

**KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY,
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COLLEGE OF ART AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

KNUST

**CHAMPIONING THE CAUSE OF AFRICAN WOMEN: AN
ANALYSIS OF BUCHI EMECHETA'S *THE JOYS OF
MOTHERHOOD*, TSITSI DANGAREMBGA'S *NERVOUS
CONDITIONS* AND AMA ATA AIDOO'S *CHANGES*.**

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BY

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DECLARATION

I, Stella Boatemaa Aninakwa of the Department of English, College of Art and Social Sciences, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, do hereby declare that this submission is my own work toward the MPhil degree in English, and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published by any other person nor material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree by the university, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to God Almighty, who was, who is and forever shall be my guide. Also to my loving parents, Grace Sarpong and Kwasi Agyei Aninakwa for their love, prayers and support in bringing me to this level and throughout the writing of this thesis. And to my husband, Samuel Tenkorang Bekoe, who supported and encouraged me to the completion of this thesis.



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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is about female emancipation as seen in three novels by African women—*The Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and *Changes* by Ama Ata Aidoo.

In the first part of the project, motherhood is shown as the main thing that would make women happy and free. But getting to the end of Emecheta's novel, a mother dies a miserable death, giving us the impression that motherhood may not be the major thing which emancipates women.

In the second part of the project, education is shown as the main force of emancipation for women. This theme is reinforced in the third part. And there is this new addition that women should have the power of free choice.

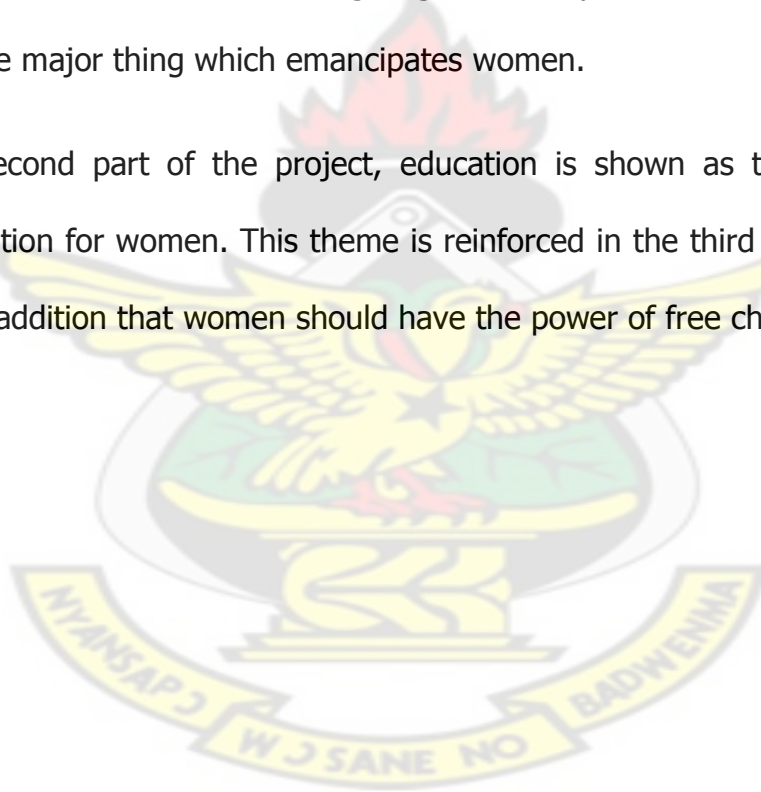


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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY: MISCONCEPTIONS OF THE FEMALE GENDER

Cultures all over the world perceive the female gender as inferior to the male. In fact, many religions blame women for all the misfortunes of the world. This is so pronounced that sometimes, it is almost as if some cultures mean to say that the world would have been a better place if it was rid of women. The biological make-up of a woman has over the years given rise to certain stereotypical notions of the nature of the female gender all over the world. For a very long time, women have been labelled mothers, child bearers, wives and home keepers, with the kitchen as their office and everything weak has been ascribed to the female. This is what Sheila Ruth talks about in *Issues in Feminism* when she writes:

No "real man" may tolerate (within himself at least) the tender qualities. He must deny himself any tendency toward them, any personal experience of them. Instead, these traits must be projected outward. The compliment of his masculine character is settled on his sexual complement, woman: 'I am man; she is woman. I am strong; she is weak. I am tough; she is tender. I am self-sufficient; she is needful'¹

Women, therefore, serve in patriarchy as the negative image of men. They are regarded as the receptacle of all the traits man cannot accept in himself. It is further stated in the same text, "The image, woman, contains that element of

humanity ripped from man—an element she keeps for him, still in the world, available when and where needed, but sufficiently distant to avoid interfering with business.”²

According to misogynist ideology, women are inferior to men in two ways: first, they are morally inferior, evil, bad, sinful, dangerous, harmful and dirty and second, women are inferior in ability—physically, intellectually, and spiritually.³ The following are some of the things that have been said to reiterate the evil in women. St. John Chrysostom says “The beauty of woman is the greatest snare”⁴ ; Sigmund Freud says “I cannot escape the notion ...that for women the level of what is ethically normal is different from what it is in man”⁵: A Mesopotamian poem says, ‘Woman is a pitfall—a pitfall, a hole, a ditch. Woman is a sharp dagger that cuts a man’s throat.’⁶ Tertullian says to women:

You are the devil’s gateway...the first deserter of the divine law; you are the she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God’s image, man. On account of your desert—that is, death—even the son of God had to die.⁷

This stance becomes clearer in the light of the fact that most religions are patriarchal too. Women therefore, are often not regarded as equal to their male counterpart. In Christianity for instance, women are excluded from genealogy accounts. For instance, in Matthew Chapter One from the first and second verse, we read:

¹ The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:

² Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. ³ Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram. ⁴ Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon. ⁵ Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, ⁶ and Jesse begot David the king.⁸

The few female names mentioned, Tamar, Rahab and Ruth, are the women with whom the men had their sons. We know that Adam had sons but we are not told of any daughter or daughters he had. Yet, the earth was populated. How could this have been possible if Adam had had no female child? Yet it is not deemed necessary for any accounts of them to be made in the documentation of the Bible. It is almost as if they played no role populating the earth.

In Chapter 14 of Matthew in the Holy Bible is an account of Jesus serving five loaves of bread and two little fishes to the multitude. In verse 21 of that chapter, it is written: 'And they that had eaten were about five thousand men besides women and children.'⁹ Could it be that women and children were too numerous to be counted? Whatever may have been the case, the fact that women were not considered worth counting goes a long way to portray the patriarchal culture of the people at the time.

In the Islamic religion, when Muslims go to the mosque, women are positioned behind the men who sit in front. Though this sitting arrangement may be for some 'good' reasons, it is no doubt a way of sidelining women. There is an

Islamic saying, "I have not left any calamity more detrimental to mankind than woman." ¹⁰

In the traditional African setting also, women are "put in their place". The traditions of our societies did not help in the building up of a woman's self-esteem. She has been made to accept that her duty is to serve her husband and children as a wife, mother and home keeper among other menial roles. She is to help her husband on the farm and with this, there are specified types of crops she is allowed to cultivate or is supposedly known to have the "ability" to cultivate.

Because of how women are brought up, they also make sure to train their daughters in the stereotypical roles their cultures impose on them. Daughters end up like their mothers—confined to the home because of these roles. This tradition then becomes a vicious circle. This accounts for the oppression of women from time immemorial, with women playing an active role in their own subjugation.

Boys have been given privileges to the disadvantage of girls, and have almost always been treated as superior. While the girl does most of the household chores, the boy has to study his books. At times, the boy's place is to sit behind his books while the kitchen is the place for the girl.

It is for this reason that some years ago in Ghana when girl-child education was being encouraged, a song was composed and aired on Ghana Television (GTV),

'Send your Girl-Child to School.' The video clip of this song shows a boy sitting behind his books and studying while the girl, his sister is in the kitchen. Fascinated by his studious brother and his books, she approaches him while he is learning and sits beside him. Just then, their parents come in to drive the girl away asking her to go to the kitchen. In tears she goes back to continue her chores after resting against a wall in a pensive mood. One sees in this video, a girl, who yearns for education but does not get it since her parents do not think she needs any formal education as a girl.

In an interview with Adeola James, Flora Nwapa says that the oppression of women starts from the home. When she makes her son go to the kitchen to cook and wash plates, her mother-in-law comes in and says, "Why are you allowing the boy to do this? He is a man, he is not supposed to be in the kitchen."¹¹

In another encounter, when her five-year-old son is told not to be in the kitchen, he replies, "Grandmother, but Amos is our cook, and Amos is a man."¹² According to Flora, if we can "educate a boy at an early age, he will grow up to appreciate women, and to appreciate his wife."¹³

It is there that we can be making a major headway in eradicating the plight of the female gender. Nwapa says also in this interview: "A woman who says she is oppressed and then has a son and treats him like a king, such a woman is only perpetrating the problems we are complaining about."¹⁴ Though most women have come to recognise that they have the power to make their own choices and

have come to a point where they believe their happiness is in their own hands, not tied to any other person, the problem still remains that women are seen as evil and at the same time the bearers of all the negative stereotypes heaped on them by traditional societies. One does not say that all women are still in that unfortunate state; as we see how some women are standing shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts in the sciences, technology, politics and all other fields that used to be the preserve of men.

However, the problem is that there are still a lot more women who are still entrapped by the expectations of their stiff patriarchal cultures and this entrapment does little at ensuring their freedom not to mention seeing them as capable individuals. Certain cultures still marry young girls off to older men; some women still suffer the effects of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), and there are women suffering domestic violence. How can this situation be changed? How can the institution of patriarchy and negative cultural practices be overthrown and be done away with for good? These and more are some of the negative and degrading cultural and religious practices that Emecheta, Aidoo and Dangarembga attempt to address in their novels to demonstrate that they are out to champion the cause of women.

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the years, female writers have, through their works, which deal with very pertinent issues affecting their gender, contributed profoundly to the

development of society. In defence of their works, a female writer such as Ama Ata Aidoo has boldly declared that,

When people ask me rather bluntly every now and then whether I am a feminist, I not only answer yes, but I go on to insist that every woman, and every man should be a feminist – especially if they believe that Africans should take charge of our land, its wealth, our lives and the burden of our own development. Because it is not possible to advocate independence for our continent without also believing that African women must have the best that the environment can offer: For some of us this is the crucial element of our feminism.¹⁵

In the extract above, Aidoo makes it clear that she is a feminist and goes on to explain what embodies the crucial element of her feminism—African women must have the best that the environment can offer. No wonder she concerns herself with the emancipation of women in most of her works, including *Changes*, the one this thesis discusses. As a feminist her works have provoked varied responses from various critics. A few examples are cited below on her novel, *Changes*.

In *Essays in Honour of Ama Ata Aidoo at 70: A Reader in African Cultural Studies*, Nana Wilson-Tague writes on an article titled, "Psychoanalysis, Gender and Narratives of Women's Friendships in Ama Ata Aidoo's Writing." Wilson-Tague illustrates, in this essay, the cognitive social and psychic ramifications of women's friendships in Aidoo's writing. The writer says, "By exploring how memories, perceptions and sensations of the unconscious impinge on our

conscious thoughts and actions, psychoanalysis can reveal how ideologies and norms of gender are internalised and lived by men and women.” (123)

Women’s friendships become a means of mutual recognition and interpretation, as each friend acquires self-knowledge through the mirror provided by the other’s eyes, according to Wilson-Tagoe.

Commenting on Aidoo’s *Changes*, Wilson-Tagoe says “the novel examines how social and cultural changes are managed and [their] narratives evoke both the present and the immediate past simultaneously, so that the processes of change unravel before us.”(133)

Wilson-Tagoe adds, “*Changes* focuses primarily on three contrasting marriages that are linked to each other and to other marriages in the past,” and that,

All three marriages intersect with each other for a particular dialectical effect that holds possibilities for rethinking the meaning of modernisation from the perspectives of women’s lives within cultures. For, while they range across different time periods (traditional, colonial, modern) and geographical spaces in West Africa, the fundamental issues of gender and power, of female desire and aspiration and their constant collision with male power and prerogative, link the narratives to suggest how little things have changed in the area of gender relations. (133)

For Wilson-Tagoe, Aidoo allows the two friends to know themselves from the mirror held by the other, while managing to make this relationship the most constant ‘intimate’ relationship in the novel.

Wilson-Tagoe ends by saying that, "A framework of psychoanalysis, applied in the general sense, provides a strategy for reading how unconscious stirrings speak through the ambiguities, gaps, and silences of conscious speech." (137)

By reading with such a strategy as she does of Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* and *Changes*, the framework opens up "those subtle and multiple complexities of women's subjectivity that would be observed if we read Aidoo's texts solely in terms of a natural allegory in which the libidinal is subsumed in the political and the allegorical." (137)

Another contributor, Ketu H. Katrak, also featured in *Essays in Honour of Ama Ata Aidoo at 70*, writes on "Teaching Aidoo: Theorising via Creative Writing," where he asserts that "Ama Ata Aidoo's multi-genre creative writing in English – drama, novel, poetry, satirical narrative and essays – is rooted in her Akan storytelling traditions as well as her strong feminist commitment to work towards a just and equitable society for women and men in postcolonial Ghana as well as other parts of the African continent and the black Diaspora." (138)

Katrak goes on to say that literary theorising helps to derive theoretical insights in Aidoo's works, and says about *Changes* that the strategy unravels the notions of love and marriage, the search for self-fulfilment by the highly educated female protagonist, and her rocky path to autonomy and liberation in the novel.

He explains that "Esi's financial independence (enabled by her MA in Statistics) gives her the confidence to divorce Oko, who has committed 'marital rape' on Esi's body," and adds that though her decision is not supported by her mother and grandmother she is not ostracised. After all, Esi is only a modern woman still in search of a space where she can be fully fulfilled as a woman who loves her career and who also desires fulfilment in her personal life." (140)

He ends by saying "Aidoo's voice is unique and profoundly significant for twenty-first century students, scholars, and policy makers as they can all learn from her incisive questions and complex representations of the many dilemmas facing contemporary and postcolonial societies in our present time." (146)

Writing on "Nervous Masculinities: Male Characters in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes*," published in *Essays in Honour of Ama Ata Aidoo at 70: A Reader in African Cultural Studies*, Mary Jane Androne, another contributor to the collection, argues that "Aidoo's novel depicts the profound masculine anxieties that surface even while male characters seem to be benefitting from 'the patchwork of patriarchies' that circumscribe love and marriage in contemporary Ghana." (149)

Androne says Aidoo highlights in Ali Kondey, Oko Sekyi and Kubi Darkwa, the growing pains that accompany gender-role changes and reconfigured marriage and familial structures.

To her, each of them embodies the particular anxieties that urban life imposes on a professional man with one foot in traditional culture and another in an emerging society where women wield greater economic and social power.

Androne argues:

"Ali ultimately exemplifies Homi Bhabha's 'mimic man,' since he more closely resembles a European capitalist and really internalises colonial values even while he tries to retain some aspects of traditional African patriarchal culture. While not as rich as Ali Kondey, Kubi Dakwa and Oko Sekyi use their bureaucratic power to announce their importance." (159)

Aidoo, at every point in time, reveals their "nervous conditions" or their confused sense of their roles as husbands, fathers and lovers, according to Androne. She concludes that, "In the end, Fusena's radiating anger keeps Ali coming home, Esi starves off Kubi's attempted seduction and Opokuya gains a new sense of autonomy with Esi's refurbished car." (160).

The Zimbabwean writer, Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel, *Nervous Conditions*, has also received the attention of critics.

For instance, in *New Trends and Generations in African Literature*, Rosemary Moyana writes on the essay, "Men and Women: Gender Issues in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and *She No Longer Weeps*."

In her analysis of the characters of both works, Moyana seeks to demonstrate the nature of the women's struggle which brings about the revolutionary change in them to find out if all the female characters get caught in a guilt trap in their

attempt to be freed from the stifling social conditions. In both works, Dangarembga has portrayed men who are antagonist towards women and vice versa, according to Moyana.

She says the women in the novel, particularly Tambudzai, Nyasha and Lucia rebel against their expected roles, as Tambudzai is advised to accept her lot as a woman and be the one to sacrifice and stay home while her brother goes to school, since there is enough money to pay for the education of only one person in the family. Being too mature for her age, Moyana says, Nyasha suffers for her mature ideas as her father considers them unnatural, while Lucia's refusal to get married symbolises her decision not to fall into the traditional stereotypical roles.

Moyana concludes that Dangarembga's works present female characters uniquely from earlier ones as "Few [works] portray men and women in such glaring antagonism with women ending with the upper hand." (34)

Writing on the article, "Psychological afflictions as expressed in Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*," Nettie Cloete refutes the generalisation about the lack of psychological sensitivity often attributed to Africans. This, Cloete does, by examining female suffering manifesting itself in nervous afflictions as a result of colonialism and patriarchy.

Dangarembga employs the extended metaphors of escape and entrapment through which to construct her discourse of the degrees of psychological afflictions her characters are suffering, according to Cloete. Tambu, Cloete says:

Struggles to shake off restrictions placed on her development by elements from both white and black cultures and must identify and evaluate elements characteristic of her life as a member of a largely patriarchal society... She thus has to find a middle-way between the kind of blind adherence to traditional - and often insensitive - male authority, shown by her mother, and the blatantly rebellious rejection of patriarchy, shown by Nyasha. The harmful physical and psychological effects on her of the struggle to synthesize the demands of the opposing systems, reach a climax on the day of her parents' westernized wedding orchestrated by Babamakuru. (41)

In the end, however, Cloete says Tambudzai succeeds in attaining a deeper insight into the nature of resistance because she soon acquires the wisdom to be diplomatic when dealing with problematic issues stemming from patriarchal and colonial structures of authority. Thus, Dangarembga, succeeds in demystifying the patriarchal social structure as well as colonial cultural domination.

Gilian Gorle in his article titled, "Fighting the Good Fight: What Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* Says About Language and Power," states that because many postcolonial texts are set in traditionally patriarchal societies, where boys are thought more worthy than girls when it comes to formal education, any discussion of language and power must include gender politics alongside questions of linguistic and cultural hegemony." (2)

Gorle discusses the unsentimental look Dangarembga takes at the dilemmas of deracination which formal schooling in English can bring to Shona families steeped in a long-standing patriarchal and agricultural tradition in *Nervous Conditions* and ends by saying that, "While the dangers of cultural alienation through language are equally great for both sexes, the process of deracination may contain the seeds of freedom for some women who aspire to broader horizons than their society's traditional gender roles allow." (15)

Buchi Emecheta is another female author whose works have been severally analysed by students of literature and other literary critics. For the purpose of this thesis a few articles on *The Joys of Motherhood* shall be considered. "Culture And Discrimination against Women in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*," is the topic of Adeola Oluwatoyin Ireoluwa's essay. In this essay, Ireoluwa discusses cultural practices that discriminate against women in the abovementioned works. Ireoluwa notes that "female children traditionally are not recognized; they are seen as assets through which they can send the male children to school, while females are not always sent to school." (23) In addition, Ireoluwa says:

Women are also seen as what can be traded for money with the bride issue in Africa. The way many parents present bride price is like they are selling off the child. For instance many people are afraid of getting married from the eastern part of Nigeria, not because there are no good girls, but because of the huge amount of money demanded as bride price by parents. Emecheta (1976)

says: "the longer she stays in school, the higher the bride price that is expected on her. (24)

The Ibuza culture that places preference on male children and considers women who are unable to bear male children for their husbands as failed women, as Emecheta describes in *The Joys of Motherhood*, makes women desperate to have male children in order to be respected in their marital homes, according to Ireoluwa, and eventually leads to men's disrespect towards their wives.

Ireoluwa, further in his discussion, cites instances of the effects of polygamy, wife battering, dereliction of duty among other negative practices that affect women and recommends an end to these cultural practices that negatively affect women.

Marie A. Umeh in an article titled, "The Joys of Motherhood: Myth or Reality?" says that though the most celebrated female character in African creative writing is the African mother and Anglophone African writers from the sub-Saharan area esteem her as the epitome of love, strength and affection, one witnesses the collapse of these glorifying images of the African Mother in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. In explaining further, Umeh states:

As a literary artist preoccupied with promoting change, author Emecheta, an iconoclast, breaks away from the prevalent portraiture in African writing in which motherhood is honorific. Children do not always maintain strong and loving ties with their mothers throughout adulthood. As Emecheta states in her novel, "The joy of being a mother is the joy of giving all to your children."

The title of the book, she says, which is taken from Flora Nwapa's novel, *Efuru*, is then significant and bitterly ironic.

Dazzled by ambitious sons educated outside of traditional Igbo values, Nnu Ego breaks down and her old secure world gives way to a new one. Fully conscious of the irony in her life, she says, "a woman with many children could face a lonely old age and maybe a miserable death all alone, just like a barren woman" (p.224).

Emecheta, here, constructs a wholly different set of economic, socio-political and cultural imperatives which diverge from the existing literary models, and that *The Joys of Motherhood* stands as a model for other African women writers who wish to portray the actual condition of women and their responses to their condition and the actual possibilities of overcoming barriers and achieving individuality, according to Umeh.

Another essay titled, "Thematic Exploration of Buchi Emecheta *The Joys Of Motherhood* and *Second Class Citizen*" by Nwachukwu Esther Chikodili exposes the numerous forces militating against the rights of African women specifically in traditional set up, cultural beliefs and customs which are destructive enough to keep women perpetually at the background.

Esther discusses themes such as oppression and rigours of motherhood, polygamy, superstition, exploitation and hardship to "raise the status of the African woman from just being child bearers to becoming independent happy women." (29)

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Underpinning this dissertation is the theory of feminism. Feminism as a concept is mainly focused on women and issues that confront them. Virginia Woolf, one of the proponents of feminism and therefore women's emancipation, says in her *A Room of One's Own*, "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction..." (4).

She comments on a dead Bishop's declaration, "It was impossible for any woman past, present, or to come, to have the genius of Shakespeare." (39) She agrees with the Bishop since it would have been impossible for any woman to write as Shakespeare did. She imagines what would have happened if Shakespeare had had a "wonderfully gifted sister," called Judith. While Shakespeare gets educated to reach his full potential, his extraordinarily gifted sister is not sent to school. She has no chance of learning grammar and logic, let alone of reading Horace and Virgil. She picks up a book now and then, one of her brother's perhaps, and reads a few pages, but her parents came in and tell her to mend the stockings or mind the stew and not moon about with books and papers. Later a man takes pity on her and offers her a job, but she finds herself with child by that gentleman. Unable to bear the frustrations she commits suicide.

What Woolf imagines here as what would have happened to Shakespeare's sister, if he had one, does not only pertain to their times but is a phenomenon

that is taking place in most African countries where girl-child education does not receive any serious attention.

If the African woman is educated and has a career in addition to being a mother, she would not end up like Shakespeare's hypothetical sister. Rather, she would have fulfilment in life. The only way, therefore, to ensure the emancipation of the African woman, is to give her the opportunity to get educated. This is the whole point of this thesis.

1.4 JUSTIFICATION

Critics have said a lot about the individual authors selected for this thesis. However, these three have been carefully selected for important reasons.

The issue or the problem that has provoked the writing of this thesis spans a long period of time as the times of publication of the novels show. *The Joys of Motherhood* was published in 1979. Nine years later, *Nervous Conditions* (1988) was published and *Changes* came out in 1991, that is, three years later. An analysis of these three novels will reveal the changing phases of women's emancipation.

In addition, though all three are African authors, each of them is from a different geographical location. Emecheta is from Nigeria, Dangarembga is from Zimbabwe while Aidoo is Ghanaian. Selecting these female authors from these

different countries proves that the subjugation of women covers a large geographical area – Africa.

The reason behind the choice for these female-authored novels is for the fact that women are able to tell the story about their kind better.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study of three African female authored novels—*The Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta, *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga and *Changes* by Ama Ata Aidoo. Complementing these primary sources in the discussion are other materials such as novels, journals and articles. The analysis is based on feminist theory as espoused by Virginia Woolf in her *A Room of One's Own*.

1.6 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The three primary novels for this dissertation are Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Ama Atta Aidoo's *Changes*. Any other works of theirs or other writers which shall be mentioned in the course of the discussion shall all be supplementary.

For efficiency and clarity, this thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter One covers a general introduction to the study, a review of relevant literature, the theoretical framework, justification, methodology and structure of the study. Chapter Two is on the Nigerian, Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. The

Zimbabwean, Tistsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* is discussed in Chapter Three. The Ghanaian female writer, Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* shall be discussed in Chapter Four.

The conclusion ascertains whether these three women do succeed in championing the cause of the African woman. Lastly, some recommendations are made in ensuring the way forward for the African woman.



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15. Aidoo, Ama Ata. "The African Woman Today," *Dissent* 39 (1992), 319-325)



CHAPTER TWO

MOTHERHOOD AND FULFILMENT IN BUCHI EMECHETA'S *THE JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD*

In this chapter we discuss motherhood and fulfilment in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. Buchi Emecheta, the author of this novel, is also known as Florence Onye. Buchi Emecheta was born on 21st July 1944, in Lagos to Igbo parents, Alice (Okwuekwu) Emecheta and Jeremy Nwabudinke. Due to the gender bias of the time, young Buchi Emecheta was initially kept at home while her younger brother was sent to school; but after persuading her parents to consider the benefits of her education, she spent her early childhood at an all-girl's missionary school. A year later, Emecheta received a full scholarship to the Methodist Girls School, where she remained until the age of sixteen when she married Sylvester Onwordi, a student to whom she had been engaged since she was eleven years old.

Onwordi moved to London to attend university and Emecheta joined him in 1962. She gave birth to five children in six years. It was an unhappy and sometimes violent marriage (as chronicled in her autobiographical writings such as *Second-Class Citizen*). To keep her sanity, Emecheta wrote in her spare time; however, her husband was deeply suspicious of her writing, and he ultimately burned her first manuscript. At the age of twenty-two, Emecheta left her

husband. While working to support her five children alone, she earned a BSc degree in Sociology from the University of London.

She began writing about her experiences of Black British life in a regular column in the *New Statesman*, and a collection of these pieces became her first published book in 1972, *In the Ditch*. The semi-autobiographical book chronicled the struggles of a main character named Adah, who is forced to live in a housing estate while working as a librarian to support her five children. Her second novel published two years later, *Second-Class Citizen*, also drew on Emecheta's own experiences, and both books were eventually published in one volume as *Adah's Story*.

She is a Nigerian novelist who until recently was little known by Nigerian readers but had become Black Africa's most prolific female writer of the second half of the twentieth century. Her works include books for children, plays for the radio and television, some poetry and nine major novels, *In the Ditch* (1972), *Second Class Citizen* (1974), *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977), *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *Destination Biafra* (1981), *Naira Power* (1981), *Double Yoke* (1981) and *The Rape of Shavi* (1983). Her autobiography, *Head Above Water*, was published in 1986.

She has received a number of literary awards including the Jock Campbell Award in 1978. Emecheta has become a powerful and influential feminine voice not only

on the African scene. Her thematic concern centres on the African woman, the educated working-class African and the subjugation of women by cruel social forces. Many of the reflections in her novels are on her own life and the lives of people close to her. Through the events in her own life, Emecheta enunciates the oppression, predicament and the precariousness of the Nigerian and African women at large.

Is being a mother all that women are good for? Is a woman defined by her ability to have children? In that case, what about those who are unable to have children? Don't they qualify as women? These are a few of the questions that come to mind as one reads *The Joys of Motherhood*.

Emecheta, in this novel, presents the predicament of the African woman in a culture caught up in a clash between traditional society and Western influence. There are several women characters in this novel. However, for the purposes of this discussion, two of them will be closely analysed, though others may be mentioned in the course of the discussion. These two women are Nnu Ego and Adaku, senior wife and junior wife respectively of Nnaife.

Nnu Ego is the protagonist of the novel. She is known for her youthful beauty with her slim stature and long neck. Nnu is often compared to her mother, the exuberant Ona. Although she has her mother's strength and singleness of purpose, she is more polite and yielding and less insistent and candid than Ona. Her first marriage collapses when she does not get pregnant. Nnu travels to Lagos to

marry Nnaife, who pays her bride price. The marriage 'contract' is signed in his absence. It is interesting how some African cultures allow people who have never set eyes on each other to marry.

As it turns out, Nnu Ego is disappointed when she arrives in her marital home to discover her husband is not what she had imagined him to be:

...in walked a man with a belly like a pregnant cow, wobbling first to this side and then to that. The belly coupled with the fact that he was short, made him look like a barrel. His hair, unlike that of a man at home in Ibuza, was not closely shaved; he left a lot of it on his head, like that of a woman mourning for her husband. His skin was pale, the skin of someone who had for a long time worked in the shade and not in the open air. His cheeks were puffy and looked as if he had pieces of hot yam inside them, and they seem to have pushed his mouth into a smaller size above his weak jaws. And his clothes—Nnu Ego had never seen a man dressed like that: khaki shorts with holes and an old, loose white singlet. If her husband to be was like this, she thought, she will go back to her father. Why, marrying such a jelly of a man would be like living with a middle-aged woman. (p.42)

In the above extract, the narrator takes readers into the mind of Nnu and vividly describes to us her first impressions of Nnaife. We therefore see what she sees. Added to this vivid description is the narrator's intent to ridicule the abhorrent custom where marriages are arranged in the absence of one party—particularly the man. Nnu Ego does not find him attractive and objects to the whole arrangement which makes her pour out such detailed description of the man, so much so that readers would sympathise with her for finding herself in such a predicament.

Nnaife's ability to give her all she ever wanted—a child—made her develop some liking for him; a proof that motherhood was perceived as a great achievement and the ultimate source of happiness. However, their first child, Ngozi, dies after a couple of months.

A distressed Nnu Ego is captured at the beginning of the novel, running to the Carter Bridge to commit suicide because of the death of her son, Ngozi. The death of the child becomes, by extension, the death of Nnu Ego. She sees no reason to live if she cannot succeed in the single role of bearing and raising children. What is the point in living if she cannot prove her womanhood by bearing a male child? The fact that she attempts suicide goes to prove the extent to which her society disregards women who do not have, or cannot have children. When some people try to stop her from drowning herself, she protests: "But I am not a woman anymore! I am not a mother any more. The child is there, dead on the mat. My *chi* has taken him away from me. I only want to go in there and meet her..." (p.62)

Her marriage to Nnaife, however, seems to bring her good fortune as she soon gets pregnant again after Ngozi's death. When she later gives birth to Oshiaju, a boy, she decides to focus exclusively on raising him. The thought of making extra income at her market stall or even making friends does not appeal to her. She is content dedicating her life to caring for her son, her pride. Slowly, she

comes to new realizations about what is truly important to her, and these epiphanies force her to re-examine her role and function as a woman.

When Nnu sets up her own business to help her family survive, she is seen as merely an economic unit. Her husband does not seem to appreciate the effort she makes at providing for them. She is only viewed as a machine for producing male heirs, so much so that when she has a stillborn,—a girl—she feels relieved since it is not a boy. She seems to be accustomed to the tradition that male children are more valuable than females. This is because she nurtures the hope of her sons growing up to take care of her in her old age.

However, her children seem too preoccupied with their personal goals rather than caring for the family. They pursue their own courses and seek to place their own self-fulfilment and individual destinies before their family responsibilities. Nnu Ego's hope becomes disillusionment as she dies, alone, at the side of the road, an ambivalent figure with little to show for her years of selflessness and sacrifice.

This is a woman who forfeits everything and makes the wellbeing of her children, especially her male children, her paramount concern. After the birth of her son, Oshia, she secures a loan of five shillings from the Ibuza women's society and begins a trade to support herself and the boy. This is when Nnaife leaves for Fernando Po. Fending for herself and her baby then becomes problematic. As if

this is not enough, they are ejected from their residence. At this point, Nnu Ego manages to secure a single bedroom for herself and Oshia.

A remarkable thing which makes Nnu a good mother and which cannot be left unmentioned is what she does when Oshia falls sick from malnutrition. When this happens, out of her motherly instincts and to be able to care for her sick son, Nnu Ego "...sold all her clothes at a fraction of their costs to Fulani street-walkers, telling herself that if her sons should live and grow, they would buy all the clothes she would ever need" (p.104). Her anguish is captured in the following words:

"Oshia, do you want to die and leave me?" she called softly to him. The poor boy would shake his head. "Then stop this sickness. I have nothing else to give you. Please stay and be my joy, be my father, and my brother and my husband—no, I have a husband though I don't know whether he is alive or dead. Please don't die and go away too." (p.104)

What more proves a woman's love and commitment to her children than what Nnu does? Interestingly, captured in these same words is the sense of the importance that is accorded male children or sons in the Ibo society. He should not die so he remains her "joy," "father," "brother" and "husband." Obviously, males, even in childhood, are perceived as having the qualities of a man. No wonder Nnu accords her male children much more importance than her female

ones. That notwithstanding, let us not lose sight of the fact that, that is the society she had been brought up in and had therefore grown to appreciate.

However, as time goes on, she examines her duties as a woman and realises she is only a 'machine' for producing male heirs. Nnaife does not appreciate female children since his status in society is determined by his ability to have male heirs; the more he has, the more powerful he is regarded. How then would he be concerned about his daughters?

Nnu Ego's decision to sacrifice all she had and find what she does not have to put her sons through school is a sign of the importance she accords her sons. For instance, when Oshia gains admission to college in Warri, it is Nnu who pays his fees and takes him to the school herself. We are told:

Her heart sank when they arrived. Here were the sons of very rich men, one could see from the cars that brought them. She called Oshia gently and said: "You must not go the way of these rich boys. They have so much money in their families. Son, I wish you did not have to come to this school. I wish you had chosen one of those in Lagos where things are cheaper and you meet ordinary people."(p.190)

From this extract we see her motherly instincts revealed. She fears her son may be influenced by the rich and affluent students. Nnu does not only do well to send Oshia to an expensive school, but she gives him valuable pieces of advice like any good mother would do. Moreover, she promises Adim: "... if you pass into one of the local schools, I will try and meet your fees somehow, if not, you will have to stay till you get to standard six and then go and learn a trade"

(p.190). True to her promise, when Adim gains admission to St .Gregory she pays his fees. After ensuring that the boys' education is catered for, she establishes her daughters in trades with the intention that that will put them in a better position to support themselves and their families in future.

In her poverty, she does all these remarkable things, but what does she get in return? What is her joy of being a mother? She dies miserably alone with no child of hers by her side. She does not reap what she sows especially in her son, Oshia. One would have thought that knowing what his mother goes through and the extent his mother goes to ensure his future is well grounded, Oshia would have reciprocated. That, unfortunately, does not happen.

From the discussion so far, we realise that Nnu Ego gains nothing from her sacrifices as a mother. She does not enjoy the fruits of her labour. Her special sons do not take care of her—too busy pursuing their own dreams and aspirations in life. And so, what is the essence of giving their mother an expensive funeral when she was not cared for while alive?

Having discussed Nnu Ego and established that she is indeed a good woman to whom motherhood and specifically, being a mother to sons is the ultimate source of her joy, we shall now attempt to discuss Adaku.

Adaku is the wife of Nnaife's brother whom Nnaife inherits when his brother dies. She willingly comes to Lagos to be Nnaife's wife. The name 'Adaku' means

"daughter of wealth." Adaku joins the family in Lagos and soon starts a thriving and lucrative business selling in the marketplace. In fact, to Nnu Ego, "Adaku turned out to be one of those shameless modern women whom [she] did not like" (p.124).

The meaning of Adaku's name is appropriate for her and serves as a symbol of her being, her aims and aspirations. This symbol goes to prove her confidence and assertive nature. She seems enlightened to know when she has been unfairly treated and takes whatever action she deems fit. For instance, when Nnu mistreats one of her relatives, she takes it to the men in the family, who arbitrate in the dispute. The men favour Nnu for the reason that she is the senior wife, even though she is in the wrong. As a woman who knows what is good for her and when she has had enough, Adaku leaves Nnaife's home. She is smart enough to know that this incident teaches her that she has no power or position in the family, and that she will always be a second-class citizen as the junior wife. She decides to leave to become a prostitute.

Nnu sees Adaku as a woman who is independent in her way of thinking. This she does not seem to like very much. When Nnu brings forth twin girls and Adaku, by way of congratulating her says, "Your first set of twin girls, senior wife," (p.128) Nnu says, "Hm, I know, but I doubt if our husband will like them very much. One can hardly afford to have one girl in a town like this, to say nothing of two." (pp. 126-127) To this, Adaku replies: "Oh, senior wife, I think you are

sometimes more traditional than people at home in Ibuza. You worry too much to please our husband.” (p.127). To this, Nnu laughs and says: “I think it’s due to my father’s influence. I can see him in my mind’s eye weighing it up and down, then chuckling over it, and asking his friend Idayi whether it’s right for my *chi* to send me two girls instead of just one.” (p.127) Having said this Adaku tries to impress upon Nnu that though they are girls they have a role to play. This intent is captured in these words: “It’s a man’s world this. Still, senior wife, these girls when they grow up will be great helpers to you in looking after the boys. Their bride prices will be used in paying their school fees as well.” (p.127) When Adaku says this we are told Nnu Ego looks at her with speculative eyes and thinks:

“this woman knows a thing or two,” she thought. So independent in her thinking. Was it because Adaku came from a low family where people were not tied to pleasing the rest of their members, as she Nnu Ego had to please her titled father Agbadi all the time? She sighed and remarked aloud, “You are right. The trouble with me is that I find it difficult to change.” (p.127)

It is not only Nnu Ego who does not like Adaku’s outspokenness. Nnaife does not appreciate that too. While they both expect that being the junior wife and the youngest of the three, Adaku would shut up and keep her opinions to herself, Adaku on the other does not think there is anything wrong expressing her thoughts. Nnaife’s dislike of her boldness is seen when he returns home to find Nnu Ego has had twin girls. We are told

"he laughed as loudly as he was wont to do when faced with an impossible situation. 'Nnu Ego, what are these? Could you not have done better? Where will we all sleep, eh? What will they eat?' " (p.127)

To this, Adaku has this to say: "In twelve years' time, when their bride prices start rolling in, you'll begin to sing another tune." (p.127) The narrator tells us at this point that "Nnaife did not appreciate this woman's boldness...(p.127)" It is evident that both Nnaife and Nnu Ego are tied to the traditional system of doing things so much so that, a woman who boldly expresses herself such as Adaku is frowned upon.

This and other reasons make Adaku eventually leave the marriage to become an independent woman, as she is disappointed to realise that her position as second wife will not ensure her freedom. As a woman who is business oriented, Adaku chooses to stay in Lagos while Nnu Ego goes back to Ibuza when Nnaife is conscripted into the military. In Nnu Ego's absence, she is able to create a thriving business. Adaku's foresight makes her educate her daughters, believing that the time will come when an educated woman will be able to earn money in the same way as a man. This is what she says to that effect:

"Everybody accuses me of making money all the time. What else is there for me to do? I will spend the money I have in giving my girls a good start in life. They shall stop going to the market with me. I shall see that they get enrolled in a good school. I think that will benefit them in the future...Nnaife is not going to send them away

to any man before they are ready. I will see to that! I'm leaving this stuffy room now, senior wife."(p.168)

Evidently, her wealth and success go unrecognized because she bears no sons but two daughters. Though she still enjoys male companionship, she is not dependent on any man for her rent, food, or other bills. In fact, she enjoys far greater wealth as an independent woman than Nnu Ego, whose profits are eaten up by her husband and children's needs and wants. In the end Adaku prospers from her business and is independent of men—she does not need their assistance to look after herself or her daughters, while Nnu Ego dies a miserable death.

So far we have established that clearly, Nnu Ego and Adaku are women with different perspectives in life. While Nnu Ego believes that having children (male heirs) is a woman's ultimate aim and should be her source of satisfaction and joy, Adaku is of the view that girls are also capable of getting educated and working to earn money just like men. To Nnu Ego a few years of staying in school is enough for the girls. We get to know this when Adaku visits them after having moved out of their marital home. She enquires from Nnu Ego if Kehinde and Taiwo are still in school. The latter replies:

"Oh, no, they only attended for a couple of years. We have Adim and Nnamdio to think of and, with Oshia's big school fees, we cannot afford fees for the twins. I think they can read a little. I personally do not regret it. They will be married in a few years. They can earn an added income by trading. The most important thing is for them to get good husbands." (p.189)

We however see Adaku's contrary view on girl-child education when she says, "...I shall see that they get enrolled in a good school. I think that will benefit them in the future...Nnaife is not going to send them away to any man before they are ready. I will see to that! (p. 168)

Buchi Emecheta creates these two characters, both of Ibuza who seem to have contrary views on women's freedom, motherhood and girl-child education. These opposing traits in the two women discussed so far—Nnu Ego and Adaku—tell readers how women can, through their actions and inactions, become either a channel for the freedom of future women or perpetrators of traditional customs which silence the female gender. Nnu Ego and Adaku are contrasted by the author to make readers grasp the import of her novel.

After readers have found that Nnu Ego does not enjoy her motherhood, contrary to the title of the novel, as she later comes to that realisation, we are left with some valuable lessons.

In conclusion, Emecheta uses the characters, Nnu Ego and Adaku in *The Joys of Motherhood* to query discriminations of patriarchal societies, while exposing the challenges the African woman faces in these societies.

Evidently then, we realise that motherhood is not the ultimate source of a woman's happiness and as such should not be a woman's only aim in life. Nnu Ego's struggle as a mother and miserable death clearly teaches this lesson.

The subsequent chapter analyses Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* to find out what the key to women's emancipation and happiness is.

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CHAPTER THREE

EDUCATION AND EMANCIPATION IN TSITSI DANGAREMBGA'S *NERVOUS CONDITIONS*

The preceding chapter revealed two women's opposing attitude to motherhood and happiness. It was made clear that bearing children is not the ultimate source of a woman's happiness. What then, is the tool for women's happiness and fulfilment? This is what this chapter will discuss in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*.

First, let us find out who this author is. Tsitsi Dangarembga, a Zimbabwean filmmaker and writer, whose novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988) has become a modern African classic, was born in Mutoko, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), in 1959 but spent part of her childhood in England. She began her education there, but concluded her A-levels in a missionary school in the Rhodesian town of Umtali (now Mutare). She later studied medicine at Cambridge University but returned home soon after Zimbabwe was internationally recognised in 1980. Her novel, *Nervous Conditions*, was awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1989.

Tsitsi Dangarembga has treated in her works the oppressive nature of a patriarchal family structure and a woman's coming-of-age. She was born in Mutoko in colonial Rhodesia, but at the age of two she moved with her parents to England and so she considers English as her first language as it was used

throughout her education, making her forget most of the Shona she had learnt. In 1965 she returned to Rhodesia, where she entered a mission school in Mutare and learned Shona again. She then completed her secondary education at an American convent school. In 1977 Dangarembga went to Cambridge to study medicine. After three years she abandoned her studies and returned to Zimbabwe, where among other things, she worked for some time at an advertising agency, and started to study psychology at the University of Zimbabwe.

During these years she became involved with the Drama Club and wrote and staged three plays, *She No Longer Weeps* (pub. 1987), *The Lost of the Soil*, and *The Third One*. "The writers in Zimbabwe were basically men at the time," she said in an interview. "And so I really didn't see that the situation would be remedied unless some woman sat down and wrote something; so that's what I did!" Upon graduation she worked as a teacher, but finding it difficult to combine an academic career and writing, she devoted herself entirely to the latter. Her short story, *The Letter* won a prize in a writing competition arranged by SIDA, the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA), and was published in the anthology *Whispering Land* (1985).¹

In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga focuses on a small group of women who struggle to be heard and to succeed in a world that often aggressively seeks to hush and have power over them. The novel examines unequal power relations

between men and women in the Sigauke family which is largely steeped in tradition. The females, Nyasha, Maiguru, Lucia, Tambu and Ma'Shingayi challenge the practices of male domination in various ways. These women attempt to defy some of the decisions that are the prerogative of the patriarch and endeavour to break out of the role of domesticity and drudgery to the surprise of the men in the family.

Though by the end of the novel not all the women have been able to break free from the stifling stereotypical roles expected of them in the family and therefore the society as a whole, a few of them nevertheless are able to assert their rights and enjoy freedom and independence.

Dangarembga says concerning her writing: "I deal with women who break away from oppression but find themselves caught in a guilt trap..."² What she deals with in this novel is no different from what she says because in this novel we find a portrayal of men and women who appear to be opposed to one another because of how highly patriarchy rules in the family. Though the attention of this dissertation is on women, the patriarchs who uphold and defend the laws of patriarchy will be mentioned as part of the analysis to bring a clearer understanding of the seriousness of the problems the women face and how men contribute to their plight. The female characters to be discussed are Tambudzai, Nyasha, Ma'Shingayi, Maiguru and Lucia.

The first female character here is the novel's narrator and protagonist, Tambudzai. We meet her as an intelligent, hardworking and curious fourteen-year-old girl. Tambudzai is hungry for education and eager to escape life on the homestead. While she is sensitive and kind, she is also often harsh and unyielding in her judgments. Tambudzai is sympathetic to the powerful pull of tradition, but at the same time, she wishes to break free of the limitations placed on her gender. At the end of the story, she is on her way to being a free woman.

Anybody would probably be considered heartless if they lost a brother but showed no remorse or sadness for it. This story, however, opens with the shocking confession of the thirteen year old Tambu:

I was not sorry when my brother died. Nor am I apologizing for my callousness, as you may define it, my lack of feeling. For it is not that at all. I feel many things these days, much more than I was able to feel in the days when I was young and my brother died, and there are reasons for this more than mere consequence of age. Therefore I shall not apologize but begin by recalling the facts as I remember them that led to my brothers' death, the events that put me in a position to write this account. (p.1)

From her stance of not apologising for her brother's death, Tambu gives an account of the events that took place before her brother died. And that is what this story is about. What do the male characters in this novel do to contribute to the events that make her not sorry about the death of her own brother?

The relationship between Tambu and her brother, Nhamo, has always not been a good one as it was reduced to that of the privileged and the non-privileged. Nhamo has all the opportunities because of his gender, while Tambu has to be content with being groomed as a prospective bride. Nhamo tries by all means to bring her down, as when he steals her maize and gives it to friends, and to dominate her as a male, as a patriarch in the making. Tambu, on the other hand, grows to hate her brother, to the point that even when he passes away, she feels no sadness as expected. However, Tambu fights to escape from what her brother, Nhamo, in this novel stands for—patriarchy and sexism. These are the gender issues which concern this novel. On the social construction of gender roles, Greene and Kahn assert:

The social construction of gender takes place through the workings of ideology. Ideology is that system of beliefs and assumptions—unconscious, unexplained, invisible— which represents 'the imaginary relationships of individuals to their real conditions of existence...'; but it is also a system of practices that informs every aspect of daily life— the machines we invent, the pictures we paint,...it authorizes its beliefs and practices as 'universal' and 'natural', presenting 'women' not as cultural construct but as eternally and everywhere the same.³

This assertion by Green and Kahn therefore presupposes that since Nhamo is a male and growing up in a society where males are considered superior to females, it becomes automatic for Nhamo to exert a sort of power over his sister; to tell her she cannot go to school because she is female. He has, at his young age adapted to the biased nature of his society.

However, as a girl who is determined to go to school, she gets an idea to grow maize in order to sell the produce and use the money for her fees since her father is not ready to help her out. He advises her to stop worrying, saying: "Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables" (p.15). She seeks her mother's encouragement but gets only discouragement when she tells her, "And do you think you are so different, so much better than the rest of us? Accept your lot and enjoy what you can of it. There is nothing else to be done.' I wanted support, I wanted encouragement; warnings if necessary, but constructive ones.'" (p.20)

She decides not to pay attention to her and seeks solidarity with her brother who rather questions her: "Why do you bother" he asked, his eyes twinkling maliciously. "Don't you know I am the only one who has to go to school?" (p. 21) adding later on that, "It's the same everywhere. Because you are a girl..." Tambudzai stops listening to him at this point informing us that, "My concern for my brother died an obstructive death from that moment." (p. 21)

Having hurt her feelings, Nhamo goes to steal Tambu's ripe corn, just to prove to her that she can never send herself to school. It is Nhamo who asks Tambu, "Did you ever hear of a girl being taken away to school? You are lucky you even

managed to go back to Rutivi. With me it's different. I was meant to be educated." (p.49)

It is no wonder therefore, that Tambudzai feels relieved when Nhamo leaves home to further his education at the Mission and does not feel any remorse after his demise. But we should question why a boy of his age should display such chauvinistic and sexist tendencies. It is as if Nhamo gets socialized into his gender role at birth. Here, we can agree with Easthope when he says that:

Every society assigns new arrivals [i.e. newly borns] particular roles, including gender roles, which they have to learn. The little animal born into a human society becomes a socialized individual in a remarkably short time... This process of internalizing is both conscious and unconscious.⁴

This seems to be the case with Nhamo. The process of internalizing his gender role as a male personality who automatically looks down on the female person has been done consciously and unconsciously while still young. Carol Mc Millan has also expressed the same view when he says:

The thrust of feminist argument has.....for the most part, rested on the belief that since there are not important differences between the sexes, nothing justifies a segregation of their roles. Any differences which may exist are said to be fostered culturally by forcing women to concentrate their activities exclusively in the domestic sphere. This in turn leads to the development of supposedly feminine traits such as self-sacrificing and passivity, which has the added consequence of inhibiting the development in women of their potential as rational, intellectual and creative beings.⁵

Having been socialised as early as possible and obviously enjoying his gender role thoroughly, Nhamo goes about trying to socialize Tambu into her feminine roles with relish and of course, with the help of their father, Jeremiah. The two of them are trying to develop the 'required' feminine traits of 'self-sacrifice and passivity' in Tambudzai and the other female children in their home like her sister, Netsai. For instance, when Tambu yearns to accompany her father and Nhamo to the airport to welcome Babamukuru and his family from England, her father calls her aside to implore her to curb her unnatural inclinations. For it was natural for her to stay at home and prepare for the home-coming.

Rosemary Moyana of the University of Zimbabwe, Department of Curriculum and Arts Education, writes in her thesis titled, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*: an attempt in the feminist tradition on this attitude and makes a reference to McM`illan as saying that women are forced culturally to concentrate their activities exclusively in the domestic sphere, thereby inhibiting their development into creative and intellectual people. Indeed, Tambudzai's father gets agitated when he sees her reading a piece of newspaper used to wrap bread by the grocery shop people, thinking that she is emulating her brother and that the things she reads will fill her mind with impractical ideas, making her quite useless for the real tasks of feminine living. In order for him to get enough cattle for her bride price at the time of her marriage, her conformity is absolutely mandatory.⁶ Therefore, she continues that what the father is doing here then is,

socializing Tambudzai into her gender role using the ideology he knows best as Greene and Kahn describe:

The oppression of women is both a material reality, originating in material conditions, and a psychological phenomenon, a function of the way women and men perceive one another and themselves. But it is generally true that gender is constructed in *patriarchy* to serve the interests of male supremacy. Radical feminists argue that the construction of gender is grounded in male attempts to control female sexuality.⁷

Jeremiah is worried about Tambu's behaviour not only immediately, but also for the future when she becomes a wife to some other man: hence the need to control her as father and custodian of her personality and sexuality on behalf of the next authoritative man in her life, the husband. Babamakuru does the same to her and sees it as his duty to ensure that she "develops into a good woman because there is nothing that pleases parents more than to see their own children settle in their own families" (p.88). Even the education she gets is viewed as preparation for marriage as he says:

In time you will be earning money. You will be in a position to be married by a decent man and set up a decent home. In all that we are doing for you, we are preparing you for this future life of yours and I have observed from my own daughter's behaviour that it is not a good thing for a young girl to associate too much with these white people, to have too much freedom. I have seen that girls who do that do not develop into decent women (p. 180)

At the end of the day, Jeremiah, Nhamo and Babamukuru exercise authority which the patriarchal institutions of their society give them over Tambu. In the process of giving what Jeremiah and Babamukuru consider as good pieces of

advice and through Nhamo's words of discouragement, they try to stifle this girl's dream of becoming an educated and independent woman.

Throughout *Nervous Conditions*, the adult Tambu looks back on her adolescence and her struggle to emerge into adulthood and formulate the foundation on which her adult life would be built. There are essentially two Tambus in the novel, and as a crafty and feisty narrator, Tambu successfully generates tension between them. She explores her own conflicted perceptions not only as a teenager but as an adult re-examining those years, a dual perspective that gives the novel richness and complexity. As the presiding voice in the novel, she can manipulate how she is represented and perceived, but under the tough exterior is a hardworking girl who is eager to please and advance herself. Her self-portrayal, with its unflattering as well as praiseworthy elements, represents the adult Tambu's effort to convey the challenges faced by impoverished yet talented women in central Africa in the 1970s. A figure of those tumultuous and ever-changing times, Tambu emerges not as a flat and one-dimensional symbol but ultimately as a fallible and triumphant human presence.⁸

When the opportunity presents itself, Tambu is determined to receive education and make sure she does not end up like the other women in her family who have been entrapped. She believes that with education, she is going to be a better person knowing it is going to give her the opportunity to be self-reliant. Apart

from her physical development, we can also perceive her mental development in the way she analyzes issues; doing her best not to do it like her cousin, Nyasha.

I told myself I was a much more sensible person than Nyasha, because I knew what could or couldn't be done. In this way I banished the suspicion, buried it in the depths of my subconscious, and happily went back to Sacred Heart. (p.208)

Though by the end of the novel, she is still in school, the obvious fact that she is on her way to becoming an intelligent and independent woman is not lost on readers when she says: "Quietly, unobtrusively and extremely fitfully, something in my mind began to assert, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed..."(p.208)

Creating the character, Tambudzai, therefore is a deliberate attempt to present a model for the ordinary African woman to know that it is possible to get out of and come up from the male-dominated societies filled with patriarchs who will do all they can to frustrate their women so they can keep on subjugating them. In the end Tambudzai emerges as a focused young lady who has hopes of living a better life in the not too distant future. She affirms:

I told myself I was a much more sensible person than Nyasha, because I knew what could or couldn't be done...Quietly, unobtrusively and extremely fitfully, something in my mind began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed, bringing me to this time when I can set down this story. (p. 208)

Having discussed Tambudzai, the role she plays and the control exerted on her by the men in her life, we shall go on to see what role her cousin, Nyasha plays and look at how she rebels against the patriarchal system.

Unlike Tambudzai, Nyasha is modern, carefree and plain. She is a girl who feels she must be able to speak her mind. Perhaps, life in the United Kingdom must have taught her that. However, the main obstacle to her happiness is her father, Babamukuru, a traditional man who would not permit his daughter's disobedience to him. Babamukuru expects her to mechanically adapt to their traditional ways. Their traditional culture is conservative, sexist, patriarchal—regarding women as second-class citizens and hence as people who should work at home, tending their husbands and children with no opinion of their own to express.

Nyasha has a father who does not consider women to be his equals, but inferior beings who should do what men like him say. He feels he must subdue Nyasha as a way of exercising his patriarchal authority over her. For instance, when Nyasha tries to tell the truth about herself, he feels she is challenging him. She must not read certain books. She must sit down at table and eat all her food because he says so, but must wait until her mother has finished serving or waiting on him first. Nyasha has contrary opinions about all these rules. While sitting at table with Babamukuru and family to dine one day. Nyasha, thinking her mother is done serving the rice, takes the ladle to add meat and gravy to her

stew. At that point her father, who expects her to wait till her mother has finished serving her, asks: "What are you doing, Nyasha?...What about your mother here?...Do you think she doesn't know what she's doing, waiting on me like this?" to which she replies: "I don't like cold food." (p. 83)

Nyasha is more intelligent, perceptive, and inquisitive than her age would have her to be in the African setting she finds herself in. Unlike the other female characters in *Nervous Conditions*, she is complex and multifaceted, and her dual nature reflects her status as the product of two worlds, Africa and England. It should be stated here that colonialism did not only affect the politics and the land of the colonised, but also their mindset. It was natural for the colonised to aspire to be like the white colonists, in all respects. Implementing Western values estranged African people from their traditional communities. Those that endeavour to adopt the culture of the colonists may end up being rejected by both cultures. Nyasha in the novel seems to be a portrait of the colonised African mind. She seems to have difficulty fitting into the African system; literally losing her mother tongue, having been brought up the western way. The narrator recounts her disappointment when she says:

I did my best to talk to Nyasha when she came. I racked my brains for odd English words that I could slip into my sentences to help her understand what I was saying, but it was no use. She did not talk beyond a quick stuttered greeting. Nor did she smile any more at all. Most of the time, much to Babamukuru's irritation, she stayed close to Maiguru, refusing my invitation to play *pada* or pound maize or take a trip to Nyamarira. When she did venture

away from her mother, our games were strained and silent. In the end I felt stupid and humiliated for making such a fuss over my cousin, but it was difficult to leave her alone. I missed the bold, ebullient companion I had who had gone to England but not returned from there. (p. 52)

On one hand she is emotional, passionate, and provocative, while on the other she is rational and profound in her thinking. Though Tambu disapproves of her English ways and is disappointed by the fact that Nyasha seems to have lost all that makes her African, she admires Nyasha for her ability to see conflict and disagreement not as threats but as opportunities to increase her understanding of herself and the world. She uses the various experiences life presents her with as a chance to grow, learn, and improve. Initially, she thrives in her state of unresolved and often warring emotions and feelings, and she sees any inconsistency in her feelings or her world as opportunities for greater self-development.

Nyasha's intelligent nature and volatile, ungrounded identity ultimately take their toll, and isolation and loneliness are her reward for being unconventional and independent. Nyasha takes to smoking. As a young girl growing up in a Mission school, this habit is unacceptable. Tambu is shocked at Nyasha's habit and says: 'You smoke cigarettes; I was aghast. Babamukuru was right! His daughter was beyond redemption.' (p.84) In fact, Nyasha's behaviour is explained by James and Busia when they say:

They can do nothing but imitate Europe even in ideas, generating none themselves but simply applying ideas and practices which were not conceived for their own societies. Within this cultural universe of third world dependency, the woman is the dependant of the dependant, being pulled along in the whirligig of neo-colonialist meaningless behaviour like her male counterparts.⁹

She is unpopular at the mission school, but this unpopularity is due more to her wilfulness than the fact that she is the headmaster's daughter. Her inner resources and resolve are highly developed, but they can sustain her only so far. Over the course of the novel, the elements that define her and the aspects of her personality she most cherishes become the source of her unrest and ultimate breakdown. The transformation leads to self-hatred, a dangerously negative body image which results in an eating disorder, and mental illness. Nyasha becomes a symbolic victim of the pressures to embrace modernity, change, enlightenment, and self-improvement.

Nyasha is at the crossroads not knowing which way to turn. Does she take to the inhibitive new home and culture, or resort to the African culture which her parents neglect to teach her, or to the freer Western culture for which she is reprimanded time and again by especially her father? Her father does not approve of the words she speaks or the clothes she wears, while her mother does not mind buying them for her. Could this act of Maiguru be her approach to protesting against her husband's traditions and conducts? When Nyasha stays late at school studying her father accuses her of socializing with boys. The day

she comes home late from a dance because she wants to learn a few more dance steps from Andrew Baker, she is accused of being a whore because 'no decent girl would stay out alone, with a boy, at that time of night. . .' (p. 113).

It is these kinds of accusations, assumptions and orders that Nyasha rebels against. She cannot simply take them sheepishly, obediently, placidly. She has been brought up in a culture that teaches her to speak her mind and defend herself as and when necessary. For example, on the Andrew Baker dance problem, in anger and frustration she ends up shouting, 'What do you want me to say? . . . You want me to admit I'm guilty, don't you? All right then. I *was* doing it, whatever you're talking about. There. I've confessed.' (p.115) When Babamukuru beats her, Nyasha cannot keep taking the lashes. She returns the blow to the horror. He vows that he will kill her for challenging him that way:

Babamukuru bellowed and snorted that if Nyasha was going to behave like a man, then by his mother who was at rest in her grave he would fight her like one. They went down on to the floor, Babamukuru alternately punching Nyasha's head and banging it on the floor, screaming or trying to scream but not squeaking, because his throat had seized up with fury, that he would kill her with his bare hands; Nyasha screaming and wriggling and doing what damage she could. Maiguru and Chido could not stay out of it any longer. They had to hold him. (p.117)

In affirming her rights and herself generally, Nyasha gets brutalized. She wastes away and finally succumbs to a mental and nervous breakdown which comes out through the food battle with her father. He constantly forces her to eat all her food as evidence of his authority over her and believes that she challenges him if

she does not eat everything on her plate, even when she is full or not hungry. As a result, Nyasha is equally determined to gobble up the food and then throw it up, a symbol of final defiance of her father's subjugation and she rebels against this eventual symbol of patriarchal power. Later on she tells Tambu:

'You know Tambu,' she began again painfully, 'I guess he's right, right to dislike me. It's not his fault, it's me But I can't help it. Really, I can't. I'm just not made that way. Why not? Why can't I just take it like everybody else does? I ought to take it, but really, I can't.' (p.193)

This tells us Nyasha is simply unable to allow herself to be crushed under the weight of her father's supremacy. She will do everything in her power to fight it even if she does not wholly succeed. In creating a character like Nyasha, Dangarembga is telling her readers, and African women in particular, that the road to freedom in a society so basically male-dominated is not an easy one but it is worth the fight at the end of the day.

The third female character to be discussed is Maiguru, Tambudzai's aunt, Babamukuru's wife and Nyasha's mother. Maiguru is a strong, educated, and successful professional woman who stands out from the rest of the women in her family. Living in England has changed her, and she wants her children to act more Western. Ironically, she later fears her children have become too anglicized. She accepts her passive role in her marriage and makes sacrifices to keep Babamukuru happy. Her fears and anxieties are rooted in her own experience of trying to reconcile attitudes and behaviours that come from two

very different worlds. Her conflicting attitudes suggest the deep divide that exists in her perception of herself as a woman and as an African.

When the family returns to Rhodesia, Maiguru wishes her children to retain the mark of distinction and difference that they have achieved from living in a Western society. She defends the fact that they have lost their ability to communicate fluently in Shona, their native tongue. She pampers her children and husband but does not really enjoy her role as a mother. Her husband does not seem to recognise the role she plays keeping the home and financially contributing to the upkeep of her family and her husband's extended family.

However, when the family returns to the homestead for the holidays, Maiguru, highly educated and accustomed to earning her own living as an educator, is reduced to a traditional role as wife, mother and caretaker of the home. During subsequent holidays, she refuses to attend the celebrations. She confronts her husband about the lack of respect and recognition she suffers in the family:

'Yes, she is your brother's child,' she said. 'But when it comes to taking my money so that you can feed her and her father and your whole family and waste it on ridiculous weddings, that's when they are my relatives too. Let me tell you, Babawa Chido I am tired of my house being a hotel for your family. I am tired of being a housekeeper for them. I am tired of being nothing in a home that I am working myself sick to support. And now even that Lucia can walk in here and tell me that the things she discusses with you, here in my home, are none of my business. I am sick of it Babawa Chido. Let me tell you I have had enough!' (p.174)

After this incident, Maiguru leaves her marital home to stay with her brother in Salisbury for some days. This single act of hers demonstrates how strongly she feels about being relegated to the background when it comes to issues concerning her immediate family. Maiguru's departure and return become a turning point in the order of power relations in the house. It goes to prove that Babamukuru's decisions are no longer absolute.

When Babamukuru decides that the convent would have a bad influence on Tambu's character, it is Maiguru who influences that decision in favour of Tambu attending the Sacred Heart College:

'I don't think...that Tambudzai will be corrupted by going to that school. Don't you remember, when we went to South Africa everybody was saying that we, the women, were loose.' Babamukuru winced at this explicitness... 'It wasn't a question of associating with this race or that race at the time. People were prejudiced against educated women. Prejudiced. That's why they said we weren't decent. That was the fifties. Now we are into the seventies. I am disappointed that people still believe the same things. After all this time when we have seen nothing to say it is true. I don't know what people mean by a loose woman—sometimes she is someone who walks the streets, sometimes she is an educated woman, sometimes she is a successful man's daughter or even beautiful. Loose or decent, I don't know. All I know is that if our Tambudzai is not a decent person now, she'll never be, no matter where she goes to school. And if she is decent, then this convent should not change her (p.184)

From this extract, we realise how she chances on the opportune time to explain issues relating to society's perception of the female gender to her husband, which is so bad to the extent of an educated woman being described as "loose",

which according to her means one who walks on the street—a prostitute, an educated or beautiful woman. Meaning whenever a woman does tow the lines society has set for her gender, she is referred to as “loose”. Maiguru, as can be deduced from this extract, evolves into a realistic model of modern womanhood for the young girls. She represents a subtle but emerging voice of feminist dissent, a woman ahead of her time who attempts to enact change in steady and practicable ways.

From the role Maiguru plays and judging from all that she goes through, it is evident that women suffer daily deprivations in their patriarchal societies and are sometimes not given the recognition they deserve for the roles they play as career women who help provide for the family financially, besides being wives, mothers and homemakers. When this happens, women ought to question the status-quo, as Maiguru does, so things can change. Otherwise, they will continue to wallow in maltreatment and disregard for God knows how long. It is for this reason that the author creates this character.

The fourth female to be discussed is Ma’Shingayi, Tambudzai’s mother. Ma’Shingayi is portrayed as a hardworking woman who has toiled and sacrificed so that her son can be educated. After Nhamo’s death, she grows spiteful, angry, and jealous of those around her. She tends to be apathetic and accepts the limitations with which life has saddled her. She is entrapped and saddled with the domestic roles of a housewife and mother. This fact is well known to her but

to her, there is nothing she can do about it. She discourages her daughter's effort to have an education, convincing her how right her father is when he says Tambu ought to concentrate on learning to become a good wife. Tambu's mother is, nevertheless, quite an intelligent woman. She is conscious of the conditions in the country and how these make the woman's position arduous:

'This business of womanhood is a heavy burden,' she said. 'How could it not be? Aren't we the ones who bear children? When it is like that you can't just decide today I want to do this, tomorrow I want to do that, the next day I want to be educated! When there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one who has to make them. (p.16)

She is so aware of the alienating effect of Western education which she says "took [her son's] tongue out so that he could not speak to [her]". She is referring to Nhamo who claims that he can no longer speak Shona after being at the Mission for a few weeks. When Tambudzai tells her about Nyasha's illness, she identifies the problem immediately as 'the Englishness: "It will kill them all if they aren't careful . . . to look at him [i.e. at Babamukuru] he may look all right, but there's no telling what price he's paying . . . ' (p.207).

Ma'Shingayi sees no way out of the womanly trap she finds herself in. For instance, she does not seem to have any control over her fertility, a situation which results in yet another baby, Dambudzo, a boy. It is as though he has to be a boy to replace Nhamo and please the patriarchal system.

It is interesting to learn that because this child is a boy Babamukuru immediately makes known his intention of starting to save for his education while Tambu gets the opportunity to be educated as a result of her brother's demise:

For one thing there is now the small boy at home. Every month I put away a little bit, a very little bit, a very little bit every month, so that when he is of school-going age, everything will be provided. As you know, he is the only boy in your family, so he must be provided for. (p.183)

This goes a long way to illustrate the kind of treatment one received in the family based on gender. Ma'Shingayi's concept of a woman is being subservient to the husband and looking after the family. However, she considers that as a heavy burden of womanhood and even advises her daughter, Tambu, to learn to carry it. By the end of the story, her circumstance remains unchanged and she continues to play the role she is accustomed to.

The narrator is well aware of the many women in Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole who find themselves in the shoes of Ma'Shingayi—they are in a situation they find no escape from and so the narrator would like to draw readers' attention to this fact while encouraging them to rise above their limits and assert their rights. Otherwise, their predicament would never change.

The final female character we shall discuss is the strong-willed Lucia, Ma'Shingayi's sister. Lucia is a mysterious woman who is feared by many and referred to as a witch. Shrewd and sexually promiscuous, Lucia is the object of gossip and rumour and is said to have had many affairs with rich men. She is

outspoken and pays no heed to the social code that requires women to be silent and obedient. She emerges as an independent and ambitious woman, eager to educate herself and improve her lot in life.

Lucia is alleged to have had sexual relations with Jeremiah and Takesure, making the paternity of her unborn child uncertain. The patriarchal system which accepts polygamy would strongly object to a woman having more than one partner at a time. But Lucia is portrayed as a fearless woman who does not seem to care a hoot about anything called patriarchy. She challenges patriarchy when she storms into the family meeting and attacks Takesure in the presence of all the elders:

It was no use telling Lucia not to go into the house, so we did not even try. We just watched her as she strode in there, her right eye glittering as it caught the yellow paraffin flame, glittering dangerously at Takesure, who wisely shrank back into his corner of the sofa. 'Fool!' snorted Lucia, looming over him, arms akimbo. 'Fool!' And she whirled to face Babamukuru, so that now her left eye glittered. 'Look at him Babamukuru! Look at him trying to hide because I'm here'. Takesure looked braver when he had only Lucia's back to contend with, but his reprieve was brief. 'If you have an issue with me,' Lucia advised him, 'stand up and let us sort it out plainly.' In two strides she was beside him and, securing an ear between each finger and thumb, she dragged him to his feet. 'Let me go, let me go,' he moaned. (p.146)

Even though she physically attacks Takesure, raising him by his ears is a significantly symbolic means of rebuking the whole gathering for trying her case in her absence. This action she takes can be seen as a direct attack of the whole

gathering of elders. She then declares that rather than marry Takesure, she would wed Jeremiah, defying the choice that the family was making for her, which is, Takesure, and opts to remain single.

Lucia does not hide her feelings and does not consider herself a woman without a voice like the other women in the family who are hesitant to express themselves because they are married and so probably 'comporting' themselves by being silent. She tells Babamukuru when she sees Tambu being punished for not partaking in her parents wedding: 'Babamukuru ...maybe when you marry a woman, she is obliged to obey you. But some of us aren't married, so we don't know how to do it. That is why I have been able to tell you frankly what is in my heart' (p.174).

Lucia here serves as a voice for Tambu. It is remarkable to realize that despite the fact that Lucia has no formal education, she seems to be open minded and knowledgeable about issues concerning women and their rights. Tambu regards Lucia's progress as an escape from male dependency when she gets a job at the mission. This move puts her in a position to raise her child on her own. Her final triumph occurs when she enrolls in grade one in order to fight illiteracy while working at the Mission. Hence, she escapes from both poverty and male dominance. She is certain to have a bright future.

The men, who now see Lucia as a no-nonsense woman, admire her when she leaves their presence. Perhaps, to them, doing so in her presence would betray

some weakness in them. Takesure refers to her as vicious, unnatural and uncontrollable while Babamukuru “applauded Lucia in her absence. ‘That one’, he chuckled to Maiguru, ‘she is like a man herself’” (p.174) It seems to be difficult for these men to acknowledge that Lucia is a person with her opinion and style of living her life independent of the fetters that bind other women.

The presence of Lucia is to tell readers that one does not need to be educated to know that their rights are being abused. Moreover, her actions teach the average African woman the need to be assertive and take it upon herself to fight for her freedom in her patriarchal society.

Dangarembga in this novel through her female characters clearly states that education is what leads to emancipation. Tambudzai and Lucia struggle to get educated and by the end of the novel, they are on their way to being emancipated.

In the next chapter, Aidoo’s *Changes* shall be discussed to show another level of emancipation as an analysis of three of her female characters is made.

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CHAPTER FOUR

WOMEN'S CHANGING ROLES IN AMA ATA AIDOO'S *CHANGES*

In the just ended chapter, some female characters in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and the struggle of some of them and nonchalance of others in asserting their rights were discussed. It was also established that education leads to emancipation and therefore serves as an important tool in women's empowerment.

In this chapter, we shall see another level of emancipation as three female characters in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* are analysed.

The author, Ama Ata Aidoo was born Christina Ama Ata Aidoo in Abeadzi, Kyiakor in the Central Region of Ghana, in 1942. Her father, a chief of Abeadzi, Kyiakor, was a politician. Because of her father's position, she grew up in a royal household with a clear sense of African traditions and a Western education. She earned her B. A. degree from the University of Ghana in 1964 and later went to Stanford University in California, United States of America. She taught Literature in universities in Ghana, Zimbabwe and the United States of America. She is one of the foremost Ghanaian and African writers as well as a female activist. She is one of the few African writers to write about the sometimes alienated relationship that exists between Africans in Africa and those outside Africa.

She has produced diverse works including plays, poetry, short stories, novels, essays and children's stories. Her works are marked with a sharp opinionated tone, that is to say she is often subjective in her writing. Some of her plays include *Dilemma of a Ghost* and *Anowa* published in 1964 and 1970, respectively. Her short stories include *No Sweetness Here*, published in 1970, *The Girl Who Can and other Stories* which she published in 1997. Her poetry collections, *Someone Talking to Sometime* and *An Angry Letter in January* were issued in 1985 and 1992, respectively. *The Eagle and the Chickens* and *Birds and Other Poems* are the children's books she has to her credit and they were both published in 1987. She also has some novels such as *Our Sister Killjoy; Or Reflections from a Black Eyed Squint*, published in 1977.

In *Changes*, a novel published in 1991, she raises issues in the life of the contemporary African woman but offers no distinct solutions to these problems in the story, probably due to the fact that these problems persist at present, despite all the awareness created for the woman to become assertive.

Fusena, Opokuya and Esi are the three major characters to be discussed here. We shall take a look at each of them and the roles they play before analyzing those roles and end by considering how Aidoo presents the issues affecting these women; that is, a look at the style she employs in the writing of this novel.

Fusena is a trained teacher, wife of Ali and a mother of three children. Owing to the expectations of a wife, Fusena abandons her career as a teacher and follows

her husband to London, where she stays home giving birth and nursing their children while her husband is in school. We do not see any determination in her to be assertive. After getting herself educated and teaching for a few years, she reduces herself to the role of the traditional woman who submits to the dictates of her husband and the patriarchal society.

She settles for a provision kiosk which her husband opens for her as compensation and as something to keep her busy. The trained teacher, who could have used her knowledge to benefit society, now becomes a petty trader. Ideally, this is not the best and this is not what one would expect a woman to do and feel satisfied with; especially when she has the opportunity of becoming a better person. As a result, Fusena could be described as a woman who is unable to liberate herself from the clutches of the traditional society.

Another female character we meet in this novel is Opokuya, a state-registered nurse and a midwife. She is married to Kubi and they have four children, three girls and a boy. She works as a midwife in the regional hospital. Though she has some challenges, Opokuya is a woman who has been able to liberate herself from the stereotypical roles of women.

She lives in a home where her chauvinistic husband would have nothing to do with the kitchen since he thinks that is the woman's place. For this reason, he does not help himself and the children when they have to do without Opokuya, especially on days when she has to spend long hours at the hospital. In a

conversation with Esi, she complains about this issue: "They try to squeeze me dry to make up for the times they have to do without me." (p.42) This notwithstanding, she is able to manage her duties as a wife, mother, home keeper and her career as a midwife.

One can therefore say that Opokuya is a woman who does not allow traditional societal norms to keep her from asserting herself and at the same time, she does not neglect her duties as a wife and a mother. On the whole, this is a woman who can be said to have liberated herself from the chains of the traditional society. Much as she will not succumb to tradition but get herself a better life, she also does what is expected of her in her home. Her role in nurturing her children is a very important one because as an educated mother she is in a better position to train her children to know their rights. The writer therefore presents Opokuya as a person who is able to create a balance in her roles as a career woman, a wife and a mother.

Esi is the main character of the novel. She is a strong-willed, educated and independent woman who, lives with her husband, Oko and their daughter, Ogyaanowa. Esi works at the Department of Urban Statistics and often brings her work home with her. After being 'raped' by her husband, Esi decides to divorce him. She wants to live an independent life so she can focus on her profession and be free from the traditional boundaries marriage imposes on her.

Esi knows that the job she does with her master's degree is not challenging enough. She expects to be given something more challenging: "Surely, one doesn't need a Master's degree in statistics to do that?" she would fume and rage daily." (p.49) This notwithstanding, she faces the problems the modern African career woman is daily confronted with; she is not treated as her male counterparts because of her gender, no matter what effort she puts into her work. For this reason, she puts in more than enough effort to earn recognition and be on the same pedestal with the men.

However, her husband, Oko, is of a contrary view. He sees no reason why a well-respected woman has to try so hard to impress anyone to the extent of leaving home at dawn and returning at dusk and then attending conferences throughout the year. Oko is worried about what family and friends think about him so far as his ability to father more children is concerned. His mother and sister's complaints about how unsafe it is to have an only child is something he takes to heart. Esi, on the other hand, does not see things this way. Probably, to her, having more than one child will prevent her from reaching the heights she hopes to attain in her career. She believes one child is enough for the moment. After all, she proved her fertility to her family and world by having her:

There was a time when she had been made to fear that in fact she would never marry. 'You have waited too long,' Esi's mother had complained. 'Given your structure you shouldn't have.' (The poor woman shared the popularly held belief that a young woman who is too tall, too thin, has flat tummy and flat behind has a slim

chance bearing children. The longer she waits after puberty, the slimmer those chances get! (p.50)

Here is an educated woman who recognises that her husband having sexual intercourse with her without her consent is an infringement on her right. It is easy to realise therefore that she knows the law and that in the law court if she wanted to have a proper divorce, the assault could come in handy since 'she decided to feel assaulted and from then on, her mind had seized on the 'assault' and held to it' (p. 44)

She takes her career seriously and strives for excellence in it. She wants to make good her education and it is for this reason that she would not have her husband demand more of her and her time. Esi is a woman who has liberated herself from the stereotypical roles assigned to and expected of the women of her society. Having liberated herself, she is strengthened to face challenges as squarely as she thinks she must. It is for this reason that her mother-in-law fails in her bid to make her feel sorry by refusing to allow Esi's daughter, Ogyaanowa to go with her. Though this was sad for her, she demonstrates to her mother-in-law that she was not really bothered.

Now that we know who these women are and the roles they play in the novel, we shall analyse them in view of how their patriarchal societies tend to stifle their freedom and independence.

To begin with, Fusena's character and identity as a woman change throughout the course of the novel. Before she gets married, she is an intelligent and ambitious young woman who wants to complete her degree and continue her teaching career. However, once she marries Ali, her world is quickly restricted. She bears one child, and then another. With Ali studying abroad, Fusena is limited to the home, until Ali purchases a kiosk for her to operate. Despite Fusena's education, she symbolises the obedient traditional woman who accepts what she is told by her husband and family without as much as any effort to raise any objections. Upon hearing of Ali's decision to take another wife, she asks him if the woman he is considering has a university degree. By asking that question, Fusena reveals the degree to which her life's ambitions have been frustrated and abandoned for the sake of her marriage and children. Despite her ambition and strong will, Fusena submits to the role of a dependent housewife.

The rain was not the only problem Fusena had with her life as Ali's wife in London. One rainy day, it occurred to her that life should offer more than marriage. That is, if the life she was leading was in fact marriage. To begin with, she was beginning to admit to herself that by marrying Ali, she had exchanged a friend for a husband. She felt the loss implied in this admission keenly, and her grief was great. The first time that this hit her, she actually sat down and wept. She also knew immediately that there was nothing she could do about her situation. . . . Fusena had stared hard at London and admitted that she had another problem. It was this business of Ali getting more and more educated while she stayed the same. Sometimes she truly felt desperate. For whereas she could console herself that she would leave the wetness of London behind her once they went back home, she knew the other problems would stay with her. (p. 79)

What makes Fusena feel extremely bitter is not the climate or the new surroundings in which she finds herself but rather the time she has wasted before and during her years in London, which she could have devoted to her studies. These frustrations take the form of disappointed abilities and ambitions sacrificed to the widely held "good Muslim wife" notion. Though she feels a lot of resentment during her stay in London, she is the one who makes the decision to sacrifice her career for her family.

This bitterness re-surfaces again for the reason that "the first time Ali informed Fusena that he was thinking of taking a second wife, Fusena asked him, before the words were properly out of his mouth, 'She has a university degree?' (p. 96).

It is at this point that she really regrets wasting her years and nothing could be more frustrating to her. Ali, who talks her out of going back to the classroom, saying, 'it is a waste of time' and 'the hours are long and the pay is terrible,' is now going to marry a woman with a university degree and to add insult to Fusena's injury, one who is not a Muslim too.

Fusena just drives away with all the frustration and humiliation she feels to look for someone to talk to. Ironically, the family members she hopes to complain to are the same ones Ali has contacted to talk to her on his behalf—to agree that he marries a second wife. It is this irony that leads us to another instance of the 'good Muslim wife' notion. When she is called before her mother and aunts, she raises no objections. Here is where we see the influence of the traditional system

which expects women to be silent and accept everything and anything their husbands want, sacrificing their happiness in the process without considering the emotional damage it causes to the woman involved.

Fusena, to an extent, has no excuse for ending up in this manner. It is her life and she could have taken full control and decided what she wanted and gone for it, but, "She had allowed Ali to talk her out of teaching, hadn't she?" However, the expectations of the society seem too strong for her to ignore. She therefore opts for the path of sacrifice. Fusena, as presented by Ama Ata Aidoo is not fully emancipated from the dictates of the traditional society. She is portrayed as a sharp contrast to Esi. Fusena's situation tells us that it is possible to be educated and choose not to be liberated.

As Esi's best friend, Opokuya inhabits a space in between the extreme independence that Esi represents and the traditional role expected of a woman as symbolised by Fusena. Like Esi, Opokuya has her own career that is personally and financially gratifying. She is educated and clearly has the freedom to pursue her career. At the same time, Opokuya has a large family and a husband. She manages the demands of her job and family, and it is evident that the two demands take their toll on her emotional wellbeing.

However, Opokuya manages to fulfil all of the roles demanded of her. She is at once a dedicated nurse and a dedicated mother and wife, even if her life is not

an easy one. She begins her days fighting with her husband. The fact that she rarely wins their morning dispute over the car is frustrating:

Opokuya thought this was absolutely ridiculous and even mad. A car is to be used. How was she to work full-time and medical work at that, and look after a family as big as theirs without transportation of her own? Was he aware of the amount of running around one had to do to feed and clothe four growing children? (p.16)

These negotiations with Kubi Dakwa, a self-centred husband who debases her over the movement of the car and is always the one to take the car to work are frustrating for Opokuya. The car is therefore symbolic of the worth placed on women's work versus that of men. Despite the numerous needs of the house Opokuya must attend to every day, her husband Kubi inevitably controls the car the greater part of the time. In the end, Opokuya is able to resolve her morning disputes with her husband by obtaining her own car, thereby demonstrating her ability to be both an independent, modern woman, and a responsible wife. She is fairly fulfilled and happy because, unlike Fusena, she chooses to keep her career in addition to her family and manages these roles as best as she can.

Esi Sekyi, is the archetype of the strong-willed, independent woman. In addition to having a job that pays more than her husband's, she owns the home in which they live. She has a master's degree and enjoys her career. Advancing within her profession is as much a priority for her as her family. Given the traditional role that women were expected to play within the family, Esi demonstrates a strong

will and independence that are unique. She comes to represent the emergence of a new feminine identity—one that can contest equally with men in terms of financial and personal security. But she realizes that Oko's demand for her and her time was not going to help at all if she were to achieve any excellence in her career:

So Esi has decided over the years that her relations with Oko has come to a dead end as a result of sterile battles for the right to manage and maximize the time she needs to strike the ideal balance between optimum productivity, professional excellence and socio-economic wellbeing.

And when shortly after Oko "pulled her down, and moved on her . . ." (p.13), she decided that this was marital rape and took the "nicely mad" decision (p.72) to drive Oko out of her house and file for a divorce. There are a lot of women who have no idea what rights they have. They have come to accept that their bodies belong to their husbands or even they are a property of their husbands. So, no matter the treatment meted out to them, they keep mute and suffer silently. Esi will not take any of that. It is the wish of the author that as many women as possible, if not all, will stand for their rights.

Aidoo juxtaposes these three female characters in her bid to champion the cause of the African or the Ghanaian woman. Esi, Opokuya and Fusena fight against more than just an accretion of oppressive tradition that favours men. They struggle for appreciation of their talents and for an equal part in guiding their marriages. Esi and Opokuya struggle to build marriages and relationships that

allow them to reap the benefits of their individuality and their education. They exercise free wills, without making them overworked, or being labelled mad women or witches.

Aidoo's love story traces Esi's distinctly rebellious and independent path to love and marriage, as contrasted with the more traditional married lives of Opokuya and Fusena. In doing so, the novel illustrates women challenging a post-colonial African society on all fronts. This front is as diverse as the workplace, in hotel bars, in the kitchen, on the road driving alone in their new cars, in the rural traditional village, and in the bedroom. Despite often finding that lonely independence is untenable, Esi undoubtedly symbolises the other level of emancipation where a woman does not just get educated but reaches the level where she decides who comes into and who goes out of her life. This point is clearly expressed in Esi's divorce of Oko and marriage to Ali to get enough time for her career.



4.2 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussions so far show that the average African woman experiences one form of subjugation or the other in the predominantly male societies they live. Some are not allowed to express their opinions, others are refused education, some are beaten and as has become a recent feature in most newspapers in Ghana; some women are gruesomely murdered by their spouses for no tangible reason.

Interestingly, not all women kowtow to the subjugation by their various societies. While some accept the dictates of their traditional societies such as Ma'Shingayi (Tambu's mother in *Nervous Conditions*), others question and even fiercely rebel against them. Such people include the likes of Tambudzai, Lucia and Nyasha in *Nervous Conditions* and Adaku in *The Joys of Motherhood* as well as Esi in *Changes*. As a result, these women are perceived as stubborn, morally corrupt and even, witches.

Emecheta, Dangarembga and Aidoo, by their works, as discussed, clearly spell out the plight of the African woman, bringing to the fore, her daily struggles in a society which is more sympathetic to males than females and hope that the trend would change. By their vivid portrayal of the problems women face in their lives daily, they are able to make readers better appreciate the negative side of being a woman in most African societies.

Discussions made so far, conclusively, reveal that the three female writers, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Buchi Emecheta and Ama Ata Aidoo through their novels, *Nervous Conditions*, *The Joys of Motherhood* and *Changes* ably present the plight of African women and champion their emancipation to ensure they live a fulfilled life. Through their various female characters, they portray that though the fight for equality in a male-dominated world is not an easy one, it is worth the try.

At the end of the day Tambudzai fights for her freedom and by the time the story concludes, she is on her way to emancipation, while Ma'Shingayi remains bound by dictates of the society. Nnu Ego dies miserably after sacrificing all she had for her male children while Adaku has a thriving business with her children in school. Esi insists on her freedom but Fusena's life is at a standstill because she chooses to sacrifice her career and fulfilment for her husband and children. The three female writers champion the cause of the African woman indeed.

Having come to the conclusion that women suffer daily deprivations and oppression and having established via the discussion of Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Aidoo's *Changes*, the need for women to ensure their freedom from any form of oppression, a few recommendations shall be made.

For women to be able to break free from suppression and oppression there is the need for them to be educated. Education is the only means by which they would

recognise oppression and fight for or insist on their right and ensure they are equally treated as their male counterparts. In *Nervous Conditions*, it is education that ensures Tambu's freedom. That notwithstanding, there remain women who are educated but still subjugated, such as Fusena and Opokuya. At the end of the day it behoves women to make the necessary choices that affect their lives so they do not remain suppressed despite their level of education. There is therefore the need for them to make the conscious effort to be free from all forms of suppression.

Parents need to bring up their sons and daughters to respect one another and not in any way make one look down on the other. This would inculcate in the younger generation equality and respect for both sexes.

In addition to this, African governments need to ensure the abolition of all cultural practices which downgrade the female while ensuring equal rights for both men and women at the workplace and encouraging women participation in government.

If women would encourage one another as they work towards a better life for themselves, they would surely succeed at that.

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