieving that change" (pp.25).

Hudson-Weems (1993:71) asserts that, "Ambition and responsibility are highly important in the life of the Africana Womanist, for family too depend on these qualities in her. She goes on to say that, the sense of responsibility she has for her family is paramount and so she creates a private space for herself in the midst of chaos, confusion and congestion, even while washing dishes, feeding the baby and cooking dinner.Martha is determined to see life changing for the better regardless of the situation she finds herself in, especially considering the fact that she is

pregnant, Freddy does not want to marry her, and her parents do not want her in their home but in husband's home as they see her as a disgrace. Under normal circumstances we would find such a woman losing hope, seeking help here and there and begging or in a confused state that she finds impossible to come out of, Martha acts differently. She stands strong and maps a way for herself even in such a situation. She hopes that better things are yet to come.

Martha is an ambitious woman, a feature that her own mother does not possess. She even tells Freddy that he has got a good job, and if things work out by the same time next year she will be done with her degree and they will both be earning. This shows that she even has hope for her own family; she still believes that she and Freddy will be a family the same time in the following year. She does not only have hope for money and a job but for a family too. She even includes the baby in their life which shows her ambition to have her own family, although Freddy disappoints her later. From a high sense of responsibility that she has, ambition stems up. She knows she has to take care of her family and knows she has to help her husband financially as well. She is unlike her white counterpart of the Victorian era who is only confined to the domestic space.

## 2.4 An Africana Woman is Family Centered and in Concert with the Male in Struggle.

Family has always been an important unit of the African community. The importance of a family is shown in Dangarembga's *She No Longer Weeps*. In the text Martha proclaims her love to Freddy and is so affectionate to Freddy, she also shows her willingness to give Freddy support in different areas of life. She says,

I still do care about him. Perhaps it wouldn't be so bad if I went back- he's  
Sometimes sweet and gentle with me. It really surprised me that a man could  
Be so warm and hold me softly, and it's so nice, so nice to lie there cuddling  
And kissing in bed. (pp.1)

In this case Martha brings out the affection that she shared with Freddy. The kind of affection they shared is more like a new discovery about men as evidenced by the statement she utters when she says, "it really surprised me that a man could be so warm and hold me softly..." In a way the psychological effects of colonialism are brought out. Hudson Weems (1993:59) says that the family is where the male obtains his initial exposure to an environment of support, love and affection. Colonialism constructed a negative image of the African man, making him incapable of showing affection to her woman. Such features were believed to make man seem weaker, and feminine. Macho images of men were viewed as ideal. Furusa (1996:2) asserts that, "The British reproduced and valorized European cultures within the colonized Zimbabwe geopolitical and mental spaces, thus systematically transforming the way Zimbabwean men and women experienced their relationships together within time and space to replicate western gender notions". A man was socialized to be strong, aggressive, not to cry and so on.

Martha is beginning to realize that it is possible for a man to show such features as affection which were generally construed as feminine. However due to the fact that colonial stereotypes are embedded in the minds of the African men, they keep on going back to their violent 'nature'. Hoping that Freddy may change she goes back to him but rather finds that he still behaves the same or is even worse. For the sake of her dear life Martha moves out, hurt, heartbroken,

disappointed and betrayed. She longs to be a part of a family, a society but she is relegated to her own space both by her family and society which hardens her. She is not only betrayed by Freddy, but also by the family and the society at large. Her longing to be a part of a family comes out when she writes her mother a letter telling her to ask her father if she could come back home. She says she sometimes feels very alone and frightened. Earlier on she says to Freddy, "... The baby will be six months old this time next year. Just think we'll be a family already". (pp.10)

Talking to Gertrude she says,

... I love Freddy and he loves me, that's why we'll get married. We are very good friends, and the baby (*she pats her stomach contentedly*), the baby just makes things a bit more difficult. You see, I thought in a year or two Freddy would be able to settle down and cope with a family...(pp.17).

Analyzing what Martha says above to her mother in the letter and also to Freddy and Gertrude we can deduce that Martha is not fighting against families and men, she so desires male companionship, which is also another feature of an Africana woman. Hudson Weems (1993:58) notes that, "While the concern for the survival of her family, both personal and collective, are of utmost importance to the Africana womanist, the mainstream feminist is self-centered, interested in self-realization and personal gratification". She also says that the Africana womanist is more concerned with her entire family rather than with just herself and her sisters. Martha shows so much concern about the family, herself and also the society. She wishes the society would change for the better.

Women in the text are all portrayed as people who are concerned with their families as evidenced by mother, Mrs. Mutsika and Mrs. Chiwara. Mrs.Mutsika and Chiwara are representatives of the

Women's Association for the Protection of the illegitimate mother. They don't expect their girls to get married although they themselves are married. Asking Martha to talk to the girls and prove to them that there is life out of marriage Martha refuses, telling the two women that if she were to talk to their girls she would advise them to, stay at home until the local teacher or doctor brought around the money for *roora*. This also shows that Martha is not anti-marriage as would have been expected of a radical feminist.

Martha's mother as well attaches importance to her marriage as evidenced in the way she loves and supports her husband. She keeps on sending Martha back to her husband as a way to show how much she desires to see her daughter happy in life as at least Mrs. Somebody and also as a way to protect the name of the family and the image of her husband who is a pastor. Martha's willingness to support Freddy even financially brings out the fact that she is bound to stand by her man even in other forms of struggle that he might engage in. Mother helps to preserve the image of father who is about to lose it because of his daughter who has been impregnated but does not stay with her husband.

## 2.5 The Africana Woman is Spiritual and Adaptable

Africans have a spiritual being that they believe in as evidenced in the text, Martha's mother is a spiritual woman believing in the supreme God. In most of her conversations she acknowledges the presence of God by mentioning him when she advises Martha. Urging her to be a good wife to Freddy she assures her of the reward that God is going to give to her. Mother says, "If God is willing, her time will come. And if he chooses not to bless you in this life you can be sure of your reward in the life to come". (pp.23)



It is believed that God will come and take his people to heaven, and his people are those that do his will. It is believed that the Almighty God will punish those who do not do what He says, thus mother says this to Martha when she denies that she is Freddy's wife, "... and then you would be punished and we would be saved".(pp.26). This serves to show that she is a highly spiritual somebody and she values issues to do with spirituality, thus she uses them in talking her daughter into marrying Freddy. Spirituality characterizes the Africana woman; she demonstrates a definite sense of spirituality, a belief in a higher power that transcends rational ideals, which is ever present in the African culture as noted by Hudson Weems (1993:71).

An Africana Womanist is comfortable with a family around her; she does not demand to have her own space out of the context of her family. However, Martha ends up having her own space, not out of her own demands but because her situation forces her to. In the beginning Martha wants to stay with Freddy, later she wants to be a part of her own family even after she is sent away from home. Her attitude shows that she is willing to establish herself even in Freddy's home, and when she moves out of Freddy's apartment she is determined to stay at her parent's home and establish herself but is sent away from home by her father. Hudson Weems (1993:71) asserts that a true Africana woman demands no separate space for nourishing her individual needs and goals, while in the twentieth century feminist movement, there is white feminist's insistence upon space. Virginia Wolf in Hudson Weems (1993:71) says that a woman needs a place to escape to, Martha is not really escaping but she has been forced by her father to move out of her home and stay with her uncle for fear of having his image tarnished by his daughter.

The rest of the women in the text stay with their husbands and as exemplified by Mrs. Mutsika and Mrs. Chiwara who show that they have other activities to do out of home, activities that in a way enable them to express themselves and even earn them money. They prove that a woman does not necessarily need her own space out of her home to prove herself; it is also possible even in their homes, and in presence of men.

## 2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that even though *She No Longer Weeps* is widely perceived as a Feminist text, features of Africana Womanism can be established. Radical feminists, under normal circumstances would rise in support of lesbianism, however in the text Martha does not draw close to that. Even though she has been disappointed by the father of her child, she goes on to fall in love with Lovemore; we would have expected her anger over her relationship with Freddy to discourage her from getting involved with men totally. Lesbianism would in a way discourage families as well for it does not make sense that women would just marry and not produce off springs. Martha already has a child, Sarah and still yearns for a family as said above. This shows that she is not totally against families but against oppression. Feminists would argue that the killing of Freddy by Martha conforms to the ideals of radical feminism in the sense that Freddy's death symbolizes an end to patriarchal domination and the act of killing would imply extreme rebellion. However it can be argued that the act of killing symbolizes an end to the colonial stereotype brought in by the White Missionaries and colonizers that were mentioned above bearing in mind that by the time this text is written, Zimbabweans have just gained independence from their colonial masters. This is a new era that Zimbabweans are embracing and it has to be characterized by total independence from oppressor. Feminism is a

westernideology and due to the fact that Dangarembga considers it alien she is bound to condemn it, not celebrate it, which is evidenced by the fact that read from a feminist viewpoint, Martha is a loser. Thus it can be argued that she is a womanist writer.

The next chapter analyses Nervous Conditions using selected features of Africana Womanism.

# CHAPTER THREE

## 3.0 Introduction

Chapter three is an analysis of *Nervous Conditions* from an Africana Womanist viewpoint. It pays special attention to the features of the true Africana womanist that include seeing the woman as nurturing and mothering, respected, a flexible role player, with genuine sisterhood, respectful of elders, whole and authentic, a self-namer and full of ambition. In this chapter it is acknowledged that feminist traits are present in *Nervous Conditions* but Africana womanist traits outdo feminist traits and the ending of the novel dismisses feminism due to its failures

## 3.1 Feminist traits in *Nervous Conditions*

It has been argued that *Nervous Conditions* is a feminist text, however the researcher challenges such claims but in doing so would not overlook the fact that there are feminist traits in *Nervous Conditions*, articulated by the characters Nyasha and her cousin Lucia. To begin with, feminism aims at demonstrating the importance of women; it reveals that women have been subordinate to men and aims to bring out gender equity. The origins of feminism can be traced back to Britain and the United States of America. (Hartman1997:83) points out that Radical feminists argue that the patriarchy creates the conditions for women to be systematically dominated, exploited and oppressed. Thus radical feminists enjoy bonds excluding the man.

Analyzing the events in Nyasha's life, her speech and behavior it is inevitable to say that she is a radical feminist. Firstly, the researcher notes that Nyasha spent the early years of her childhood in England and this means that she adopted the English culture, leading her to her failure to adapt to the African culture and traditions. Nyasha has western ideas about everything as evidenced when she talks to Tambu about her body, she says, "Not bad at all. You've got a waist. One of these days you'll have a bust. Pity about the backside", she continued slapping it playfully as she turned away. 'It's rather large ...' pp.91

Western ideals of beauty are portrayed in her statement. Beauty in the western culture is seen in tall, slim women with small waists and so on. However, this is directly converse to the African ideals of beauty; African views of beauty portray an ideal woman as plump and curvy as a sign of good living. Nyasha says she does not want too much food as it will make her fat. (pp.91)

It is not only what she says that makes her feminist, but what other people say as well. Her age mates at school notice that she does not behave African, they say, "She thinks she is White...she is proud... the way she dresses for Saturday night dances" (pp.94).

The way she dresses echoes the assertion by Santon (1815-1902) in Bryson (1995:27) that women should dress for comfort but not to please men. This is also characteristic of Nyasha who dresses in mini dresses even with the disapproval of her father. Ready to go for a dance in a dress she has received as a gift from her mother for doing good at school, her father asks her where she thinks she is going 'dressed like that', indicating his disapproval of her dressing, he says she is dressed in an ungodly manner and accuses Maiguru of compromising Nyasha's decency.

( pp.109). Nyasha on the other hand feels comfortable in her clothing, which is how she loves to see herself especially bearing in mind the fact that this is not the first occasion where her father

expresses discontent over the way she dresses. Nyasha however is aware that the way she dresses is contrary to African ways of dressing. When she comes to the homestead from England, “she wears a tiny dress that hardly covers her thighs .She was self-conscious though, “constantly clasping her hands behind her buttocks to prevent her dress from riding up ...” (pp.37). Having noted that what she dresses in is not proper she does not change but rather clings to the tiny dress which suggests that she is satisfied with it and does not intend to change and her clothes rather define her.

Speaking to Tambu at some point, Nyasha echoes some sentiments that may lead to one interpreting her as a radical feminist and at the same time advocating for lesbianism. In her narration, Tambu says, “she said I was better off losing my virginity to a tampon which wouldn’t gloat about its achievement than a man who would add mine to his hoard of hymens...” (pp.96)

Under normal circumstances one is expected to lose her virginity to her husband or at least a man but she goes against it, in a way suggesting her distaste of men, this is typical of radical feminists.

The patriarchy is the main enemy of radical feminists, as evidenced by Nyasha’s behavior, which highlights that men are the problem in the lives of women. Nyasha’s problem in this case is her father, Babamukuru. She is constantly fighting with her father concerning almost everything that she does. Nyasha challenges her father, openly to which her father says, “We cannot have two men in this house. Not even Chido, you hear that Nyasha? Not even your brother there dares challenge my authority”. (pp.115). Lucia also challenges the patriarchy as evidenced by her encounter with the males in the family. She holds Takesure by his ear asking him to tell the truth about her in front of all the people in the lounge where they seek to resolve family issues. The patriarchy fails to tame her thus they term her vicious, unnatural and

uncontrollable. Tambu also has a problem with the patriarchy as exemplified by Nhamo and her father who do not want her to go to school but still she remains compatible with the patriarchy. Tambu realizes that Nyasha's ways are not the best ways for her as she says that, "But for all the glamour, the thought persisted that Nyasha would not be good for me. Everything about her spoke of alternatives and possibilities, that if considered too deeply would wreak havoc with the neat plan I had laid out for my life" (pp.76)

She realizes that she is different from Nyasha and that her agenda is different from hers thus she decides that Nyasha would not be good for her. Traits of Africana Womanism can be established in other characters though as will be shown below.

### 3.2 Africana women are nurturing, mothering and respected

It is the duty of an Africana woman to love and care for her children, her family and the society as a whole, being a nurturer and playing a positive role in their lives. She does not deny them her love, she offers them support for she wishes to see them grow well and she delights in seeing them prosper. Because of her concern for their future she is obliged to set a good path for them to follow and at the same time she is respected for her role in society. This is characteristic of the women in *Nervous Conditions*. Mai Tambu's nurturing skills are reflected in her daughter Tambu who has been taught to be strong and to learn to bear her burdens as a woman with strength. (pp16). This is what gives her the strength and determination in her life. Tambu decides to take matters to her own hands even when her father cannot provide her with school fees. Her upbringing has taught her that hard work pays. Grandmother cements this when she tells Tambu

of how Babamukuru got to be a successful somebody; this is evidenced by her assertion that Babamukuru was not afraid of hard work, having grown used to it from an early age, ( pp.19).

Tambu admits that she used to spend most of her productive time working with her grandmother in the plot she called her garden, (pp.19). As the saying goes, charity begins at home, she learnt the most important things in life from the women around her including Maiguru, whom she stayed with at the Mission. In the same way, Nyasha, Tambu's Anglicized cousin learnt most of the things from her mother, she would do household chores, read her books and do well at school due to the encouragement she got from her mother, her parents liked to see her being dutiful (pp.79) however, she was different from Tambu and the rest of the women, except her cousin Lucia. She had a feminist mindset and rather rebellious as evidenced by her wild behavior. This bothered her parents especially her father who always tried to map a way for her to follow that she wouldn't.

Mothers earn respect for their roles as mothers and nurturers as evidenced by the women in the text. Maiguru is well respected because she is a teacher and is educated, Mai Tambu says, "Because Maiguru is educated that is why you kept quiet"(pp.140). She also believes that because she has money people respect what she says. Her marriage to Babamukuru who is also well respected for his status in society also earns her some respect. Mai Tambu is also respected as she is the one who takes care of the home where the rest of the Sigauke family gathers during holidays and different occasions. Tete earns more respect for her patriarchal status as evidenced when she comes to visit at the homestead, Tambu says, "Because of her patriarchal status my Tete could not sleep in such a public place as a living room when more private rooms were available"( pp.132). Tete, unlike the other women who had become part of the family because of



marriage was involved in decision making processes as evidenced by the Lucia and Takesure issue.

### 3.3 Genuine sisterhood is expected of Africana women

Genuine sisterhood is evidenced in the text as different women share their experiences and help each other in different ways, Tambu does not give up on her radical cousin Nyasha, despite her wild ways Tambu tries to knock some sense into her head. She displays genuine love for her cousin and so much care. She says that, “I was more concerned about Nyasha, because Babamukuru had Maiguru to look after him and the solace of knowing Nyasha was wrong” (pp.118). Sisterhood is essential among African women, this is expounded by Hudson –Weems (1993:67) when she says , this sisterly bond is a reciprocal one in which each gives and receives equally. She further says that African women support each other, “They are joined emotionally, as they embody empathic understanding of each other’s shared experiences. Everything is given out of love, criticism included...” This is notable in Nyasha and Tambu.

Nyasha has physically challenged her father thus Tambu feels it is her duty to give Nyasha some comfort since at this time she needs it. At this point she is the only person available for her; her mother is trying to calm her angry husband down. Tambu was worried about the effect the situation would have on Nyasha. Tambu criticizes Nyasha’s behavior condemning her for not showing respect for her parents. She does this for the good of Nyasha not hers. She says, “Even if you have been to England you should respect your mom; ... I wouldn’t speak to my mom the way I have heard you speak to Maiguru” (pp.78).

Nyasha has displayed disrespect for her parents and thus Tambu feels she should tell her to respect them, maybe she might change. However, issues of respect will be dealt with in detail in their own section. Other women also display genuine sisterhood in the text for instance during the Christmas holiday when the Lucia and Takesure issue is discussed, women in the kitchen show some discontent in how matters are handled in the Sigauke family. Tambu says that ‘fierce solidarity was established in the kitchen’ (pp.137). This shows that the women stood up and supported Lucia, However Maiguru distancing herself from the issue also said what sounded sensible to the ears of Lucia. On the other hand, Lucia gives her sister, Mai Tambu some support during the time when she gives birth to her son. Mai Tambu also gives Tambu some support when she needs maize seeds to plant so she can get herself educated. Throughout the text women have displayed genuine sisterhood.

### 3.4 An Africana woman is a flexible role player and is ambitious

In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga shows that African women compliment the efforts of their husbands in everything they do and that they are flexible role players. They display concern in the way the family is taken care of and involve themselves in economic activities so as to fend for their families. This is exemplified by Mai Tambu, and Maiguru. During the time when Babamukuru is in England with his family, there is scarce funding for Nhamo’s education, thus she looks for the money. Tambu contends that,

Fortunately my mother was determined that year. She began to boil eggs which she carried to the bus terminus and sold to the passengers passing through. (This meant that we could not eat them.) She also took vegetables- rape, onions and tomatoes - extending her garden so that there was more to sell. . . . In this way she scrapped enough money to keep my brother at school. (pp.15)

At such times however it is sad that her lazy husband Jeremiah does nothing, he always expects his brother to give him money to fend for his own family and makes no effort to make some money himself. Dube (1996:26) says that, “It was the responsibility of both men and women to ensure that their society survived, unlike in the English society where the survival of the family hung on men”. Jeremiah can hardly do anything productive but simply awaits funding from his brother.

Jeremiah’s family is immersed in poverty; their situation is rather sad which is evident in the names of his kids. Dambudzo which has the Shona equivalent of ‘problem’, Tambudzai and Netsai which depict being problematic, Nhamo depicting destitution, hardship, neediness, and poverty itself and Rambanai which denotes separation. Their poverty is also a product of Jeremiah’s laziness. This however impacts negatively on his family because, he does not have a say about matters concerning his family such that even when his son dies he does not really ask about the death or show some concern. The mother actually sounds bitter and at least says something. When Babamukuru imposes a wedding on them he just accepts it whereas the wife shows that she does not like the idea together with Tambu, who says, “I don’t think my uncle’s plans for my parents were something to laugh about” (pp.149).

Tambu shows that she is a flexible role player when at a tender age she comes up with a plan to raise money for her school fees and succeeds in implementing it. She says, “I will earn my fees. If you give me some seed, I will clear my own field and grow my own maize, not much, just enough for my fees” (pp.17)

This statement also brings to light her determination to attain some education which because of the financial crisis in her family and because of her femaleness she has been denied. It was once

a belief that it is better to educate a boy than a girl because educating a girl child was a waste of money for she would get married and use her money on the family she is married into and spend it on her own family as a boy would. This is also echoed by Tambu's father.

Maiguru is also a flexible role player; she works and earns money that feeds for the family together with her husband's. It is however sad that she does not enjoy the privilege of receiving her money in her own hands. In this way she is reduced to a minor, Vambe.T.M (1996:126) asserts that under colonialism the situation of women worsened as they were downgraded to minors, this statement explains better the situation of Maiguru. Tambu and Lucia repair the roof of the hut in the homestead, a duty often carried out by men, and Babamukuru applauds Jeremiah for a job well done to which Jeremiah replies as though he is responsible for the thatching. Babamukuru further says that Takesure will do the rest.

### 3.5 An Africana woman is whole and authentic and a self namer

Maiguru epitomizes what Hudson Weems says in her theory. She loves her family and provides for it. All the times she is talked of in the context of her family. She goes to England together with her husband in pursuit of education, and she does not leave her kids Nyasha and Chido behind. She stays with them for five years before they come to Zimbabwe. Despite the problems arising in her family she stays with her husband and kids. She desires positive male companionship, trying at all times to stay calm even though her husband does things that hurt her. At some point she becomes so angry with her husband but rather goes to her brother's home. When Babamukuru hears that she is at her brother's home he goes there and brings her back home. A true Africana womanist wants her home, her family and career and neglects not one of these for the other as articulated by Hudson Weems (1993:69) who further says that in acquiring

wholeness ,the Africana womanist demonstrates her desire for a positive male companionship, for without her male counterpart ,her life is not complete in a real sense. She needs male companionship and likewise he needs female companionship. Both are essential for the survival of the human race. This highlights the fact that men and women need each other for survival. Tambudzai manages to go to school because of the efforts made by Babamukuru and those made by her teacher Mr. Matimba. Babamukuru asserts that Tambu was an intelligent girl and deserving of education as she would help the family come out of poverty.

Maiguru manages to balance and divide her attention to her family, her career and her home. She cared not about her family alone but for the survival of other people as well. This is evident in the statement uttered by Tambu when she says, “My Maiguru was concerned about everyone, she was gentle, conscientious”. (pp.79)

The Africana woman has always insisted on identifying herself as a mother and companion, Hudson Weems declares that an Africana womanist is her own person, operating according to the forces in her life, and thus ,her name must reflect authenticity of her activity, not that of another culture. Looking at Maiguru, she has been to England, obtained her degree and comes back home, but the way she behaves depicts that of an African woman. She is concerned about her family’s survivaland the survival of other people outside her immediate family as exemplified by her concern for Tambudzai and Nhamo. In her an Africana womanist can be seen.

### 3.6 An Africana womanist is respectful of elders

It is generally expected of children to display some high regard for elders. African children are natured in such a way that they view respect as a good quality in any person. In *Nervous Conditions* women generally show respect to people around them except for Nyasha, who has the guts to challenge her father verbally and physically and Lucia who grabs Takesure by his ear in front of the elders of the Sigauke family. Women in the text call each other in a dignified manner for example Mai Tambu, Maiguru, Mainini Patience, Tete, and Sisi Tambu. These women show respect for the men as well as exemplified by Tambu who kneels when called in by Babamukuru. When her brother Nhamo called their father by his name, Tambu grew angry and for once was up in arms on behalf of her father(pp.48).

Tambudzai is presented as a character full of respect and thereby she expects other people around her to be respectful. She is quick to tell Nyasha to show some respect to her parents too. She says, “even if you have been to England you should respect your parents; I told her. I wouldn’t speak to my mother the way I have heard you speak to Maiguru” (pp.78). However this does not transform Nyasha in any way as she continues to answer back to her parents in an undignified manner when they speak to her. Confronted by her father about staying out at night with boys she becomes unapologetic and maintains that she is right, this leads to her father beating her. When beaten she retaliates punching him as well. She asks her father, “What do you want me to say... You want to admit I am guilty don’t you? Alright then. I was doing it, whatever you are talking about. There, I have confessed” (pp.113). Due to her failure to respect her parents and follow what they say she fails to conform to the African ideals. She is a confused child who does not know what to take and what not to. This leads to her nervous breakdown. She cannot eat, and when forced to, she quickly gobbles up the food, and when she goes away she throws up

all the food she has eaten. This could be a clear sign of her denial of African culture. At the end of it all she becomes anorexic.

## Conclusion

*Nervous Conditions* bears qualities of Africana Womanism as has been shown above. This does not however mean to say that feminism does not exist in the text, it is there and it is significant. Feminism can be fully established in Nyasha and partly in Lucia while Africana Womanism can be seen in other female characters. It has been proven that women are compatible with men as has been shown by Maiguru who goes to her brother for help. However Nyasha disapproves of her mother seeking solace in a man's arms. Her problem is with men as in the case with radical feminists. In this case, Dangarembga shows that she does not deny the fact that patriarchy may be a source of conflict but it can also offer viable solutions. Dangarembga also brings to light the fact that colonialism is problematic as it makes the man look more like an enemy to the woman. Nyasha herself, though radical admits to the negative effects of colonialism to her father. Realizing patriarchal ills here and there, Tambudzai clings to her culture and tradition which saves her as compared to her cousin Nyasha. At the end of the text, it can be noted that feminism has failed as proven by Nyasha's nervous breakdown. Anorexia and Bulimia were ailments not associated with blacks. Dangarembga's choice of these ailments is to suggest the negative effects of western ideas on African women. Normally these ailments emanate from western ideas of beauty which at the end may prove to have tragic effects on the mind of the African. Thus her nervous breakdown seeks to denounce feminism as an attempt in solving the problems of a woman of African descent.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## 4.0 Introduction

This chapter is an analysis of *The Book of Not* using the Africana womanist theory. The features of a true Africana woman that will be looked at in this chapter are the woman as: strong, in concert with the male in struggle, flexible role player, compatible with males and ambitious. This chapter will also look into the effects of Western ideologies on the Africans.

## 4.1 An Africana womanist is Ambitious

One thing that rings out loudly in Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* is ambition. Tambudzai continues in her quest for education as it will bring in her a better person. She has learnt that hard work pays from her uncle's achievements. Tambu is also capable of achieving success just like him. Finding herself at the Young Ladies' College of the Sacred Heart a prestigious school densely populated with whites she is determined to make it in life. The superiority of the whites does not deter her; rather she vows to outdo them. This is seen when she says,

Me! I could be that person with the best 'O' Level results. I'd show them I had what it took- grey matter that was grey enough, white matter that was white enough, in fact greyer and whiter than theirs. They'd see I had more brains not only than them, but also than Ntombi!

Number one! I'd be number one in class, and then at the end of my fourth form year I would walk down the aisle in the hall, across to the steps on the left to receive my gleaming trophy.



(pp.113)

This sort of ambition has been displayed since the beginning of her story in the prequel *Nervous Conditions*. It becomes clear that she was greatly inspired by her grandmother's story of her successful son Babamukuru, after all her uncle had even excelled in a white territory, in England where he had done his degree. Like Babamukuru, she would have money and would become a provider.

Having been told that not a single girl from her dormitory had achieved an honor she was determined to attain it and she did not waver (pp65). However having exhibited so much determination and despite being the best 'O' Level student at her school, her achievement is torn down as she never gets an honor on the account of her being black .She continues to excel but her white counterparts get credit at her expense. This is also seen when Dick Lawson a senior copywriter at the Steers *et al* Advertising Agency is credited with her achievements. Tambu however does not do anything about this but rather decides to resign and decides to lie in her resignation letter that she is getting married and her husband does not want her to work (pp.242). She does not speak out even when Tracey is unfairly awarded for what Tambu has worked for in spite of the support Ntombi offers her. This leads her into submission to white authority and abandonment of her African culture. However at the end she realizes she has no place with the Europeans as she is left wanting and wondering what future there is for her in Zimbabwe (pp.246)

## 4.2 An Africana womanist is strong

In *The Book of Not* strength is another dominant feature of an Africana womanist. Tambu demonstrates inner strength and strong will in spite of the disappointments and challenges she faces stemming up from the time when Nhamo her brother was still alive in *Nervous Conditions*. She asserts that she would be able to “face the challenges at Sacred Heart courageously and so advance in due course to a useful job” (pp.103). Tambu struggles to establish herself in a school dominated by whites, life is not easy for the black students at Sacred Heart, segregated and down trodden by the white students and the nuns but she soldiers on. Having lost her trophy to Tracey she is determined to outdo them again at advanced level but however due to the conditions of her learning her science subjects at this level, she fails to make it. She narrates her ordeal at advanced level, stating that,

The girls in my class reading science subjects were driven each day in the school bus to Umtali Boys High School for their lessons. This secondary school was a government institution, built upon government land, so that my presence there was forbidden. I was instructed by Sister Emmanuel to identify one girl whose notes I was to copy after lessons... I wondered, was I a Rhodesian if I could not sit on Rhodesian seats, read formulae on a Rhodesian blackboard and press down upon Rhodesian desks. (pp.153)

This frustrates her so much but there is nothing she can do about it, so she takes the situation the way it is. Her struggle is not only meant to benefit her but her entire family as well as revealed when she says, “Had I disappointed Mai so badly? How? When all I had wanted was a good education so that I could help, just as Babamukuru did! Disappoint my mother? No! It was not

possible (pp.103). She is determined to rescue her family from poverty, but her mother does not understand matters the way she does. She feels her daughter has been taken away from her. Hudson Weems (1993:66) asserts that the Africana womanist comes from a long tradition of psychological as well as physical strength and continues to demonstrate her strength and steadfastness in protecting the vulnerabilities of her family. Tambu's initial goal conforms to Hudson's assertion. However her mother's murderous scheme against her uncle infuriates her and leaves her with no option but to do away with her.

### 4.3 An Africana womanist is concert with male in struggle and male compatible.

African women work together with their men in ensuring that African legacy lives on and in safeguarding harmony in families as well as the co-existence of men and women. Netsai, Tambu's young sister demonstrates that she is in concert with males in struggle when she plays an active role in the liberation war. She feeds the freedom fighters in their hideaway and it is at this time that she falls in love with one of the freedom fighters. At the time when she loses her leg she emerges from the jungle, 'her gun belt rolling around her hip like a string of beads, the young woman of war...' (pp.15), this brings out her zeal to liberate her fellow Africans. Not only is she in concert with males in struggle, she is also compatible with males as evidenced by her falling in love with the freedom fighter, 'Netsai was his first war love' (pp.5). The existence of this affair is further confirmed by Mai who refers to the freedom fighter as, 'our *mukwasha*' 'our son -in - law' and 'your brother- in- law' (pp15). Her partaking in the liberation war is evidence

that she is a flexible role player. However, with the adoption of western ideas, gender roles were categorized according to biological sex. As shown by Ifi Madume (1987:15) in Furusa (1996:3) "Over time, Ndebele's and Shona's flexible gender constructions, where daughters could become sons and consequently male, and where daughters and women in general could be husbands and consequently male, were placed in western rigid categories based on biological-sex"

Despite the challenges Maiguru faces with her husband, she sticks to him, even in trying times. Maiguru accompanies her husband to the *morari* although she knows what her husband is most likely to face. For the sake of Tambu, Babamukuru is beaten as he is accused of being a *mutenges*. Tambu says,

I was proof of my uncle's dubious spirit. For why would a man select a school for his child? Where the education was superior to the education given to the children of other people? A school that would not unlike any other schools in areas where guerillas battled for independence, be closed? A school peopled not by those who looked like us, but by Europeans. I was to watch the decimation of my uncle in order to instill loyalty in me (pp.7).

This further cements the co-existence of men and women, thereby suggesting that African women are in concert with their men in struggle and that they are male compatible. Babamukuru has throughout the novels *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not* demonstrated love to Tambu, to whom he has awarded the opportunity for education. He has been there as a father figure as evidenced by the way he provides for and supports her. Elechi Amadi in Hudson Weems

(1993:67) asserts that “men and women need each other emotionally and of course for survival”. This proves that both sexes are important in the development and survival of the other. As noted in the previous chapter, Babamukuru builds a better future for Tambudzai and as father feels hurt when she fails her advanced level examinations considering what he went through at the merciless hands of freedom fighters. He says,

I hope you will remember! This scar came because of you; I put it out of my mind until today. When we received your wonderful O level results, even if you did not manage to obtain the trophy, still you were doing very well, and I knew that even if I had suffered this, I was still whole. Now there is pain! I feel I am being pulled into pieces (pp.189).

It is not only women expected to love and sacrifice for men, but men also go out of their way to make women better people and ensure a better life for their female counterparts. The consumer of Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* tends to regard Tambu with approval as she always tries to make her uncle happy too. She shows full awareness and appreciation of Babamukuru's efforts of creating a better person in her.

She further proves her male compatibility when she says to Nyasha, “Don't you think about better things? 'I enquired'. There's so much we can have. Like doing well, winning things. Like growing up, really becoming a woman. Doing your own thing, finding someone to love and having a family” (pp.92). The fact that she aspires to one day find love and have a family proves that she has characteristics of an Africana womanist; she realizes the importance of having a man to love. African women celebrate families and positive male companionship. Also from what she

says it becomes clear that she is a flexible role player, looking forward to a successful life and career. She becomes economically active as witnessed by the jobs that she later on takes up.

Maiguru is also a flexible role player as she is an economically active woman, being a teacher at the Mission school. She is also involved in agriculture as evidenced by her wonderful and fruitful garden. She sells the produce to people around her as well. Her efforts complement those of her husband, who is a headmaster at the same Mission school. Mai Tambu does the same at her homestead. She- tells Tambu that she has been selling vegetables that she grows to everyone such that she manages to have money even when Babamukuru cannot provide (pp.228).

*The Book of Not* captures the colonial period in Rhodesia and the post-colonial era in Zimbabwe in the 1980s. It unmaskes the atrocities committed by whites in the name of civilization. Colonialism impacted negatively on African families and on relations between males and females. This is evidenced by the strained relations between Jeremiah's family and Babamukuru's family due to Mai Tambu's cruel plot against Babamukuru. Mai Tambu assumes that Babamukuru is a sellout thus she wants him killed. Furusa (1996:2) asserts that "the colonizing process separated Zimbabwean men and women and reinforced inequalities in the way each gender experienced the colonized environment". Men and women began to view each other as enemies, Mai Tambu felt that this Englishness was not good for her children but had no power to change the situation. On the other hand babamukuru thought what he was doing was the best for the Sigauke family.

Through her story Tambu exposes the inapplicability of western ideologies in the context of the African. Looking at the narrator Tambu, it is clear that she faces discriminatory abuse on the

basis of her skin color at the hands of the whites having been one of the few blacks at Sacred Heart.

The text opens with a with a statement suggestive of violence and brutality, it says, “Up, up, up the leg spun. A piece of person, up there in the sky” (pp.3). The opening highlights the viciousness of the colonial period. In this case it is Nestai’s leg that flies up high and dangles on a tree, blood dripping from it after an explosion. Expected to do something, Tambu feels useless. She says, “How miserable I was, for nothing lay in my power”(pp.3).This predicts her loss of power as her story unfolds. At Sacred Heart, she is exposed to extreme racism as evidenced by her failure to attend her science lessons at Umtali Boys High School on the account of being black(pp.153). At first she shows some resistance to the racist rules at school as is witnessed by the incident when she is caught in the toilets reserved for white girls. However this zeal to question things quickly fades away. She no longer questions anything; instead she resorts to making unnecessary sacrifices.

Tambu sacrifices African cultures and values overof European values. Caught in an incident where her cousin Nyasha is reading a book by one prominent African writer Ngugi wa Thiongo, she displays ignorance of him and his works. She assumes the book has something to do with agriculture since it is entitled *A Grain of Wheat*. (pp.117), at that time she is trying to memorize Shakespeare’s book. She looks down on African education as she declares that Nyasha’s books were of the inferior syllabus. During the colonial era the mindsets of people were transformed together with their attitudes towards African ideologies. European ways were viewed as superior. This is also witnessed in language usage. Furusa (1996:3) asserts that “Schools and churches and other political and economic policies and institutions sought to produce Zimbabwean people who internalized the ‘invented’ notions of their customs and traditions...”

Tambu rebukes other Africans at Sacred Heart who use the Shona language. She says that, “These seniors were planning to spend the entire evening trying futilely to turn back time by speaking Shona... I was not going to identify with a group that spoke in the only language, out of all the ones that were known at school, which was forbidden” (pp.169). This further highlights that she has lost her culture as well. Ngugi waThiongo (1986:13) says that, “Language has a dual function. It acts as a means of communication and a carrier of culture”. This renders her vulnerable as she cannot really identify with a certain people. She is in a confused state as she does not really know where she belongs. The white society is not accommodating her while she feels that being at Sacred Heart and going to the Mission has enabled her to escape the homestead. However, her mother in the prequel *Nervous Conditions* shows a strong distaste of Englishness as she feels that it will kill her like her brother Nhamo.

Tambudzai is met with misfortunes at all times when she attempts to identify herself with the Europeans for instance when she is caught in the toilet used by white girls she is humiliated. Despite her efforts for recognition she is rejected. When the Swanpoel twins lose their parents she joins in to knit some comforters and gloves for the troops thus meaning that she fights against her own people. Her dorm mates view her as a *mutengesesi*, to this she defends herself by saying, “when the Swanpoels come back, I thought if... maybe if someone said, I knitted a helmet and some gloves, it would help them...” (pp.138), however her efforts go unrecognized. At the end of it all she realizes that she is a loser as evidenced by her closing remarks where she says, “So this evening I walked emptily to the room I would soon vacate, wondering what future there was for me, a new Zimbabwean” (pp.245). This symbolizes that she is a loser even in the newly independent Zimbabwe where she is supposed to be enjoying the fruits of her hard work.



Dangarembga is portraying a Zimbabwe that is just the same as Rhodesia, she returns to nothingness that characterized her in Rhodesia. It is expected that after such hard work one would have her way but she fails. As a victim of colonialism she has nowhere to go. The colonial master's ways are deeply embedded in her mind. Her disappointing loss clearly shows Dangarembga's condemnation of the Western ideals of life.

## 4.5 Conclusion

The advent of colonialism meant the advent of a foreign culture with it. The new settlers had a culture of their own which was different in many ways from the cultures of the indigenous peoples. This meant that colonialism deliberately sought to disintegrate all cultural institutions of the African people and to replace them with the western ones. This led to the African people abandoning their cultures in favor of the colonial cultures as they were viewed superior to African cultures. Many were deceived and taken by the great sway of colonialism; however it becomes clear from Tambu's story that Western ways are not the best ways for Africans. Feminism as a western ideology proves irrelevant for the African thus she is characterized by emptiness at the end of the day.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the issues that have been explored in the research concerning Tsitsi Dangarembga's texts *She No Longer Weeps*, *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*. Furthermore it gives recommendations on possible ways that can be adopted in reading Dangarembga's texts.

## 5.2 Summary of Previous Chapters

Dangarembga's texts bear characteristics of Africana Womanism as well as those of feminism; however Africana Womanism is dominant. In *She No Longer Weeps*, Martha and her mother articulate the major concerns in the text. It is however notable that in as much as Martha is said to be a feminist, she displays Africana womanist characteristics. Bearing in mind the fact that an Africana Womanist is male compatible, she exhibits the characteristic as shown by her willingness to have a male companion. She is however disappointed and from her disappointment arises the need for self-definition. She wants to define herself in her own way; not that of the patriarchy. She does not want to be seen as a domestic woman as is the case with Victorian ideals of womanhood. She is willing to develop herself and see the society at large change for the better, thus she becomes an ambitious woman. She is also family centered as proven by her need to be a part of a family. Martha's mother is also family centered and is in concert with male in struggle. If written in a feminist tradition we would expect the characters to

show feminist traits throughout, and at the same time celebrate them. However, feminism is demonized in this text as in *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*.

In *Nervous Conditions* Nyasha is a radical feminist but her feminism betrays her as evidenced by her nervous breakdown. She totally distastes men as she views them as the main obstacle in the lives of women. She wants to feel herself and do what pleases her even when she knows it not decent. She challenges her father even physically and speaks her mind out just like her cousin Lucia. However some women in the text display Africana Womanism in the way they behave. Maiguru and Mai Tambu together with Tambu echo the sentiments in the Africana Womanist theory. The women are mothering and nurturing as shown in the way they raise their children. In the text they have displayed genuine sisterhood and ambition. Women like Maiguru and Tambu have shown that they are flexible role players as they have revealed that they are capable of sustaining families even in the absence of men.

In *The Book of Not* Tambu's story continues highlighting the change that she goes through in her life. Her perception of things changes with the exposure to the white community. At some point she believes she will be successful and her benefits will become personal benefits, she tries to fit into the white community but she is met with disappointments at all times. It however becomes clear that she cannot live a lonely life as she has; rejecting the homestead and her family. When faced with the challenge of having to take care of Netsai and accommodating her mother she begins to make plans of how she will make it happen. She finds herself with nothing at the end and thinks of Babamukuru's family and hers but says she can no longer go back.

Dangarembga's texts analyzed in this research interrogate colonialism and the stereotypes that come with it as they impacted negatively on both women and men. In *She No Longer*

*Weeps* Dangarembga reverses the status of women as being minors as seen in Martha suggesting that colonialism reduced men as well to minors. This is also seen in *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*. When Maiguru goes to England it is generally believed that she has gone to take care of her husband. In *The Book of Not* Babamukuru is shot and remains bound to the wheelchair. This suggests that he can hardly take care of himself. This is also symbolic of the efforts by Zimbabweans to bring an end to oppression of women; however they only manage to cripple the oppression. Dangarembga counters oppression by making her women economically active and gives them voices. Englishness also impacts negatively on Babamukuru the way it does to his daughters. His nerves have become bad. Nyasha has a nervous breakdown while Tambu leads an empty life. Their different conditions expose the problems of internalizing western ideologies. People forgot their culture and language as well due to the adoption of western ideologies.

It can be thus argued that Dangarembga is a womanist writer as has been shown above. This is also evidenced through the way she demonizes western ideologies. In all her texts, women considered as radical emerge as losers at the end of it all. It can be thus said that in her texts she seeks to display that Feminism is not suitable for the woman of African descent and somehow calls for different solutions to African women's problems.

## 5.3 Recommendations

- It is recommended that consumers of Dangarembga's works employ different literary theories in reading her texts. Reading her texts from one point of view limits the reader's scope together with their analytical capabilities.
- In reading Dangarembga's texts, women should not view men as the sole enemy, but should realize the different forces contributing to their oppression, those that include colonialism and religion.
- Certain strategies should be employed in liberating women, instead of being radical; they should involve men in their fight against oppression.

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