“I’m Not One of Them but I’m Not One of You”:

An Analysis of the Effects of Patriarchy and Hybridity in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s Nervous Conditions

By: Donjeta Osmani

English for Subject Teachers, 61-90 credits
Individual Project (15 credits)
Spring 2019

Supervisor: Zlatan Filipovic
Examiner: Jenny Malmqvist
Abstract

“I’m Not One of Them but I’m Not One of You”: An Analysis of the Effects of Patriarchy and Hybridity in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*

By: Donjeta Osmani

This essay examines how the factors that inspire Tambudzai and Nyasha to counter the patriarchy are portrayed and how these factors contribute to the formation of hybrid identities among the younger generation of women in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) by Tsitsi Dangarembga. Both characters are faced with different predicaments which makes it necessary to divide the factors in regard to each character. The factors that are connected to Tambudzai are the following: the death of Nhamo, the patriarchal male figures, and the will to obtain an education. Meanwhile, the factors that are connected to Nyasha are the relationship with her patriarchal father, the desire for liberation and gender equality. Postcolonial and feminist criticism are applied. The main focus of the essay is hybridity, or double identity, where the specific term cultural hybridity is used in order to analyze the effect that the struggle against the patriarchy has had on Tambudzai’s and Nyasha’s emerging hybrid identities. Meanwhile, the feminist-psychoanalytic approach is used to analyze the factors that inspire Tambudzai and Nyasha to counter the patriarchy.

The results show that the factors that inspire Tambudzai and Nyasha to counter the patriarchy have been visible and crucial to the formation of their hybrid identities. The struggle that Tambudzai and Nyasha have to face when going against the patriarchal system brings certain predicaments in their lives that affect them and their identity tremendously. One of these predicaments is the realization that patriarchy is universal and, hence, something you cannot escape.

Length of Essay: 23 pages

**Keywords:** Nervous Conditions, Tambudzai, Nyasha, Cultural Hybridity, Patriarchy, Feminism.
Introduction
In her novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Tsitsi Dangarembga depicts the struggle that women endured in colonialized Rhodesia. The patriarchal system of the Shona community has prevented women from emancipating and becoming more than only hardworking and obedient wives to their husbands. Women who deviate from this cultural norm often become outcasts among their communities. The signs of this patriarchal system are, according to Molly Manyonganise, evident throughout the culture of Shona. One example of this is how the community views the different genders. When a girl is born, she is not considered a human being; however, when a boy is born, he is referred to as a human being (2). This suggests that the gender differences are introduced from an early age in women’s lives and continue to affect the female members of the Shona community throughout their lives. Women are encouraged to learn how to clean, cook and serve from an early age since they are to be married off. As opposed to the women, the men do not have this obligation since they are to be educated and take care of their family members.

The main characters in *Nervous Conditions*, Tambudzai and Nyasha, are brought up in two separate environments, as opposed to the elder generation consisting of their mothers, Ma’Shingayi and Maiguru, which causes complications to their self-examination. The female characters in the novel have been casualties of injustice both by the patriarchal culture and colonialism which have forced them to deal with a form of double-oppression. This leaves them feeling disoriented and abandoned by the male figures in their families. In addition, Tambudzai’s and Nyasha’s respective fathers, Jeremiah and Babamukuru, are the patriarchs of their families. Their patriarchal authority leads them to treat Tambudzai and Nyasha in a different way compared to their brothers, Nhamo and Chido.

One of the main reasons that these distinctions between women and men exist in the Shona culture is explained by Grace Okereke and Itang Egbung, who state that “male children are valued more highly than female children because they secure the lineage through procreation, while the female children marry and leave their natal homes and are, therefore, seen as a loss to their families” (2059). This shows that the male patriarchal figures in the family do not want to spend any of their resources on their daughters, since their husbands’ and their families will gain from this. As a result of this, women have not been given any space to voice their concerns in different matters, since they are not considered to contribute with anything else other than their existence. In this paper, I will examine how the two young female characters Tambudzai’s and Nyasha’s struggle against the patriarchy induces their hybrid identities and how this is illustrated in the novel.
Women who derive from the community of Shona are, due to the patriarchal environment that reigns amongst their community, faced with several complications that affect their lives in disparate ways. The term *hunhu* is equivalent to “being human”, through which the community of Shona can estrange individuals if their behavior is not admissible by the cultural norm (Manyonganise 1). This can be perceived as a measure in terms of human behavior in which *hunhu* is something that all humans are obliged to have. Women are taught not to dress in a certain way, not to engage in political contexts where decision-making is required since women are not allowed to make decisions. Furthermore, land ownership can only be accessed through male figures, such as their fathers, brothers or husbands (5). Their roles as mothers do not, however, seem to go unnoticed in the Shona society, and credit is given for the labor that is required when taking care of their children. At the same time, there is still a lack of encouragement where husbands mistreat their wives by demanding “that they surrender their salaries at the end of each month” (5). Despite the fact that they might live in a modern community, they need a way to continue to maintain control over their wives’ emancipation. An illustration of this is evident in the novel where Tambudzai can be seen thinking about Maiguru’s situation after finding out that she does not receive her own salary: “I felt sorry for Maiguru because she could not use the money she earned for her own purposes and had been prevented by marriage from doing the things she wanted to do” (103). Babamukuru still holds on to the patriarchy where control is one of the most important factors in being able to prevent the women from becoming self-dependent. Moreover, Tambudzai’s mother can be seen reflecting on these patriarchal issues when Tambudzai confronts her about the cultural norms where Ma’Siningayi states that “this business of womanhood is a heavy burden” (16). This implies that the elder generation of women within the novel have accommodated themselves to the cultural norms and accepted the conventions. The women have, thus, chosen not to fight against the patriarchy knowing that there is nothing they can do but surrender. They have, instead, relinquished themselves and learnt to deal with the struggles that womanhood carries, whereas the younger generation of women, represented by Tambudzai and Nyasha, questions the patriarchal system.

The younger generation’s questioning shows that their upbringing in colonized Rhodesia, within the English culture, has affected their identity and their willingness to question the cultural norms of the Shona community. Salumeh Eslamieh describes this matter as “the individual growing up in a multinational hybrid society strugg[ing] to keep the tradition of his or her past while modernization rapidly takes over” (3). This can be noticed in both of the characters’ struggle to find their identity and thus becoming “hybrids” in colonized Rhodesia,
“where the West defines non-Westerners as the Other” (3). Tambudzai’s identity is not affected by her new cultural setting in the beginning; however, this alters when she adapts and adjusts her living conditions in terms of the English culture. As noticed in the novel, Tambudzai develops from being in agreement with Babamukuru and his cultural rules, to impugning him for his ways and, hence, developing an identity crisis where she explains that “[h]e did not know how my mind had raced and spun and ended up splitting into two disconnected entities that had long, frightening arguments with each other, very vocally, there in my head, about what ought to be done, the one half maniacally insisting on going, the other half equally maniacally refusing to consider it” (169). The hybridity that she encounters when having to choose between Babamukuru’s and her own opinions is what makes her realize the effect of being in a different culture. As opposed to Tambudzai, Nyasha is, due to her upbringing in England, affected by her cultural setting from an early point in her life. Her attempt to combine both of her cultures into one mixture leads to the development of her hybridity. Consequently, Nyasha’s relationship with her father, Babamukuru, is badly affected by this hybridity that she is experiencing, where their differences in opinions drive them further apart from each other. As seen in the novel, Nyasha reflects upon this matter and tries to explain her nervous condition of not being able to belong anywhere to Tambudzai. She argues that, in order to avoid the cultural hybridity that she is experiencing, “[her] parents ought to have packed [them] off home” (79). She struggles with fitting into the cultural norms of the English and Shona societies, which makes her believe that the experience she is having could have been avoided if she had only been raised in the Shona community instead.

Further, as John Hutnyk explains one should keep in mind that the term hybridity has been used in different aspects and contexts, leading to a point where it “has come to mean all sorts of things to do with mixing and combination in the moment of cultural exchange” (80). Therefore, cultural hybridity will be considered in order to analyze the effect that the struggle against patriarchy has on Tambudzai’s and Nyasha’s emerging hybrid identities. To explain, cultural hybridity is a result of the different cultural settings that people spend their lives in, in which their identities are damaged. As Rumi Sakamoto clarifies: “giving up the desire for a pure origin, hybridity retains a sense of difference and tension between two cultures but without assuming hierarchy. It is not just a new identity but a new form of identity” (115-116).

The characters Tambudzai and Nyasha are significant to this study because of their disparate backgrounds and corresponding aspirations of challenging the patriarchal authorities in their families. The characters grow up in adverse settings, Tambudzai in the poverty of the
homestead in colonialized Rhodesia and Nyasha in the Western society of England. Even so, they still end up facing the corresponding maltreatments from the male figures of the families. One could use the elder generation of women to study their actions and outcomes, but since they do not confront the patriarchal authorities in the same significant way that the younger generation of women does, they are not as crucial to the purpose of this study.

Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* deals with topics of colonialism, post-colonialism, eating disorders, racism, feminism, along with gender and sexuality. The studies that can be related to the aim of this particular essay will be mentioned and explained in the following.

Numerous studies have been conducted on this novel; however, the following presentation will deal with studies of direct relevance for my aim, whereas other studies will be incorporated in the analytical section as they touch on aspects related to the analysis. This is done due to the reason that they do not completely address the same topics as this essay does but are still of relevance to this essay.

The anthropologist Carolyn Martin Shaw has focused on sexuality, feminism and double identity in her study and how these can be related to Dangarembga’s novels, *Nervous Conditions* and *She No Longer Weeps* (1987). She analyzes and compares the characters Nyasha and Martha, where the last-mentioned is a character from the novel *She No Longer Weeps*. The discussion of Nyasha’s sexuality constitutes Shaw’s main focus, where she further argues that Nyasha’s ability to live by Babamukuru’s rules is supposed to lead her into the direction of being a good daughter (12). Shaw also argues that “sexuality is crucial to the understanding of Nyasha’s breakdown” (10), where she draws the conclusion that Nyasha’s interest in boys and sexuality generates her eating disorders, as a way of avoiding womanhood, due to the fact that “it is impossible for her to be an obedient daughter and at the same time a sexually mature adult” (9). The eating disorders become a way for her to escape the predicaments that her becoming a woman brings. For that reason, her hybrid identity develops when her father dismisses her due to the fact that she identifies herself more with the colonial values than with the Shona values (11).

Moreover, Stephanie M. Selvick considers sexuality in her study *Beyond the Binary*, with the use of queer and postcolonial theories, by looking at the relationship between the narrator Tambudzai and her cousin Nyasha (278). She argues that “their sexual identities are constantly being interrogated by and against foreign objects of material culture” (282), such as clothing and books, along with the norm of the silent woman regarding female sexuality. The characters tend to use materials that are not prescribed in the Shona culture to counter these rules. In addition, Selvick clarifies that the relationship between Tambu and Nyasha “becomes that
which defines them in the face of colonial oppression and heteropatriarchal expectations” (289), which suggests that their hybrid identity develops when facing the Shona and English environments together with their cultural norms.

In these previously mentioned studies, the characters’ sexuality and eating disorder in relation to the postcolonial and feminist theoretical interpretations of the novel have been analyzed and discussed. Shaw argues that the factor which generates Nyasha’s disruption is her sexuality and her interest in boys, in which her anorexia prevents her from becoming a woman and from having to face these issues. Meanwhile, Selvick has her focus on how Tambu’s and Nyasha’s hybrid identities embolden them to challenge the patriarchy with foreign materials and how this is portrayed in the novel. As distinct from the earlier studies, I will focus on both of these characters and determine the different factors that embolden them to counter the patriarchy. Furthermore, the study will analyze how this affects their identity and what precisely produces the hybridity.

The aim of this essay is thus to examine how the factors that inspire Tambudzai and Nyasha to counter the patriarchy are portrayed and how they contribute to the formation of hybrid identities among the younger generation of women in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s Nervous Conditions. The characters are faced with different predicaments which makes it necessary to divide the factors in regard to each character. The factors that are connected to Tambudzai are the following: the death of Nhamo, the patriarchal male figures, and the will to obtain an education. Meanwhile, the factors that are connected to Nyasha are the relationship with her patriarchal father, the desire for liberation and gender equality. Postcolonial and feminist criticism are applied.

A close reading of Nervous Conditions will be essential to interpret and answer the thesis of this essay, which will provide a deeper understanding of the characters’ motives and struggles. The decision to apply the literary theories of post-colonial and gender studies on the novel has been made since the aim of the essay deals with colonialism, feminism and patriarchy. It is crucial to focus on certain approaches in these literary theories in order to analyze the characters, due to the fact that both feminist and post-colonial literary theories are substantial. The representation of the women in Nervous Conditions will be considered in the terms that Peter Barry mentions in Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory (2017), such as revaluing the women’s experiences and analyzing power relations between the two genders (128). The analysis of the factors that inspire Tambudzai and Nyasha to counter the patriarchy will, hence, be examined by using the feminist-psychoanalytic approach.
Feminist theorists have described the feminist-psychoanalytic approach in distinctive ways, which makes it necessary to make a selection on the basis of the two characters and their actions. This decision has been made due to the fact that Tambudzai and Nyasha counter the patriarchy and their family members in distinctive manners. The feminist approach used by the psychoanalytic feminist theorist, Luce Irigaray, describes feminism in the manner “that women should exaggerate the stereotypes that surround femininity in order to ultimately challenge those stereotypes, pushing gender stereotypes to their limits to destabilize the hierarchical relationship between man and woman” (176). Irigaray’s definition of the feminist-psychoanalytic approach will be used to analyze Nyasha. The reason for this decision is because of the fact that Nyasha’s behavior is challenging toward her father and his patriarchal authority, where she tries to challenge the norms that exist in the Shona culture. Meanwhile, the feminist theorist Nancy J. Chodorow explains the feminist-psychoanalytic approach in *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1989), where she states that gender inequality is visible from early childhood experiences due to the influence that parents afflict on to their children. Moreover, Chodorow implies that this results in men believing themselves to be masculine and women as feminine (78-80). Thus, Chodorow’s description of the feminist-psychoanalytic approach is necessary in order to understand Tambudzai, her self-growth and how her parents and their values have affected her childhood and upbringing.

The postcolonial approach will be used to evaluate the contribution of the factors for the formation of Tambudzai’s and Nyasha’s hybrid identities. Likewise, an evaluation of how they are affected by the colonial ruling in Rhodesia will be examined. Matters such as the representation of other cultures in the novel, cultural differences and diversity will also be considered. Nonetheless, hybridity, or double identity, will be the main focus of this study. Barry describes the term as “the situation whereby individuals and groups belong simultaneously to more than one culture” (192), which implies that a person carries characteristics from two cultures and tries to consolidate them without relinquishing the other.

The next chapter will contain an analysis of both of the characters, Tambudzai and Nyasha, where their identities and tribulations are taken into consideration. The analysis will consider the factors that inspire and encourage them to the choices that they make, and how these factors implicate the outcome. The analysis will also illustrate the battles that they face, along with how they proceed and master them. Lastly, a discussion regarding how their struggle against the patriarchy induces and builds their hybridity in the different settings will be considered.
Escaping Patriarchy and Facing Hybridity in *Nervous Conditions*

*Nervous Conditions* has been considered to be a postcolonial and feminist novel about women’s suffering and, simultaneously, escape out of patriarchy. Tambudzai and Nyasha are the two female characters who show their individual courage and determination to fight for their freedom and for the emancipation from patriarchy.

**Tambudzai’s Escape from Patriarchy**

Education can be seen as one of the definitive factors on the pathway towards freedom and success in *Nervous Conditions*. Tambu sees education as her escape out of the patriarchal system which has controlled her since birth. Her brother would be able to carry on the family name and care for the family due to the success of his education, whereas Tambu would not due to her prospective marriage. In the novel, her father, Jeremiah, can be noticed speaking of the reason why Tambu educating herself is not necessary when facing the principal of the school regarding her studies: “Have you ever heard of a woman that remains in her father’s house? ... She will meet a young man and I will have lost everything” (30). Tambu might succeed through her education and acquire a favorable economic situation, but this is not considered due to the fact that it will favor her future husband and his family instead. Jeylan W. Hussein describes this sort of African gender ideology as “a system of shaping different lives for men and women by placing them in different social positions and patterns of expectations” (60), which can be noticed in the distinct ways that her father, Jeremiah, views his son and daughters. His son is obligated to educate himself, meanwhile, the daughters should prepare themselves for marriage instead. Pauline Ada Uwakweh further argues that “the major source of conflict between the two siblings is Tambu’s loss of opportunity to start early schooling because her brother, the male child, is given priority consideration” (83). This implies that her subordinate position follows her from an early age and is crucial to the decisions that are made.

Moreover, Tambu’s attempt at self-emancipation is something that her father and brother are reluctant to grant. Several examples in the novel indicate that her self-emancipation is not only a matter of her poverty, but also of a strong desire to escape the isolated space of the homestead: “He thought I was emulating my brother, that the things I read would fill my mind with impractical ideas, making me quite useless for the real tasks of feminine living” (34). Jeremiah is aware of Tambu’s ability to advance her intellectual virtue by reading and increasing her individual knowledge. The power to acknowledge the rights of women and men, where her perception of the world would alter, is something that Jeremiah wants to avoid.

Nhamo follows in his father’s footsteps by being responsible for the disappearance of Tambu’s
cobs in the maizefield, which she was going to sell in order to earn the money to pay for her own school fee, and discourages her for her attempt to do so: “What did you expect? ... Did you really think you could send yourself to school?” (22). Nhamo’s attitude and patriarchal authority towards Tambu, and her endeavors to succeed as a woman, make their relationship even more agonizing. In her study, Uwakweh describes Tambu’s maizefield “as an attempt to define herself in a male world” (83). The maizefield acknowledges her desire to emancipate herself and break free from the grip of the male figures, but also the impossibility of doing so.

The death of Tambu’s brother can be perceived as the first and most significant factor of Tambu’s desire to go against the patriarchy, owing to the fact that his death is what gives her the opportunity to obtain an education and leave the community in the first place. The patriarchal background is established in the beginning of the novel where Tambu sets the tone for the novel by justifying her callous attitude towards the death of her brother. Thus, she introduces the story by revealing her feelings and thoughts:

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 the mere consequence of age. Therefore I shall not apologise but begin by recalling the facts as I remember them that led up to my brother’s death, the events that put me in a position to write this account. For though the event of my brother’s passing and the events of my story cannot be separated, 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, farminde and isolated, my uncle’s daughter, whose rebellion may not in the end have been successful. (Dangarembga 1)

The life of Tambu before losing her brother consisted of constant victimizing and dispiriting criticism from the male figures in her family, particularly Nhamo and her father, Jeremiah, for the reason that she was a woman. Nhamo’s position of being the eldest out of all the children, and the only son, bestows him advantages that Tambu and her sisters could not be granted because of their gender. This leads to Nhamo developing a mindset where he could identify himself as superior and distinct from his younger sisters, and as a result, his behavior and attitude towards Tambu also shift. As noted by Okereke and Egbung, the cause of his mindset is mainly “because of the favoritism that her parents and uncle confer on Nhamo; he perceives himself as culturally and naturally superior to Tambu and his sisters, thus fueling his arrogance and high-handedness which inflict on Tambu a feeling of being cheated and oppressed in her
home at a very early age” (2060). It is apparent that this feeling is what fuels her desire to counter the patriarchy through an education paid with her own money, and not her father’s.

When living in the homestead, Tambu constantly questions her father and brother for their attitude towards women and seeks to prove them wrong with the help of her arguments and actions. However, difficulties regarding her argumentative manner do appear, which Uwakweh describes as a loss of “her earlier determination and independence of mind in the shadow of her uncle’s benevolence and power” (83). Tambu now finds it troubling to use her voice to contradict Babamukuru due to the chances and opportunities that he has granted her, such as living in his mission home and getting access to a Western education. Tambu leaving the homestead for a new life at the mission can be perceived as a moment of rebirth where she leaves her malnourished self behind: “It was evident from the corrugated black callouses on my knees, the scales on my skin that were due to lack of oil, the short, dull tofts of malnourished hair. This was the person I was leaving behind” (58). She is eager to leave and prepare herself for a new life, where gender differences will not prevent her from being successful in life because Babamukuru is an educated and rich man.

In addition, Tambu undergoes several adjustments that affect her identity. Her observation of Nyasha’s struggle with her father, Babamukuru, leaves Tambu with an uncertainty of whose side she should stand by due to the respect that she has towards her uncle. The uncertainty is acknowledged throughout the novel where Tambu begins to side with Nyasha and her predicaments. However, seeing her actions which are not acceptable in their misogynistic setting, such as smoking a cigarette and dressing vulgarly, leave her siding with Babamukuru: “I was aghast. Babamukuru was right! His daughter was beyond redemption” (85). Nevertheless, this uncertainty changes when facing Babamukuru’s treatment of Nyasha and her choices.

The earlier perceptions Tambu had about the patriarchy and its connections with the Shona culture alter after her experience in the English mission. This is noted in the novel where Tambudzai and Chido leave Nyasha on her own with her male friend, Andy, whom Babamukuru later notices and is opposed to. He becomes furious and argues that she “must learn to be obedient” (116) and blames Chido for letting his “sister behave like a whore without saying anything” (116). This shows that Nyasha is to be subordinate in relation to her father and brother. The incident makes Tambu see the reality of things, and her earlier understanding of the reasons as to why patriarchy exists and how one can fight it becomes clearer: “The victimisation, I saw, was universal. It didn’t depend on poverty, on lack of education or on
tradition” (118). She realizes that the male desire of controlling women and their choices is universal and has little to do with the person’s education and economic position.

There is no escape from patriarchy because of the reason that it exists in both settings and “men take it everywhere with them” (118). The oppressive colonial system is what affects the male figures in Tambu’s family to approach women in an oppressive manner. To explain further, Bubenechik suggests that Dangarembga reveals “the system of double oppression”, where “the British colonial authority oppresses the male indigenous population” (14) and leads to “the indigenous men themselves oppress[ing] their women” (14). The colonial setting has affected Babamukuru; although, he still holds onto his cultural traditions when they are beneficial to him.

**Encountering Cultural Hybridity**

Tambu’s attempt to escape patriarchy turns out to be a miscalculation of her own, where her intellectual development causes a fragmentation of her identity and leaves her feeling divided within herself. This is something that she has not prepared herself for. One could, therefore, argue that the relationship that she has with her cousin Nyasha plays an important role in the process of her self-development. Lindsay Pentolfe Aegerter implies that this is mainly because of Nyasha’s ability to bring awareness about patriarchal and colonial issues in their community, where she educates Tambu about the existing unfairness, and Tambu “slowly but surely learns from Nyasha’s postcolonial and feminist perspectives to hold onto her African identity, even as she revises it” (234). She tells Tambu about the hybridity that comes with living in another culture and suggests that her parents, Babamukuru and Maiguru, should have considered leaving them at the homestead instead in order to avoid having hybrids as their children. Apart from this, Tambu’s devotion to become a part of the English society still remains and is shown by her decision “to take up the scholarship offered by the Young Ladies College of the Sacred Heart, aware that a personal and familial price will be exacted as a result of her choice” (59). A decision that is made because of her need and responsibility to take care of her family now that her brother has passed away.

The realization that escaping one man’s patriarchal authority leads one to running towards another man’s patriarchal authority affects Tambu and her viewpoints. Tambu begins to see Babamukuru, her new environment and surroundings from a new and more awakened perspective. The following quotation illustrates her realization, which appears after experiencing the encounter between Babamukuru and Nyasha, where she feels defeated: “All the conflicts came back to this question of femaleness. Femaleness as opposed and inferior to
maleness” (118). The opportunity to advance herself intellectually gives her the ability to compare and acknowledge her individual choices when observing the relationships that exist between the male and female family members.

Subsequently, her perception of the world has developed, and these developments are mainly caused because of her experience at the Christian mission. It can be argued that the colonialization and its impact is one of the factors for the development of the hybridity that the younger generation is experiencing. Scholars, such as Bubenechik, explore the effect of colonialization and look into “the formation of the characters’ colonial and postcolonial identities, the nature and impact of colonial trauma and the possibility of resistance on the side of the colonized” (1), where Tambu’s and Nyasha’s trauma and resistance are examined. Tambu’s resistance is explained by the refusal to attend her parents’ wedding and “signals her rootedness in the Shona culture” (35) which shows “that she has maintained her cultural traditions and has not wholly succumbed to assimilation” (35). Tambu is still aware of her Shona culture; however, the aftermath of having to face the patriarchy in two separate environments affects Tambu and her estimations regarding patriarchal and colonial issues. Likewise, Searle describes the peculiar environments as Dangarembga’s trying to depict “both the oppressions and values enforced by the British colonial regime and the obstacles posed by Shona culture for women in their search for self-realisation and fulfilment” (56).

These environments produce a conflict within Tambu, the family, and the community, where she tries to maintain the balance in the traditions of her Shona culture, while trying to incorporate the English culture concurrently. The identity crisis that she is experiencing is therefore a result of her escape from patriarchy, which Tambu can be seen reflecting upon in the novel:

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. I was beginning to suspect that I was not the person I was expected to be, and took it as evidence that somewhere I had taken a wrong turning. (Dangarembga 118)

The formation of her hybrid identity is influenced by her willingness to face the patriarchy. If Tambu had, in contradistinction, accepted the conventions and adapted to the cultural norms, as the older generation of women in her life had, she would have remained at the homestead with her earlier mindset, forcing her to be unable to identify the issues tied to her identity. The Anglicized behavior that Nyasha and Chido had, and were prejudiced for having, when visiting the homestead in the beginning of the novel becomes apparent to Tambu due to the intellectual
growth that she has undergone. She does not fit in the homestead anymore because her intellectual ability has developed. Her new life at Sacred Heart means a new beginning where she will encounter even more predicaments that might affect her, but she remains determined to continue “to question things and refuse to be brainwashed” (208) while being in this process.

**Nyasha Facing the Patriarchal Figure of the Family**

The community of Shona where the patriarchy is enforced by the environment disturbs women and leaves them with a distortion that follows them throughout their lives. Maureen Kambarami describes the differences between male and female children in the Shona culture as “Shona males [being] socialized to view themselves as breadwinners and heads of households whilst females are taught to be obedient and submissive housekeepers” (2). The patriarchal figure of the family is Babamukuru who has principles that his daughter, along with the other female family members, should follow in order to become a “good woman”. These principles are much alike the description that Kambarami gives for the process of wanting control over women, where the focus is to “fit them into a relationship of dependence on men” (2).

The perplexity that comes with having to fit into two different communities and its norms leaves Nyasha in a state of confusion. In addition, Ann Smith describes Tambu and Nyasha as “feisty young women who, in different ways and with different degrees of success, try to counter the oppression to which they are subjected” (246). For the most part, Tambu is frequently used as a model by Babamukuru in terms of demonstrating “the sort of young woman a daughter ought to be” (157), which Nyasha finds distressing and difficult to live up to. As distinct from Tambu, who has not yet faced the calamities that alters a person’s identity and the consequences it brings Nyasha can be perceived as the product of two different worlds being assembled into one. The desire to unify the English and Shona cultures generates a disagreement between her and Babamukuru, who sees these actions of hers as loathsome and damaging to her personal characteristics. Indeed, as Amanda Waugh contends: “Nyasha remains entrapped because she is unable to redefine and rename the world around her. Nyasha constantly struggles between what she believes to be right and what Babamukuru claims is wrong” (87), making it difficult for her to settle in her identity.

To continue, Babamukuru has his focus on preparing them for their future marriage where these negative characteristics might affect the perception that the men, or potential husbands, could have when negotiating marriage. As seen in the novel, Babamukuru reveals his concerns about Nyasha’s behavior when reminding Tambu about the opportunities that they have given her and how these will benefit her development in comparison to Nyasha: “I have observed
from my own daughter’s behavior 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” (183). Throughout the novel, Nyasha can be seen advocating liberation of herself and her life continually in the hopes that her father will attain an insight on the disparities that exist between his treatments towards Nyasha and her brother Chido. The suffering that Nyasha has to face in regard to her identity and life knowledge, which primarily comes from Babamukuru and his misogynistic mindset along with his patriarchal authority, leads her to opposing him and his stance on women and culture. Meanwhile, Chido does not face any predicaments for his similar actions. This triggers Nyasha into rebelling and fighting for her equal rights to live in freedom, far away from her father’s rules and expectations.

Her rebellion against Babamukuru’s authority is made by attempting to voice her opinions with the result that she will be freed from his grip, which is something that he resents and criticizes her for. This can be noticed in the following quotation where Babamukuru speaks upon the matter: “Our Nyasha... Is she the type to bring us a son-in-law? No, she is not the type. And even if she did, it would be a question of feeding the cattle – the man would soon be wanting them back” (133). In this case, Nyasha is being branded as an outcast due to her refusal to live by the Shona culture and its norms, hence, being perceived as an unacceptable woman who Shona men do not favor. Given that, Lucia Rabello de Castro explicates that Nyasha, “incarnated by her refusal to accept, ipso facto, that her father possesses an absolute authority over her” (201), tries to breach the patriarchy by using her mind and intelligence as weapons.

As a consequence of her defiant behavior towards her father, Nyasha “has to face debasement (being called a whore), physical punishment (she is severely beaten) and being expelled from home” (Rabello 201). Under those circumstances, Babamukuru addresses her counteraction and assures her that there can only be one authority: “We cannot have two men in this house. Not even Chido, you hear that Nyasha? Not even your brother there dares to challenge my authority” (117). The awareness brought forward when facing the harsh reality where family members appeal to the cultural and patriarchal spirits, seems to appear in Babamukuru’s assessments. An example of this can be noticed in the novel, where Nyasha reflects and draws the conclusion that “[i]t’s the same everywhere. But he has no right to treat me like that, as though I am water to be poured wherever he wants. I know I should trust and obey and all that, but really he hasn’t the right” (121). The actions of Babamukuru, in spite of their severities, are justified by her brother Chido who emphasizes that Nyasha “is the daughter” and that “there are some things you must never do” (119). Chido feels “obliged to carry on the
tradition in the normal, unanalytic male fashion” (111) and finds it problematic to maintain a good relationship with both Babamukuru and Nyasha.

Nyasha’s eagerness to read books and gain knowledge about the distinctive cultures and the purpose of colonization are essential to the confrontation with patriarchy. Similar to Tambu, her intellectual capacity inspires her to question matters such as colonization, religion, cultural and societal issues. Nyasha’s aspirations for freedom can, hence, be distinguished throughout the novel where her gained knowledge and experience give her guidance to confront the patriarchal and authorial figures in her family. But even so, there are differences in how Nyasha and Tambu consider and review their journey for freedom, due to the fact that they have both grown up in two separate settings and do not have the same experience of life. The reprehensible relationship that Nyasha has with her father Babamukuru affects her in a burdensome way, which can be seen in the following quotation:

But it’s more than that really, more than just food. That’s how it comes out, but really it’s all the things about boys and men and being decent and indecent and good and bad. He goes on and on with the accusations and the threats, and I’m just not coping very well. Sometimes I look at things from his point of view, you know what I mean, traditions and expectations and authority, that sort of thing, and I can see what he means and I try to be considerate and patient and obedient, really I do. (Dangarembga 194)

The effect that Babamukuru has on Nyasha and her well-being when putting her under the pressure of having to live up to his obligations leaves her with a feeling of entrapment. She begins to realize that there is no possibility to “fulfill the requirements of goodness” (Waugh 86) that Babamukuru deeply wants her to follow. Nyasha knows that there is no possibility to change the patriarchal culture that lives on; “incapable of changing her environment because she considers it incontrovertible, her will to exert power is turned inward against herself, seen in her disciplined diet and anorexia” (88). In theory, Nyasha tries to take control over herself and her body, but in practice, she ends up losing that control to the eating disorder itself. Consequently, different scholars have suggested that her eating disorder is what keeps her away from having to face Babamukuru’s rules.

Nyasha is aware of the effect that the predicaments that she has encountered and still encounters has on her, which also lead her to developing an eating disorder that ends up controlling her life and its outcome. It has been argued that Nyasha’s eating disorders are her way of escaping from her patriarchal father and his misogynistic behavior. Evidently, Muzna Rahman examines Nyasha and her eating disorder from a postcolonial context by removing her from the Western discourse and locating her in the history of Zimbabwe. This is done because
of the reason that Western discourses, most of the time, find eating disorders as a result of certain thin beauty standards in media. Furthermore, Rahman argues that Nyasha’s food refusal is a response to the injustices that her father Babamukuru serves on his dinner table, specifically described as “his complicity with the colonial mission, his enforcement of unequal gender practices, and even the class and cultural snobbery he displays in his food choices” (285), which signifies the cultural norms that continue to exist around the male members of the Shona community and that Babamukuru shows based on the food choices that he makes.

Nyasha realizes that it is not possible for her to affect the values of her patriarchal father; hence, her decision to respond to the injustice is with her starving body. Rahman implies that it is a result of the hybridity that Nyasha is experiencing and her anorexia is instead her way of resisting the cultural norms in both communities. One could argue that her eating disorder is not an attempt to escape from Babamukuru considering that Nyasha still remains, due to the eating disorder’s perplexity, under her father’s roof and is able to receive his continuing patriarchal remarks.

In conclusion, Nyasha’s “dissociative identity disorder is the result of her trauma” (285) where her response is through her mental and physical illness. Similarly, Bubenechik argues that Nyasha’s eating disorders are a result of the trauma that she is experiencing when being a part of two different cultures. She further explains that Nervous Conditions is an example of the result of “colonial oppression and discrimination” (5), and that the other female characters can be seen suffering from this with their “signs of mental illness and resistance” (39). As a conclusion, Bubenechik contends that Nervous Conditions “is an act of resistance to colonial oppression and has an alleviating effect on the author” (42), which suggests that Dangarembga is, like Tambudzai, reclaiming her past and “what has been stolen by colonialism” (39). The bitterness towards the colonizers and their impact on the Shona community becomes apparent to Nyasha when advancing her knowledge about them and their intentions with coming to Zimbabwe.

Nyasha’s Hybrid Identity
Nyasha’s determination to move forward comes from observing her mother’s entrapment of not being able to use her full capacity in life (98). However, the encouragement of her development is one-sided: “People like me [Tambudzai] thought she was odd and rather superior in intangible ways. Peripheral adults like her teachers thought she was a genius and encouraged this aspect of her. But her mother and father were worried about her development” (98). The struggle that Nyasha is experiencing to fit into the cultural norms of both societies,
where the English believe that she is on the right path, leaves her in an ambivalent state of mind. At the same time, her parents and Tambudzai, believe that this development of hers will not do her any good. Bubenechik states that this kind of confusion regarding the identity and cultural norms is the result of an “intense clash of two distinct cultures and ideologies that causes dramatic imbalance and breaches familial bonds in traditional Shona families” (10), which explains the perplexing situation that Nyasha encounters when being a part of both the Shona community and the English culture at the headquarters of Sacred Heart convent school. Further, Martha Bigelow clarifies that “hybridity may emerge among youth through an analysis of the perspectives they hold, the clothes they wear, or the way they use language” (32).

As can be seen in the novel, when visiting the homestead, Nyasha faces prejudiced thoughts and opinions from her fellow family members in regard to her attitude, dress choices and her lack of involvement in the Shona culture. Their prejudice has much to do with not having perceived other cultures but their own and henceforth finding the behavior of Nyasha and Chido as inadmissible. In the following quotation, her cousin Tambu, not yet having faced the complexity of hybridity is disgruntled by the view of Nyasha’s behavior and has difficulties with figuring her out:

“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 had who had gone to England but not returned from there. Yet each time she came I could see that she had grown a little duller and dimmer, the expression in her eyes a little more complex, as though she were directing more and more of her energy inwards to commune with herself about issues that she alone had seen. (Dangarembga 38)”

The aftermath of Nyasha having lived in England during her childhood is the cultural hybridity that follows with this progress, along with the change of identities that become significant to herself and the identity crisis that she is experiencing. With this in mind, Maiguru attempts to explain that both Nyasha and Chido have become “Anglicized” to Tambu who, due to her own rootedness in the African culture, cannot understand the possibility of this happening.

As a result of the Englishness, Nyasha’s “African notion of identity becomes fragmented and polluted by the appropriation of Western modes of individual autonomy” (Bubenechik 17). Therefore, the relationship that Nyasha builds with Tambu gives her an opportunity to reencounter her African heritage and become a part of the Shona culture again. She sees Tambu as someone that could help her find herself in the nervous condition that she is experiencing. Correspondingly, Nyasha’s ability to express her thoughts becomes possible, and her main
purpose is to get Tambu to see the complex conditions that follow one when living abroad from her own perspective. This is noticed in the following quotation, where Nyasha reflects upon her situation: “It’s not England anymore and I ought to adjust. But when you’ve seen different things you want to be sure you’re adjusting to the right thing” (119). The hybridity that Nyasha is experiencing is acknowledged several times throughout the novel and is one of the significant traits of her character. She has produced a new combined culture consisting of both the English and Shona culture, leaving her with a feeling of alienation and dysfunctionality in both settings: “I’m not one of them but I’m not one of you” (205). She does not belong with the English, but at the same time she does not belong with the African people.

Nyasha’s position being in-between the two cultures remolds her into a “third culture kid”, which Pollock and Van Reken describe as “a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture... Then builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any” (19). There is no possible way for her to be fully accepted in both or one of the cultures. As illustrated in the novel, Tambu can be seen noticing the uninviting manners of the English students while observing Nyasha and her predicaments: “As it turned out, it was not Nyasha’s accent they disliked, but Nyasha herself. ‘She thinks she is white,’ they used to sneer, and that was as bad as a curse” (95). On the other hand, Tambu notices that the same dismissive attitude exists amongst their Shona friends where they resent Nyasha for her language abilities, as she expresses it in her letter to Tambu: “They do not like my language, my English, because it is authentic and my Shona, because it is not!” (200). There is no place for her in any of the cultures, leaving her with frustration and sadness about her identity and in her own third space.

The difficult events that Nyasha faces are one of the definitive elements that induces her hybridity and her strained relationship with her father. Baharvand and Zarrinjoeoe argue that Babamukuru’s authorial and aggressive behavior has much to do with the fact that he has suffered from being inferior to the English people during his time in England and continues to be inferior at the mission in Rhodesia (32). He makes an attempt to atone for his inferiority by endorsing an authorial behavior towards his own family members. Tambu reflects upon this matter and argues that the Englishness had made him distant ever since the English had taken him under their wings (104) and reminisces about the past where he would appear more connected with the children.

By way of contrast, Babamukuru has an expectance of “a questioning obedience from his family” (32) which he tries to assert by “threat[ening] his dependents to stop providing for them if they challenge him” (32). Nyasha is one of the victims that suffers severely from her father’s
controlling character; however, the fear and obedience that Babamukuru strives for is something that Nyasha does not provide him with. As mentioned before, her ability to strike back when facing maltreatments from her father is something that is not difficult for her to do. One could further argue that her awareness of Babamukuru’s threats being empty emboldens her to stand up for herself, but her desire to oppose her father leads her towards the roads of eating disorders and mental problems affecting her well-being and future. Accordingly, Clare Counihan describes Nyasha’s nervous condition as a consequence of “being black, being a woman, being enmeshed in a colonial system” (175) where the “complicated interaction of all those” (175) denies Nyasha “any subjectivity at all” (175). Nyasha is not able to have a taste of freedom because of the patriarchy that dwells upon her family. She tries to escape from her predicament by indulging herself in books and trying to gain knowledge about the history of Africa and the English missionaries’ purpose by reading literature written from both perspectives. Nyasha’s intellectual level leads her to struggling and expounding her hybridity which ends up controlling her state of mind.
Conclusion
In my essay, I have examined the two female characters from the younger generation in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*. Tambudzai and Nyasha can be recognized as two rebels who face different predicaments when going against the patriarchal issues that exist in their culture. Both of the characters are affected and suffer from the patriarchal environment that carries several normative principles which they have to meet. The results of this essay show that both Tambudzai’s and Nyasha’s hybrid identities are induced by their struggle against patriarchy. Tambudzai grows up in the poverty of her community and Nyasha grows up in England. Nevertheless, the patriarchy and cultural hybridity that develops with time are somethings that they share with each other. In the beginning, Tambu sees her hybrid identity as a positive asset; however, with time, she realizes that it is more difficult than that. Nyasha knows of the dismissive attitudes that a hybrid identity brings.

The results have shown that their struggle against patriarchy has, indeed, induced their hybrid identities in disparate measures. The factors that inspire Tambu and Nyasha to counter the patriarchy and their contribution to the formation of their hybrid identities are visible. From the beginning Tambu and Nyasha had the same intentions, which was to find a way to escape from their patriarchal family members and have a taste of their own freedom. Tambu believed that leaving the homestead was a solution, meanwhile, Nyasha believed that challenging her father and his ways was another solution. Set aside the differences, they end up sharing the same values in regard to the patriarchal figures that they encounter. The realization that patriarchy is universal and, hence, something you cannot escape leaves them disoriented in themselves and in their identities. Furthermore, their ideological perspectives have changed due to their cultural hybridity, along with the patriarchal settings that they have denounced. In other words, the formation and inducement of Tambu’s and Nyasha’s hybrid identities are a result of their fight against patriarchy which generates their shattered Shona and English identities.

Works cited


