



FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA

Women's Voices from Southern Africa: Gender, Class and Ethnicity

Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesa
Traballo de Fin de Grao
Curso 2012/2013

Alumna: Carmela López Giménez

Directora: Manuela Palacios González



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Introduction

1. Objectives and Methodology

The following dissertation has as its objective to provide an analysis of *Nervous Conditions*, a novel written by the Zimbabwean writer and filmmaker Tsitsi Dangarembga. The literary analysis of this novel will be done from a postcolonial and feminist perspective which will pay attention to the interactions among the characters in the novel and those they maintain with the social and political structures at the time when Zimbabwe was still Rhodesia. My analysis will attempt to show the way in which Dangarembga elaborates on the consequences of colonialism on women and the double oppression they suffer. I will also discuss the importance of giving a voice to the various types of women through the novel. In addition, I will analyse the different methods of colonial oppression exemplified in the novel and their consequences at a social and psychological level.

For my analysis, I am indebted to a number of studies which analyse *Nervous Conditions* from both a postcolonial and a feminist perspective, such as the critical articles of Susane Z. Andrade, Linda E. Chown, and Heather Zwicker among other literary critics who investigate in the field of Postcolonial Studies, as well as other areas of investigation inside Cultural Studies. In addition, I will turn

to the works of the critics Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak for my discussion of theoretical postcolonial concepts such as “the voice of the subaltern”, and the phenomena of “mimicry” and “hybridity”. These concepts will be illustrated with instances of their appearance in the novel. I will also compare Dangarembga’s approach to the psychological neurosis of the colonised to the proposal made by Franz Fanon, and how Dangarembga extends this question to gender. In addition, I will use the essays of Audre Lorde and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, among others, to support the feminist view of my analysis.

My decision to analyse this novel and to adopt, as its methodological approach, postcolonial and feminist critical analysis for this essay is partly due to the course on Postcolonial Literature which I took for my degree. I found myself interested in investigating further on literatures which are outside the “traditional” western canon and which show a different way of portraying reality, as well as themes and points of view which question how sometimes western writers and literary critics portray the so called “Third World”.

2. Introduction to Postcolonial Studies

Postcolonial Studies are part of the wide field of Cultural Studies, pertaining to a large academic field with various schools in different countries – especially in India. Being a wide academic field, there are quite a number of different objects of study, as well as methodologies and processes of analysis which are used by a number of scholars belonging to the above mentioned Cultural Studies. In spite of that diversity, what they all have in common is their

interest in the study of the relationship between culture and power structures, especially in the globalised and media dominated contemporary world. The notion of culture is examined in a broad and general sense, and is used to analyse the different human activities and relations, while being contextualised within the social and political situation in which these human interactions take place.

Among the diverse currents of study that can be considered within the wide field of Cultural Studies, one which has gained importance over the years is Multiculturalism. Multiculturalism acts as a reaction to many problems of modern societies, such as the different ways of cultural imperialism in the contemporary world, the impact of globalisation, the new ways of migration and their effects, the different constructions and conflicts of identity affecting the modern individual, and mass media among others. Multiculturalism analyses a broad reality and, as well as Cultural Studies, it is a very generic field. Nevertheless, under this generic field there is room for more specific groups of studies, which analyse a more specific aspect of reality, as it is the case of Feminist Theory, Black Studies, Queer Theories and Postcolonial Studies. In the case of Postcolonial Studies, the main subjects of this approach are: the imperialist discourse, globalisation, the creation of new identities in a hybrid space, migrations, and modernity versus tradition among others.

3. The Postcolonial Era and Postcolonial Studies

In its origin, the term “postcolonial” had a strict historical and political meaning, and it lacked of the ideological sense it has today. As Neil Lazarus

explains in his introductory essay on postcolonial studies “To describe a literary work or a writer as ‘postcolonial’ was to name a period, a discrete historical moment, not a project or a politics” (2). The term “postcolonial” was used to refer to a historical period related to the new decolonised states which emerged after the decades following the Second World War in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, in addition to the ones which had already gained independence after their struggle with the colony in South America.

It was almost two decades after decolonisation, in the late seventies and during the eighties, when academic specialisation on Postcolonial Studies emerged, and acquired the meaning it has today. Since its establishment as an academic field of studies, it has been growing in importance over the last decades, gaining the prestige it enjoys today, as prestigious universities have departments which investigate and theorise on postcolonial themes. In addition, centres of postcolonial studies have been created, and different postcolonial journals have been published. Nevertheless, it is important not to forget that before Postcolonial Studies emerged, a large amount of postcolonial analyses had been published which focused on economic, political, social, or cultural issues of the decolonised countries in the different continents. It is important to highlight Edward Said’s work *Orientalism*, first published in 1978, as one of the works which inaugurated Postcolonial Studies.

4. Feminist and Postcolonial Studies

Like other schools which belong to Cultural Studies, Feminist Theory and Postcolonial Studies share their interest in the analysis of inter-human oppressions, the later focusing on patriarchal oppression and the former on political and cultural one. It is not thus strange that quite often a social situation, or a literary work, can be analysed using these two approaches, as “Feminist and postcolonial are occupied with similar questions of representation, voice, marginalization, and the relation between politics and literature” (Bahri 201). As an instance, in *Nervous Conditions* we find a novel which is integrated in postcolonial literary production and, in addition, because it explores and denounces the situation of African women, it is also a novel which can be classified as feminist.

However, there is often controversy between both academic fields, as feminist scholars might criticise postcolonial approaches – for not considering sufficiently gender issues – and western feminist approaches might be criticised by postcolonial feminist critics. In the first case, when a postcolonial analysis does not pay attention to the question of gender in its analysis it will completely omit and silence the specific suffering of the colonised woman, and will not highlight the double colonisation process women have to struggle against. In the case of the colonised woman, she is oppressed both by patriarchy and by the colonial system. On the other hand, Black Feminism and Postcolonial Feminism have criticised Western Feminist approaches. Different critics have accused mainstream Feminism of obviating the different realities of women in the Third World and in western countries but that do not belong to the hegemonic group. These critics

have stated that this obviation was a reproduction of imperialist discourse. It is important in both perspectives – postcolonial and feminist – to come to terms with a broader analysis which would be able to integrate gender to the postcolonial approach, as well as the different cultural contexts in which women have to struggle and make their own path without necessarily following western feminist patterns.

5. Historical Context

For my analysis of *Nervous Conditions* it is important to set the novel in the historical context of the narrated story within the novel and in the particular moment in which the novel was written and later published. A brief view on the former colony of Rhodesia – today's Zimbabwe – will be provided together with a short contextual depiction of the struggle for decolonisation, which took place during the years prior to its independence in 1980.

At the time the novel was published, the decolonization process in different African countries was a recent historical event, as it was the case of Zimbabwe, where the novel is set at the time when the country was still called Rhodesia. Dangaremba's country was part of the British Empire from 1888 until 1965, when the white Rhodesian Front Party, with Ian Smith as its leader, made a Unilateral Declaration of Independence from the United Kingdom. The colony declared itself independent and dropped the word "South" from its name, becoming then Rhodesia. After the UDI, the United Kingdom asked other countries to stop trading with Rhodesia because of its rebellion, in addition to its

being a racist government by a white minority. This attempt of sanctioning the colony did not succeed, since other white-ruled neighbouring countries trade oil and other goods which Rhodesia needed. Among these countries was South Africa, which recognised the Unilateral Declaration of Independence of Rhodesia.

At the same time that Rhodesia was struggling to empower itself at an international level and trying to make the UDI legitimate, resistance started inside. African parties emerged and actively worked to turn settler-ruling Rhodesia into what later became African-ruled Zimbabwe. It was in the 1970's when the different nationalist parties joined forces and created the Patriotic Force, which had the support of other ex-colonies, and struggled to bring power to African people by the only way they found possible, by force. By 1978, the Patriotic Front's guerrillas had won control over a big part of Rhodesia, and, finally, in 1980, Britain agreed to carry out a process of elections which would involve all parties in Rhodesia. The result of this election was that the two main African nationalist parties won and Rhodesia became the independent Republic of Zimbabwe.

Dangaremba's novel is set in the years after the Unilateral Declaration of Independence, during the time of African struggle for independence with a racially segregated Rhodesian society. However, *Nervous Conditions* does not focus on the guerrilla in Rhodesia. In the novel there are just some vague allusions and scarce instances of the racial segregation problem in Rhodesia – the clearest example is the moment when Tambu starts going to the Sacred Heart and the black girls are to be in different rooms from the white girls. In one of her interviews, Dangarembga explains the difficulties she experiments on writing

about racism, since it always sounds so unrealistic though she experienced it herself (Dangarembga 209). However, Dangarembga elaborates on the themes of independence struggle and the race-segregation in Rhodesia in the novel which is a continuation of *Nervous Conditions*, titled *The Book of Not*. In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga, writes about the characters that belong to a Shona family in former Rhodesia and focuses on the terrible effects that colonisation has on African women and the effects of colonial education on the native population.

1. African Women's Voices in *Nervous Conditions*

In this first chapter I will analyse the relevance of the first-person protagonist in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, both in the historical context of the author's homeland and from a feminist postcolonial point of view. I will discuss how the narrator's female voice gains authorship over her own story and, in addition, gives voice to different types of African women. I will also analyse the importance of the protagonist's relationship with other female and male characters of the novel, and will show how the interaction with these other characters in the novel contributes to the protagonist's maturation. I hope this introductory analysis will also help the reader of this essay to get a clearer insight of the story in the novel. To conclude this first chapter, I will focus on how the female characters in this narrative break stereotypes built around the category of the "Third World woman", and I will pay attention to the question of giving voice to the "subaltern", in order to analyse whether this has or has not been achieved in the novel.

When *Nervous Conditions* first came out in 1988, Tsitsi Dangarembga became the first black Zimbabwean woman writer who published a novel.¹ It was first published in the United Kingdom by the London-based Women's Press – an

¹ I use the term Zimbabwe to refer to this country in its post-independence period. *Nervous Conditions*, however, is set in the colonial period when the country was called Rhodesia.

international feminist press – and later in the United States by Seals Press. The novel became an international success and won the Commonwealth Writers Prize. Today, it shares a place with other prominent literary works from the African continent – such as Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* – in syllabuses of universities that aim to introduce students to African literature and culture (Willey and Trieber 9). Although the novel enjoys high recognition, the author initially found it impossible to publish *Nervous Condition* in her homeland. As Dangarembga has carefully hinted in several of her interviews, the difficulties she found were due to the male-dominated literary scene in Zimbabwe – which was promoted by the Literary Bureau – and was also influenced by the lack of educational opportunities for women in Zimbabwe, which is a prominent theme in the novel.

The Literary Bureau was created during the colonial period in order to preserve the Shona and Ndebele languages. After the decolonization process it was still in use. It has a high cultural importance, since, as Heather Zwicker points out, though the Literary Bureau is not a publisher itself, it controls what will be published or not, as it “solicits and assesses manuscripts, acting as a guarantor of their literary value so as to encourage their publication” (7). It is an institution with the function of promoting literacy but – as any institution belonging to the dominant power – it has a hidden political agenda which is to transmit the political values that the powerful institutions endorse. It is not surprising then that the discrimination women suffer in Zimbabwean society also manifests itself in the decisions about which text has ‘literary value’ and which one lacks it, in a way that it ends up discriminating women’s writing: “in Zimbabwe, as in other parts of

Africa, patriarchal subordination of the female is reflected in the male domination of the literary arena, a situation that has always questioned the realism of female characterization in male fiction” (Uwakweh 75). Bearing this in mind, it is not surprising that a novel which breaks with those stereotypes and gives voice to the long-silenced women was not published straight away in such a context.

Due to the lack of female writing in Zimbabwe, the portraits of women in literature were done by men who usually made simplistic or idealised representations of female characters. The male-dominated literary scene entailed that the voice of Zimbabwean women had been silenced. The silencing of women always favours marginalisation and the negation of their rights and individual identity, as it “comprises all imposed restrictions on women’s social being, thinking and expressions that are religiously or culturally sanctioned” (Uwakweh 75). In this sense, as Tambu is the narrator in *Nervous Conditions*, the novel is appropriated by a female voice and perspective, which can be considered revolutionary in the context of Dangarembga’s homeland at the time *Nervous Conditions* was published. Pauline A. Uwakweh, in her essay entitled “Debunking Patriarchy”, explains the importance of using Tambu as the narrator in Dangaremba’s novel. She points out that the “self-referential nature of the autobiographical mode adopted by Dangarembga as a literary strategy marks her attainment of voice in the Zimbabwean male-dominated literary arena” (Uwakweh 75). In *Nervous Conditions* an African woman gains voice in a patriarchal society and she will also try to give voice to her other fellow women. This is highly important from a feminist perspective as it “proclaims an individual as a conscious being capable of independent thought and action” (Uwakweh 75).

Tambu is the narrator of her own text, which gives her authority over her own life and story. Her position as a narrator empowers Tambu and subverts patriarchal control. In addition, Dangarembga, through Tambu's narration, is giving voice to various African women.

Tambu narrates the events of the novel in an autobiographical form. She recalls the different events of her childhood and adolescence that have made possible for her to go to the Mission school in order to achieve her goal of having an education, and afterwards, to be selected to attend class in Sacred Heart – which allowed her to continue with her education in a more select environment. She recalls those early years as an adult, but she keeps her childhood perspective in the narrative, which gives realism to the narrative and clearly shows Tambu's psychological development. Because of her naive perspective, Tambu cannot be considered as a reliable narrator, since she lacks the understanding of many of the events that happen around her. Nevertheless, there is a development throughout the novel in her awareness of the reality around her. Her acquisition of a more critical view is reflected on how her vision and judgement about her environment evolve at the same time that she observes and analyses how it works. This observation of her family relationships and her interactions in the Mission and Sacred Heart lead her to gain conscience of her position as a woman and a colonised individual. Her attention to the lives of the other women of her family and, especially, her relationship with her precocious cousin Nyasha, the daughter of Babamukuru – who is the patriarchal figure in the story – accentuate her awareness that African women suffer a double colonisation.

As it was previously mentioned, *Nervous Conditions* presents different women of the same family. Tambu's female relatives do not share the same social position or age, though they all share the burden of being women in a patriarchal society – the “burdens” of “womanhood”, as Tambu's mother refers to it (Dangarembga 16). They also share among them, and with the male characters of the narrative, the fact that they are “natives” in a colonial, racist society. Nevertheless, though the male characters do suffer the oppression of the colonised individual, “A woman is twice marginalised in such a society because she is first a victim of the imperialist project and secondly she is at the periphery of a patriarchal order” (Bhattacharjee 49). All the female characters in the novel suffer the double oppression of colonised women, regardless of their social position.

In the first chapter, Tambu introduces the women of her family and explains that the story she is about to tell is not just her own but also the story of these women: “My story is not after all about death, but about my escape and Lucia's: about my mother's and Maiguru's entrapment; and about Nyasha's rebellion – Nyasha, far minded and isolated, my uncle's daughter, whose rebellion may not in the end have been successful” (Dangarembga 1). The women appear classified in three groups: the ones who escaped, the ones entrapped, and Nyasha is the only one who appears alone in the classification. This isolation of Nyasha can be considered one of the reasons why her rebellion did not succeed, but this question will be discussed in a later chapter of this dissertation. In addition to this categorization of the female family members by Tambu, women mirror each other in relation to the role they have in the family – mothers and daughters – in relation to the different generations to which they belong, and in relation to class, peasant

or bourgeois. There are also some parallelisms between them but each woman also has her particular situation. Tambu and Lucia are the ones who escape, and they do so thanks to education, though Maiguru – the highly educated mother of Nyasha – is one of the entrapped females. Nyasha is in a privileged position, in her cousin's view, as she lives in a wealthy environment and has the opportunity to study, but she is trapped between two worlds – English and Shona – and has problems defining her identity, especially because of her authoritative father.

As I mentioned above, Tambu's development and maturation are influenced by her relationship with the women of her family and the events in their lives. Susan Z. Andrade explains how Tambu's relationship with her mother, Ma'Shiganyi, encourages her to pursue an education. Ma'Shingayi, is a hardworking woman who has had a difficult life. She comes from a poor rural family and has had to do hard physical labour in the land during her whole life. Ma'Shingayi has lost her son Nhamo and she is also afraid that the "Englishness" will take her daughter away (Dangarembga 207). She resigns herself to her duties of mother and wife, which "obscure [her] individual personality, taste, and habits" (37). Her resignation makes her seem to suffer a pathological sadness. She helps Tambu by persuading her husband – Jeremiah – to let her grow maize in order to sell it and get money for the school fees. Later, Ma'Shiganyi encourages Tambu to continue studying in order to have better luck in life than she herself has had (37). A character that might be considered to be the opposite of Ma'Shingayi is her sister-in-law, Maiguru. However a closer analysis will show that both characters, in spite of their different class position, share the hardships of being black women in former Rhodesia. Maiguru is Babamukuru's educated wife, and

Dangarembga uses her to illustrate that education is not enough for a woman's liberation. It is after Tambu has been living for a while in her uncle and aunt's house that she discovers that her aunt has had the same studies as her uncle, Babamukuru. It surprises and saddens Tambu to know that "Maiguru had been deprived of the opportunity to make the most of herself, even if she had accepted that deprivation" (Dangarembga 103). Maiguru chooses her wife duties instead of her career. Moreover, Maiguru gives all her income to her husband so as to help his family. Towards the middle of the novel, she leaves their home after an argument with Babamakuru, only to come back days later to her husband, which disappoints her daughter terribly. However, it is at least a small act of resistance that, even when it is not done successfully, helps Maiguru to negotiate her position in her relationship with her husband. It is interesting that, in spite of their visible differences, the two mothers in *Nervous Conditions* are dominated by their roles as wives and mothers (Andrade 39). The female character that completely breaks the stereotypes that can still be seen in both mothers – especially in Tambu's – is aunt Lucia, Ma'Shingayi's sister. Lucia, very much like Ma'Shingayi, is a hardworking woman who has to struggle against poverty as well as against women's "burdens" (Dangarembga 16). In opposition to her sister, Lucia is still full of vitality and energy to rebel against the unjust impositions that Babamukuru – as the representative of patriarchy – tries to enforce on her. She is also able to understand how she can do things in her own way, as she knows how to coax Babamukuru and convince him in her benefit. Lucia is the only female adult of the family who is not married, which is what makes her "free precisely because she is not responsible to a husband and, as a 'barren' woman, is not

hampered by the burdens of reproduction” (Andrade 39). In addition, another fact that presents Lucia as a liberated woman is the fact that she feels free to enjoy her sexuality, even when the other members of the family do not approve of her behaviour. She embraces her sexuality “her body had appetites of which she was not ashamed” (Dangarembga 155). Lucia is able to escape because she convinces Babamukuru to let her work and study in the Mission. She is an example of an independent woman. However, it is to the relationship between Tambu and her cousin Nyasha that the novel pays most attention. In the cousins’ relationship, Nyasha points out to Tambu many of the issues which Tambu is not able to acknowledge, because of lack of perspective or because she is too worried of the consequences that her reflections might lead her into

it was easy for me to leave tangled thoughts knotted, their loose ends hanging. I didn’t want to explore the treacherous mazes that such thoughts led into. I didn’t want to reach the end of those mazes, because there, I knew I would find myself and I was afraid I would not recognise myself after having taken so many confusing directions. (Dangarembga 118)

Tambu is in a comfortable position once she is taken by her uncle and she does not want to upset him or do anything that will break the spell of her new life. Nyasha has the critical voice that opens Tambu’s eyes, or as Andrade puts it “Nyasha is her mentor in matters intellectual and political” and after Nyasha’s breakdown and Tambu’s return to Sacred Heart, the trigger of Tambu’s deeper reflections will be activated (97).

It is also important to analyse the relationship Tambu has with the male characters of the novel, as it is also key for her development and behaviour.

Tambu's father, Jeremiah, has no ambition to send her daughter to school; he does not even like her daughter's eagerness for an education. The father's lack of understanding of her daughter's needs, makes Tambu realise from an early age that "the needs and sensibilities of the women in my family were not considered a priority, or even legitimate" (Dangarembga 12). It is not until Tambu's brother dies that she is able to go to the mission school, as she is taken under the protection of her uncle, who wants to uplift the family by helping one of his brother's children. Tambu starts her narrative with the striking sentence "I was not sorry when my brother died" (Dangarembga 1). It is not easy for the reader to understand, until she later explains it, that it was thanks to her brother's death that she could "escape". Tambu also depicts her brother as an obnoxious child with whom the reader cannot sympathise easily. Tambu's relationship with Babamukuru is the one that influences her the most. She sees her uncle as someone to look up to, a self-made man. He comes from the same humble origin as hers and since he had the opportunity to study, he is now the headmaster of the Mission. It is because of the example of her uncle that she realises the importance of an education. When she is taken under the protection of Babamakuru, what she had so long fought and longed for becomes a reality. She is grateful to her uncle, her saviour, and she wants to be a good student and 'daughter' to him. On the first evening she is in their home, Babamukuru has a talk with Tambu in which he tells her how to be a "good woman": "To be good, to listen to what we, your parents, tell you to do, to study your books diligently and not let your mind be distracted by other things" (Dangarembga 89). Tambu already had the desire of learning in her, but the concern to please her uncle in order to show her gratefulness makes

her lose the strength and initiative she has at the beginning of the novel – when she is determined to have the same right as her brother to go to school.

As it has been shown, Tambu is deeply influenced by her interactions with and observation of the secondary characters. As a child she undertakes a type of rebellion by struggling to get the money for her studies by growing and selling maize in order to get the money to pay the tuition fees. Later, as a teenager, she is quieter and tries to please her uncle, at the same time that she struggles to understand the knowledge of the world that her cousin imparts on her. At the end of the novel there is an open ending, in which Tambu lets the reader know that her growth is still in process and that, with time, she has started to understand what Nyasha explained about their position as colonised women and about the other colonised individuals: “Quietly. Unobtrusively and extremely fitfully, something in my mind began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed” (Dangarembga 208). In *Nervous Conditions* it is shown how Tambu grows through the novel, how she gains maturity, and how she is able to acquire her goal – an education – and the consequences this has for her. For this reason, the novel has sometimes been classified as a Bildungsroman. It is interesting that Tambu’s critical views are not always clearly verbalised, as she plays more the role of an observer, however, she will show her perplexity when she witnesses the unfair actions of Babamakuro, the male figure she looks up to, and she will even show a quiet resistance to his decision of her parents’ Christian wedding by not attending it.

Going back to the question of voices in the novel, it is appropriate to do an analysis of the novel through the perspective of Subaltern Studies. The depiction

of women made in the novel is made from a female perspective, which will break with the previous stereotypes and give a new insight into the representation of African women: a more realistic, non-idealised or stereotyped one – as is often the case with male authors or even western female writers. In Linda E. Chown's essay "Two Disconnected Entities" she states that in *Nervous Conditions* the subaltern can speak (239). She argues that in the novel the subaltern does have a voice since "Tambu speaks, remembers; she revels in the story, her story, what she has told, said, thought and written" (239). Nevertheless, it is necessary to argue whether Tambu is an example of a subaltern or not. "Subaltern" is understood as a marginalised individual, the oppressed, the person outside the hegemonic group, "a group defined by its difference from the élite" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffi 200). Tambu has humble origins, a rural Shona girl in former Rhodesia. Nevertheless, her class position changes completely when she is taken under the protection of her uncle and becomes one of the few Shona girls who can get an education. Though the story has an open ending, it is assumed that she will further her studies – even if the existence of a sequel, *The Book of Not*, is not taken into account. This means that Tambu becomes a girl belonging to the educated African élite. Hence, Tambu cannot be easily classified as a subaltern, or at least not as a "true" subaltern. She is in a different social position from that of poor, uneducated black Africans and is alienated from them through education, though the native élite in the colonial context are also in the periphery of history (Bhattacharajee 47). However, if the category of subaltern is analysed according to the definition which Gayatri Spivak gives it in *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, Tambu clearly would not belong to this group, since to be

classified as a subaltern would mean “to be removed from all lines of social mobility” (430).

The several examples of subaltern women we find in the novel will be Lucia – this could perhaps also be arguable since she goes to the Mission school – Tambu’s mother and sisters, and Anna, the servant girl. The question that might be asked is whether these women do have a voice in the novel. In the famous essay by Spivak “Can the Subaltern Speak?” she states that “The subaltern cannot speak” (104). This statement has sometimes been misinterpreted and understood as the impossibility of the subaltern to have a voice, but is rather referring to whether this voice can be heard and to the problematic construction of the subaltern’s voice (Aschroft, Gareth and Tiffin 201). In the novel, Tambu is narrating different events in which the women of her family took part and she is transmitting to the readers the statements and moods these women had, she is transmitting their endeavour to resist or their loss of strength. As an instance, Tambu carefully reproduces different statements that show her mother’s sorrow and struggle – which Ma’Shiganyì rarely verbalises as she feels defeated – as when she worries after Tambu’s first going to the Mission and then to Sacred Heart, or this instance in which she shows her resignation after years suffering a double oppression, the burden of a colonised woman:

“Does it matter what I want? . . . Do you think I wanted to be impregnated by that old dog? . . . Do you really think I wanted to travel all this way across this country of our forefathers only to live in dirt and poverty? Do you really think I wanted the child for whom I made the journey to die only five years after it left the womb? Or my son to be taken from me? . . . It is all the same. What I have endured for nineteen years I can endure for another nineteen, and nineteen more if need be. (Dangarembga 155)

Neither Lucia nor Ma'Shingayi or Tambu's sisters tell their story themselves – Anna does not appear often in the narrative, so Tambu does not reflect much of her thoughts – but they are an important part of the narration of *Nervous Conditions*, and as such, they are shown to the reader in a way that allows them to understand these female characters and have a closer look at their reality in the novel, which is a representation of various types of African women. Through Tambu's narration, Dangarembga tries to give voice to the African women outside the hegemonic group. One could argue that Dangarembga is not a subaltern herself either, but her realistic portrait of this family microcosm which can be exported to a broader African reality, makes her novel a faithful portrait of the realities of different African women, to whom she gives voice and thus allows the subaltern women to be heard.

As it has been shown, Dangarembga uses the diverse female characters in her novel to provide non-stereotyped portraits of African women and of Third World women. She tries to give a realistic approach to their circumstances. As she has stated in one of her interviews “the one thing I was very concerned with was to leave a very real taste of life during the times that I grew up” (George, Scott and Dangarembga 311). It is highly important that an African female voice can represent African women, and in this way help to create an African feminist discourse, in order to avoid the sometimes mislead western feminist constructions of the realities of the Third World woman which

western feminisms appropriate and colonize the constitutive complexities which characterize the lives of women in these countries . . . [in a] process of discursive

homogenization and systematization of the oppression of women in the third world
(Mohanty 51)

2. Education and Mimicry

In this chapter I will analyse examples of the different strategies of colonial domination reflected in *Nervous Conditions*. I will pay especial attention to the school system, since the importance of education and the negative consequences of the colonial school system is a dominant theme in the novel. The analysis of this chapter reflects on how these domination strategies influence different behaviours of the colonised individuals, leading to the phenomena known as “mimicry”. My analysis will pay especial attention to how the relation between the autochthonous population and the western colonial values increases the confusion of the identity that the colonised individual has of his or herself.

As an example of a postcolonial novel – as it was published when the country was no longer a colony – *Nervous Conditions* pays attention to the relationship between the colonised and the coloniser’s culture. There are various examples in the novel of how the hegemonic culture influences the indigenous population and the ways in which they have to interact with it. The different strategies of the colonisers to impose their culture will end up in not just an expressly political colonisation – ruling land and people, and applying physical coercion – but also a psychological one, which can lead into the colonised rejecting his or her own culture or looking down on it, which leads to the

appearance of behaviours such as what Homi K. Bhabha defined as mimicry – when the colonised mimics the habits of the coloniser. As the shrewd Nyasha states to her cousin Tambu “It is bad enough ... when a country gets colonised, but when the people do as well! That’s the end, really, that’s the end” (Dangarembga 150). The colonisation of the “people” will imply that the metropolitan hegemonic values of the settlers’ minority have been accepted by the colonised population, and the decolonisation of the mind, of those new values and ideas, will be more difficult to undertake than the decolonisation of the country.

One of the most effective ways to impose the coloniser’s values is through teaching institutions, as Hena Ahmad points out “The task of psychological decolonization is made complicated and difficult, the text indicates, by the educational system which fosters values that generate a sense superiority that goes along with the teaching of English literature in the colonial context” (57). The issues concerning the dominant theme of the novel, Tambu’s pursuit of an education, exemplify how schools can educate on the values and culture of the empire. As it is shown in the novel, not all Rhodesian children had the opportunity to go to school, among other reasons because of the cost of the teaching fees that many families could not afford. Moreover, even a more reduced group of Zimbabweans would have the opportunity to attend school lessons in an institution such as Sacred Heart – a European religious school in the novel – which only allowed a small percentage of those with the best academic results to enrol in the school courses. This inaccessibility to enter the educational system for the people of Zimbabwe was due to “[t]he discriminatory strategies underlying the rules and laws governing the hierarchal educational system” which “perpetuated

the subjugation of the Zimbabwean people by only educating a few” (Ahmad 66). The indigenous Zimbabweans that went through this process would become eventually educated, and perhaps even able to take a master’s degree in the United Kingdom – as Babamukuru and Maiguru – but they would also suffer the trauma of becoming an alienated educated African, and even lose their part of their self-identity during the process.

Nevertheless, the school system under colonial rule plays an ambiguous role for the natives, as it also gives them the opportunity to climb up the social ladder. From their privileged position, they were supposedly given the opportunity to help their relatives and community fellows. The educated member of the family – usually a man – will act as the benefactor or patriarch. He will be in a position which empowers him and gives him high responsibility, as he will look after the wellbeing of the family. In addition, education would also help a Shona girl, as Tambu, to gain a certain emancipation, and could even help her to free herself from an imposed gender role, women’s “burdens” (Dangarembga 16). Tambu wants to benefit from an education as she infers, from an early age in her uncle’s example, that "being tutored in Western ‘wizardry’ meant access to power, however limited, and improved living standards” (Nair 134). Moreover, in the position that she occupies as a woman within the Shona community, to study and become educated will help her to achieve emancipation, or at least to put her in a position in which it will be easier to obtain it. However, as it is shown in the example of Maiguru “education is certainly one means whereby a woman can empower herself and effect social change, although acquiring an education does not necessarily guarantee these gains” (Ahmad 70).

In the novel the character who plays the role of the educated African becomes his family's benefactor is Babamukuru, meaning "great father". He is the one who provides to one of his brother's children the opportunity to study in the Mission and to live with his wife and son and daughter, as if Nhamo and later Tambu were his own children. The purpose of doing so is, in the first place, to assist the family and make sure that someone of the next generation will be able to continue helping the relatives to move up the social ladder. In the novel it was Nhamo the one who, before his illness and death, was taken in by Babamukuru. Nhamo was chosen because he was the male of Jeremiah's children, which makes the privilege of education a male one, men who help other men, "an inherited tradition, a patriarchal investment that allows the man to play primary breadwinner" (Nair 134).

In Shona tradition, when a woman married all the possible profit that she could earn while working would go to her husband's family – as is the case of Maiguru, who gives her entire salary to her husband. This is one of the reasons why Tambu's education lacks importance for her father, who knows that he will not be able to profit from her daughter's position once she is married. In addition, Tambu's eagerness to study is not understood by her father, who thinks that a woman's place is at home taking care of her husband and children, and, as well, that it will be more valuable for her daughter to learn how to be a good wife, as shows his response to Tambu's yearning for going to the Mission School: "Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables." (Dangarembga 15). Nevertheless, after Nhamo's death, the moral responsibility of the family's educated member is

to uplift another one of his brother's children. Babamukuru and Jeremiah finally agree that Tambu should study because the family will be able to profit from the benefits of her education before she marries.

As was previously stated, schooling in the colonial context introduces colonial discourse into the students' minds effectively. In *Nervous Conditions* all characters who are exposed to Rhodesia's education system suffer the consequences of the intrusion of western colonial culture in opposition to their traditional culture. The characters that do not go to the colonial school will also be affected by the decisions that the educated élite makes about their lives. Dangarembga exemplifies different consequences in the behaviour of the characters who go to the colonial school in a way which shows its dangers as well as its possible benefits.

In the case of Nhamo, he was negatively affected by the exposure to western culture, both at school and at the bourgeois home of his uncle. Tambu narrates, in the first chapters of the novel, how her brother changes after he starts living in his uncle's house. He comes back to his parent's home a stranger who does not help his sisters and locks himself in his room with his books. He spurns the house where he used to live and his parents and sisters:

All the poverty began to offend him, or at the very least to embarrass him after he went to the mission, in a way that it had not done before . . . But then something that he saw at the mission turned his mind to think that our homestead no longer had any claim upon him, so that when he did come home for his vacations, it was as if he had not: he was not very sociable. Helping in the fields or with the livestock or the firewood, any of the tasks he used to do willingly before he went to the mission, became a bad joke (Dangarembga 7)

Nhamo becomes indifferent to his parents and sisters. He reveals himself snob and shows an evident lack of sympathy about Tambu's struggle for an education. In fact, he sabotages his sister's plan of selling maize to make some money for her future school fees, by stealing and giving it out to his class mates. In the depiction of Nhamo's behaviour it is clear that he would not have played fairly his role of the educated benefactor, as he was seduced by the new culture in which he lived and lost touch with his origins.

On the other hand, in the case of Tambu, her determination to go to Sacred Heart – the place in the novel where the racial segregation of Rhodesia is firstly shown – leads her to not ignore to her cousin's warning of the dangers of the education in the convent, where she might “forget who you were, what you were and why you were that” (Dangarembga 182). Nyasha tries to tell her cousin that the convent education will lead to Tambu's assimilation and alienation. Nyasha suffers these maladies herself after the years she spent in England, which in addition to the relationship she has with her authoritative father will cause her terrible nervous breakdown and her ‘bulimia’. Her cousin's warning does not persuade Tambu who

unaware as yet that the anglicized colonial education would alienate her from her family and culture, sees the fortuitous opportunity afforded by the convent, not only as a chance to emancipate her family, but to acquire Nyasha's learning, sophistication, intellectual acumen and zeal, to become more like Nyasha whom she sees almost as an alter ego. (Ahmad 68)

Supriya Nair in her essay “Melancholic Women: The intellectual hysteric(s) in *Nervous Conditions*” points out that though Tambu's desire for an education can

be understood as “a desire for bourgeois status and colonial capital”, she finds it necessary to “historicize her decision and underline it as a determined choice to transform the homestead while at the same time being aware of her limited options” (135). Nair states that it is easy to criticise, from a western point of view, the bourgeois desire of comfort by a Third World woman, especially when the situation in the west is radically different from the one represented in the novel –a situation which already enjoys the comfort that the main character wants to achieve (135-136). However, Tambu’s experience in *Secret Heart* will lead to the self-alienation that Nyasha wanted to protect her cousin from.

The conflict between western education and Shona tradition has a remarkable effect on Babamukuru. His education gives him the role of the patriarch, which shows the tension between modernity and tradition in the novel. As Frank Schulze-Engler states, when he refers to the figure of the patriarch in the novel and emphasizes how colonial structures change traditional society, the figure of the patriarch “is not a venerable village elder [any longer] but the middle-aged headmaster of the mission school Tambuzai eventually attends” (29). Babamukuru is influenced by the two cultures he has been in touch with, Shona and western Christianity. His relationship with the family’s women, especially with his daughter “demonstrates both the ‘colonial’ and ‘traditional’ sides of his character, dictating what constitutes being good, what constitutes sin, and how a woman should conduct herself” (Ahmad 61). Ahmad comments on the episode in which he harshly punishes his daughter – Nyasha is beaten by her father – because she has not behaved according to his Christian and traditional patriarchal Shona values: “Christian and patriarchal values in Babamukuru’s condemnation of his

daughter, Nyasha, for wearing a short dress and for being alone with a date [. . .] suggested to her father a defiance of Christian decorum and patriarchal honour” (58). However, the education he has received in the Mission will influence his attitude towards different aspects of the Shona culture, such as the “the spirit media– whom he refers to as “witch doctors” and the importance he gives to Christian morals” (Shulze-Engler 32).

In the novel, one the most obvious results of the interactions of both cultures is reflected in the coexistence of English and Shona. As Anne Donadey states in her essay “Overlapping and Interlocking Frames for Humanities Literary Studies”: “The characters are all in a hybrid space between the two languages and cultures” (Donadey 33). Although *Nervous Conditions* is written in English, Dangarembga makes use of different Shona words – names of food, family name of the characters, and different objects found inside the house – and she is also able to show how the different languages interact. When Tambu moves to her uncle’s she is confused about which language she should use in her anglicised uncle’s homestead. Conversations in which both languages interfere will be usual in the narrative and more habitual after Tambu moves to her uncle’s house. In the first evening she spends there she is insecure of which one is appropriate to use, and a similar confusion happens with Nyasha and Maiguru:

“‘Good evening Baba,’ Maiguru greeted him in Shona.

‘Good evening Daddy,’ Nyasha said in English.

‘Good evening, Babamukuru’ I said, mixing the two languages because I was not sure which was most appropriate (Dangarembga 81).

The other characters in Babamukuru's home also use both languages alternatively, as in the episode in which Babamakuru hits his daughter and Maiguru uses her mother tongue as it is a moment of tension full of deep emotions: " 'No, Babawa Chido, kani' pleaded Maiguru. 'If you must kill somebody, kill me.'" (Dangarembga 117). It is also visible how the disuse of Shona is a clear sign of the loss of traditional identity. For instance, when Chido and Nyasha come back from England, they have forgotten how to speak Shona correctly. Moreover, the identification of language and identity is made even more clear when Tambu's mother, anxious about the possible loss of her daughter as the girl whom she knows, asks her " Tell me, my daughter, what will I, your mother say to you when you come home a stranger full of white ways and ideas? It will be English, English all the time" (Dangarembga 187).

As it was stated in the introduction of this chapter, one of the consequences of the interaction of the colonised with both cultures is the appearance of the phenomena of mimicry. Is a concept formulated by the theoriser of postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha in his work *The Location of Culture*, first published in 1994. In *The Location of Culture* Bhabha states that

Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers. (86)

Mimicry is produced when the colonised one reproduces conducts and ideas of colonial discourse. The colonised copies – mimics – the coloniser. It can be understood as a proof of colonial supremacy, as this reproduction of the coloniser's culture can make mimicry seem "as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power" (Bhabha 85). However, a closer analysis will show that mimicry, rather than strengthening colonial power may weaken it, as it is often closer to a parody of colonial habits and values than exaltation (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 139). In addition to this, the concept of mimicry is of high interest in postcolonial studies as it "reveals the limitations in the authority of the colonial discourse, almost as though colonial authority inevitable embodies the seeds of its own destruction" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 140).

One example of this phenomenon found in the novel is when Tambu starts living with her uncle and tries to speak in her incorrect English mixing it with her mother tongue. She copies the behaviour of the rest of her uncle's family, who at the same time are influenced by western culture. Nevertheless, the most outstanding example of mimicry in the novel is the episode of the imposed Christian Wedding of Tambu's parents. After twenty years of marriage Babamukuru decides that Tambu's parents should have a Christian wedding in order to sanctify their union, and because, in a superstitious way he believes that it will be the solution to a series of family problems due to the misconduct of his kinship

For a long time these misfortunes have been on my mind [...] But rather than say they are the result of an evil spirit that someone has sent among us, I have been thinking they are the result of something that we are doing that we should not be doing, or the result of

something that we are not doing that we should be doing. That is how we are judged, and blessed accordingly [...] I remembered that our mother, our mother always insisted that Jeremiah must have a church wedding before God. This is a serious matter, so I have been saving a little, a very little bit of money for a wedding for you and Mainini.
(Dangarembga 149)

Babamukuru's decision shows contempt towards his own culture in favour of western values, as Ahmad expounds: "Babamukuru's internalization of colonial cultural ideology is testified to by his insistence that his brother legitimize his twenty-year marriage by undergoing a Christian Church wedding to atone for living 'in sin'" (61). Tambu herself is at first pleased with the idea of the wedding, because she considers Babamukuru to always deliver wise judgements. However, as the wedding date is approaches, she starts to feel uneasy about it, "Whenever I thought about it, whenever images of my mother immaculate in virginal white satin [. . .] I suffered a horrible crawling over my skin, my chest contracted to a breathless tension and even my bowels threatened to let me know their opinion" (Dangaremba 151). Tambu slowly realises that she is feeling strongly against her parents' wedding, and starts to see it as something that "made a mockery of the people I belonged to and placed doubt on my legitimate existence in this world [...] I simply did not believe these lies" (Dangarembga 165). Tambu realises that the celebration of a wedding delegitimises her parents' marriage, which was a union done following the Shona tradition – her tradition and the tradition of her family. To impose a western marriage claiming that her parents' union was sinful was something she could not tolerate. In addition to this, there is the feeling of performing a ridiculous play as in a theatre, a copy of a ceremony which is only done because the powerful member of the family is educated in the colonial

values and codes which he thinks he must adhere to. The way in which the narrator explains the how the wedding is described by the people who attended it shows clear irony “By all accounts the bride [...] was as happy as anybody [...] My father cutting a dashing figure!” (Dangarembga 170). Even though Babamukuru’s intention was to perform a solemn act for his family in accordance with his Christian morals, the final result seems to be a ridiculous performance, a copy of a foreign ritual.

3. Identity Confusion and the Nervous Condition

As was explained in previous chapters, in *Nervous Conditions* Dangarembga explores the question of how colonial schooling can lead to the alienation of the educated colonised élite, as well as the difficulties for the colonised to not to lose his or her identity in the situation of hybridity which is produced under colonialism. In order to see in depth how these concepts are treated in the novel, it is convenient to provide a more careful analysis of Nyasha. In the character of Nyasha, Dangarembga shows the effects of colonialism at a sociological and a psychological level, as this is the character who best reflects the results of the phenomenon of “hybridity”, which in addition to her self alienation trigger her nervous breakdown. In this chapter Nyasha will be compared to the ‘escaped’ female characters, and the causes of her nervous breakdown will be analysed.

Firstly, it is necessary to explain two concepts: ethnicity and hybridity. Ethnicity is a broad term that overcomes the narrow biologically determined term of race. Richard Alonzo Schermerhorn defines ethnicity as:

A collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry (that is, memories of a shared historical past whether of origins or of historical experiences such as colonization, immigration, invasion or slavery); a shared consciousness of a separate, named, group identity; and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as

the epitome of their peoplehood. These features will always be in dynamic combination, relative to the particular time and place in which they are experienced and operate consciously or unconsciously for the political advancement of the group. (Schermerhorn 12)

It is remarkably important in this definition that the characteristics of an ethnic group are in a “dynamic combination” to understand the cultural problems in the novel. The features that make an individual belong to a determined ethnic group evolve. The fact that an individual has a particular nationality or certain biological characteristics does not make him or her belong to an ethnic group. Nyasha, though born a Shona from Shona parents, finds herself an alien to her parents’ and her own culture. She lacks the knowledge of the behavioural codes that she has to adopt in family gatherings. In addition, she has forgotten most of her original language and her English is also different from the English spoken by the other children in the Mission, so her westernization makes her be marginalised by her fellow school mates. Nyasha finds herself a stranger in her own home and country.

In relation to the question of ethnicity as the notion of belonging to a particular culture, Nyasha, like the rest of the characters in the novel, finds herself in a situation in between two different cultures, western culture and Shona. However, as it has been illustrated, in the case of Nyasha this interference of the west and Shona culture is stronger due to her migration to the United Kingdom with her brother and parents, while they studied their master’s degree. However, Nyasha’s experience in the metropolis makes it possible for her to have different models of societies and customs to compare, as “migration can involve forms of

domination as well as liberation and can give rise to blinkered visions as well as epiphanies” (Smith 246). Her wider view of the world and her natural intelligence make her have a precocious capacity to analyse her environment and to develop a critical thought of the situation she and her family have to endure, especially her female relatives. On the other hand, the fact that she lived at an early age in another country makes it more difficult for her to adapt again to her position as an African woman in Rhodesia, she is more affected by “Englishness” (Dangarembga 207). The term used by Ma’Shiganyi as a malady “Englishness”, encloses all the western influences that make the characters be in a situation of hybridity. Hybridity is caused by the interaction of different cultures in a common context. There will be an influence between them which will lead to “the creation of new transcultural forms” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 118).

In the first chapter, when Tambu is starting to tell her story, she introduces the other female characters, among them, Nyasha. She is said to have not succeeded in her rebellion, which makes her be in opposition to Lucia and Tambu. Lucia and Tambu are the only women who are able to change – escape – from their previous situation at the beginning of the novel to an improved one (Dangarembga 1). Bearing in mind the privileged position Nyasha enjoys in comparison with the other characters – as she belongs to a wealthier family and her position guarantees her to be educated, in addition to her broader view of the world and experience – Nyasha makes us wonder why a character who seems to departure from a more privileged position should fail in her rebellion, and not manage to be part of the escaped ones.

In the first chapter of her narration, Tambu already hints at one of the reasons for this failure, “Nyasha, far minded and isolated” (Dangarembga 1). Throughout the novel, it is visible that Nyasha suffers a high isolation from the other characters. This isolation is already shown at the start of the narrative, as she is not even classified in any of the two previous groups in which Tambu categorizes the women of her family: escaped or entrapped (Dangarembga 1). Her isolation is directly related to the years she spent in England. As it was discussed in an earlier chapter, western education had the disadvantage of isolation, moreover, in the case of Nyasha, her years in England make her lose touch with her culture. These two factors make her suffer a loss of identity, as she does not belong in the metropolis and she is a foreigner in her own country.

Different critics have argued about the question of the loss of identity as one of the reasons of Nyasha’s failed rebellion, especially when comparing Nyasha and Tambu. Maggie Philips, among others, points out one of the differences between the two cousins, as Tambu is more rooted in their mother culture than Nyasha: “Tambu’s family, though poor, maintains a direct link with traditional subsistence farming and customs, which provides the solid ground on which Tambu makes clear, practical decisions about her feminine rebellion” (Phillips 99). In addition, in the relationship Tambu had with her grandmother she could learn about the family history and be more in touch with her heritage, in order not to lose her identity. “Nyasha, on the other hand, is born into the Europeanized, wealthy, and educated side of the family and suffers, due to childhood years spent in England, from the loss of indigenous language, history and, consequently, personal identity.” (Phillips 99). When Chido and Nyasha

return with their parents to Rhodesia they have lost their language and they lack the knowledge of many of Shona customs – which makes it impossible for them to join the family welcome celebrations when they come back, as they are not able to communicate with the rest of the family. They acquire a situation of perpetual exile, as Supulka Bhattacharjee points out “[i]n exile from their past, they also found themselves in exile from their future” (46). In opposition to Tambu, Nyasha has lost most references that made her familiar with Shona culture.

In order to analyse further the reasons for Nyasha’s failed rebellion it is relevant to compare Nyasha to the other rebellious character of the novel, Lucia. Lucia could be seen as a character closer to Nyasha in her defiant attitudes towards patriarchal impositions. Lucia is the only female character of the older generation who is not married, and the only character that is referred to by her name and not by a family title. Because of her single status she can act freely, without the weight of women’s burdens, which makes her “the only character who is not suffering from a nervous condition” (Donadey 31). Lucia speaks her mind freely, objects and claims, as Nyasha tries to do, but Lucia does get away with it because she does not have to obey any men, not even Babamukuru, by whose power she does not feel intimidated. Babamukuru is aware of Lucia’s strength and free will, “she is like a man herself” (Dangarembga 174). Lucia is able to manipulate the patriarch to get what she wants – as when she convinces Babamukuru to give her a job in the Mission – because she understands how Shona society works, unlike Nyasha. Lucia’s wit to act her own way proves that, “traditional structures of patriarchy nevertheless permit women spaces of resistance” (Andrade 97).

What makes the outcome of Lucia and Nyasha's resistance completely different is the fact that Nyasha, who is influenced by her western education, is not able to dialogue with her father, she is not able to persuade him and there is always a cultural clash between them. An instance of this is the already mentioned example of the episode in which Nyasha and her father have a confrontation because she was out late with one boy, as Nyasha tells her father that "'you've told me how I should behave. I don't worry what people think so there's no need for you to.' She did not know her father either, because anyone who did would have retreated at that stage." (Dangarembga 116). Since Babamukuro plays the role of the community's benefactor and is the closer native to colonial power, he is a solemn figure, and he cares about reflecting that image. In addition, he is the authoritative figure of the community and of the household; he does not tolerate what he considers his daughter's disrespectful manners. It is difficult for Nyasha to behave meekly or to successfully lure her father without having a confrontation. Nyasha is not able to adapt herself to the patriarchal Shona culture, not even able to follow the example of Lucia, who is able to create strategies to succeed. As for Tambu, in her role of the family's observer, "[u]nlike Nyasha who is largely disgusted with the status of the women in the family, Tambu senses their strength in their particular methods of resistance and learns from each one while forming her own distinct identity" (Nair 138).

In the novel, one of the most important resisting strategies of the female characters against patriarchy, as well as against the threat of isolation, is female bonding. By bonding, the women create alliances that make them help and support each other. As the feminist critic, Audre Lorde points out in her essay

‘The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House’, the bonding strategy is highly important as a feminist strategy of resistance, since “[f]or women, the need and desire to nurture each other is not pathological but redemptive, and it is within that knowledge that our real power is rediscovered. It is this real connection, which is so feared by a patriarchal world.” (Lorde 26). As a way of opposing patriarchy, women need each other in order to learn from their differences, and to become stronger and find ways of resistance. In the relationship of the two cousins there is one of the clearer examples of women’s bonding in the novel. Nyasha illustrates Tambu with her observations on the colonial society, helping Tambu to develop a political awareness of their situation as colonised women, and, at the same time, Tambu teaches Nyasha about the things she has forgotten or not learned about her mother culture, helping Nyasha to get more in touch with her identity. There is a sort of dependency between both cousins, which makes Nyasha more vulnerable when Tambu leaves for Sacred Heart and finds herself without an ally, so her “nervous conditions” get worse and eventually has a nervous breakdown. As Nyasha has to struggle alone, without the support of her cousin, who is also the one who ties her to her culture, “[t]he novel makes it clear that by following western individualist paths, the characters risk cultural alienation and death; westernization cannot be easily equated with female liberation.” (Donadey 32).

However, in the novel, the consequences of the loss of identity and alienation are explored from a more psychological than sociological perspective in the character of Nyasha. Through the novel, Nyasha develops what at a first impression might be seen as a case of bulimia. She starts to lock herself in the

toilet after each supper to bring up the meal she has eaten at the dinner's table with her family. There are instances in the novel that show how Nyasha is influenced by the western beauty canon, as at different moments it is stated that Nyasha likes the figure of thin women. As Tambu points out more than once: "I knew that she preferred bones to bounce" (Dangarembga 202). However, to reduce Nyasha's breakdown to a western influence will be to simplify the psychological problems this character experiments after she returns to Rhodesia. A closer analysis to Nyasha's sickness will lead to another conclusion.

As it was discussed before, the father and daughter's relationship consists in Babamukuru trying to impose his authority to his daughter and Nyasha trying to make herself heard and understood, in order to negotiate her position in the cultural and identity confusion she experiments. The moment in which most arguments between father and daughter take place is at dinner time, when the family gathers around the table. Babamukuru will end up imposing his force by making his daughter eat the food. The only way in which Nyasha can show her resistance will be by throwing it up. "Nyasha [. . .] has the status of "hybrid" caught between two cultures, and anorexia is seen as a deeply compromised attempt to control body and life in the face of colonial and patriarchal authority [which Babamukuru represents]" (Zwicker 15). Finding herself alone, without the help of her mother, and with Tambu gone to Sacred Heart, Nyasha's condition gets progressively worse. When Tambu goes back to the Mission during her holidays, she witnesses her cousin's nervous breakdown. Sleepless, at daybreak, Nyasha desperately tries to explain to her cousin what it is happening to her

'I don't want to do it, Tambu, really I don't, but it's coming, I feel it coming' [. . .] 'They've done it to me.' [. . .] 'It's not their fault. They did it to them too. You know they did,' [. . .] 'To both of them, but especially to him. They put him through it all. But it's not his fault, he's good' [. . .] 'He's a good boy, a good munt. A bloody good kaffir' [. . .] 'Why do they do it Tambu,' [. . .] 'to me and to you and to him? Do you see what they've done? They've taken us away. Lucia. Taksesuke. All of us. They've deprived you of you, him of him, ourselves of each other. We're grovelling...I won't grovel, Oh no, I won't. I'm not a good girl. I'm evil. I'm not a good girl' [. . .] 'I won't grovel, I won't die.'

(Dangarembga 204-205)

Nyasha struggles between being a good daughter and not being an “underdog” (Dangarembga 205). The desire to please her father, to be accepted by him, leads her to over worry about her exams, which is the way she finds to be the “good girl” her father wants her to be. However, she is not able to study the official history of her books, which do not tell the truths about colonialism, but the imperial version of history ““their history. Fucking liars. Their bloody lies”“(Dangarembga 205). To be the “good girl” means to embrace the hegemonic power without resistance. As Andrade explains “Nyasha [. . .] incarnates all the problems with women's access to development: she's the exceptional woman [. . .] doomed either to transgress and be punished, or to suffer a life in which she does not believe” (29). Her situation, as well as that of her parents, is related to the relation Babamukuru has with the hegemonic power. The reason why he was uplifted was because he acted as a “good kaffir”. He was mellow and did what he was told to do inside the colonial racist system of Rhodesia. She does not want to be broken by colonial power, but she is aware that she has already been broken.

Dangarembga, who did not read Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* until she finished the novel's manuscript, used one of Jean Paul Sartre's statements of his preface for the *Wretched of the Earth* for the title: "The condition of the native is a nervous condition" (20). Dangarembga does follow a similar thesis to the one made by Franz Fanon, as she is also interested in examining the way in which colonialism affects the colonised psychologically (Zwicker 10). However, Dangarembga examines the question of gender in colonialism – which Fanon did not pay much attention to – and the way in which the violence of colonial power affects women. Nyasha is the clearest example of how the psyche of the colonised is affected. Powerless, unable to resist, she can only control her body, which makes the female body "[become] the ground on which violent struggles over identity take place and through which resistance is articulated". (Zwicker 13).

4. Conclusions

As I have shown, in *Nervous Conditions* Dangarembga presents the members of a Shona family in the times of former Rhodesia so as to illustrate the different ways in which colonisation affects the colonised at a social and a psychological level. Dangarembga explores how the interiorization of colonial discourse by the colonised – which in the novel is imposed through colonial education – causes him or her to be in a situation of hybridity, due to which the traditional ethnic identity and culture will be lost in favour of new forms of transcultural identities. This identity confusion will lead to the appearance of mimicry, as manifestation of contempt towards the traditional culture.

All the characters in the novel are exposed to colonial power, nevertheless, *Nervous Conditions* pays special attention to colonised women, whose plights have often been silenced in analyses that neglect the differences in the situation of men and women. Gender-blind analyses ignore evident genre inequalities and fail to notice the double oppression of women or portray the colonised women in a stereotypical way. Thus, in order to explore the psychological damage caused by colonialism, Dangarembga uses the character of the anglicised Nyasha, and adopts an approach which deals with both colonialism and patriarchal oppression. In addition, Dangarembga uses her narrator, Tambu, to provide an insight into the lives of the colonised women in former Rhodesia. Through Tambu's narration of

her own story and the story of her female relatives, the reader is provided with a careful depiction of women from different generations and in different positions of the class hierarchy. This depiction turns out to be more realistic in its construction of female characters. Thanks to this realistic approach to the female characters readers can finally hear the subaltern speak, as the narrator, by telling also other women's stories, is giving a voice to other women.

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