REPRESENTATION OF POSTCOLONIAL TRAUMA IN TSITSI DANGAREMBGA'S *NERVOUS CONDITIONS* AND CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work prepared by no other than the indicated sources and support, and has not been presented elsewhere for a degree or any other award.

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CERTIFICATION

The undersigned certify that they have read and hereby recommend for acceptance by Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology a thesis entitled, "Representation of Postcolonial Trauma in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*."

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my Canadian parents, Anne and Mitch Sanborg, who have been the most consistent cheerleaders and supporters of my academic journey**.**

ABSTRACT

This study examines the literary depiction of postcolonial trauma in selected African women's writing. Post-colonial trauma here refers to the psychological, social, and cultural wounds experienced by individuals and communities as a result of colonisation, decolonisation struggles, and the ongoing effects of colonial systems and structures. Through comparative analyses of contemporary fiction by African women writers from two regions (West and Southern Africa), the study examines the close connection between the historical traumas of colonialism and the identity of African women in *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga. The authors considered serve as literary historians engaging with traumatic pasts to rewrite and re-present African women in a global present. The following objectives guide the study: to investigate the forms of postcolonial trauma expressed in the female characters of the selected texts; to examine the literary techniques employed by the authors to portray postcolonial trauma in their female characters; and to analyse the role of postcolonial trauma in shaping the identities of these women. Using postcolonial feminism trauma theory and the concept of decolonising trauma, the study reflects on how postcolonial trauma manifests in African women characters and explores how they navigate the historical limits imposed by collective trauma in their respective locales. The selected primary texts demonstrate the potential of a postcolonial feminist and decolonised trauma framework tailored to African women's writing, aimed at framing their experiences. Additionally, the study investigates the solidarities envisaged by the authors under consideration, in terms of progressive decolonised trauma studies that can promote healing beyond borders. A critical approach underpins the analysis, employing literary theories such as postcolonial feminism trauma theory, and decolonising trauma to interpret the texts. Uncovering the links between remembering traumatic events and collective healing, as distinct from the individualistic Euro-American models discussed by theorists, the study posits that engaging with a specific postcolonial feminist trauma theory is essential for interpreting these texts. It argues that such an approach can reveal how women's fiction articulates and facilitates routes to communal healing from traumas specific to African women's experiences in postcolonial contexts. The research identifies various manifestations of trauma rooted in colonial legacies, such as dismemberment, psychological wounds, physical abuse, double oppression, and oppressive domestic spaces influenced by religious fanaticism. These traumatic experiences are closely tied to the fragile identities of women. In attempts to transcend their fragile identities, women often acquire hybrid identities, reflecting the complex interplay of cultural and historical forces. The texts employ key techniques, including first-person narration and vivid imagery, to evoke the profundity of these traumas. These methods offer a personal and immersive perspective on the impacts of colonialism on women's lives, illustrating how their identities are shaped and often fractured by both historical and contemporary forces.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Background to the Study

This study explores the representation of postcolonial trauma in African women through a critical reading of *Nervous Condition*s (Dangarembga, 1988) and *Purple Hibiscus* (Adichie, 2004). The texts address issues of trauma, colonialism, and denial during the violent transformation from White-minority rule in Rhodesia in the 1970s to an independent Zimbabwe in the 1980s and the post-independent 1980s in Nigeria, when the wounds of the coups and civil war were still healing, respectively. These novels demonstrate a compelling contribution to contemporary African trauma literature, expanding the canon beyond Western experiences by introducing new voices, subjectivities, and aspects of postcolonial trauma, specifically in African women. At the same time, these texts enable critics to ask to what extent Western trauma theory provides a productive lens through which to address issues of the legacies of colonialism, racism, and identity. Significantly, *Nervous Conditions* and *Purple Hibiscus* are concerned not only with the traumatic effects of extreme events but also explore "the darker side of postcolonial subjectivity" (Mrinalini, 2024); that is, they explore black subjectivity as constricted by otherness and, above all, by the African women's traumas of colonialism. The postcolonial trauma of African women is a critical entry point for understanding the complexities of the continent's present challenges, as represented in the selected texts.

Trauma comes from the Greek word "τραῦμα," meaning "wound." The term was initially used to describe a psychological and emotional injury of a harrowing and long-lasting nature (Leys, 2000). Miller and Tougaw (2002) suggest that the tendency in popular discourse to conflate the term with any experience of psychological intensity reflects the current social

fascination with extreme experiences: ‘If every age has its symptoms, ours appears to be the age of trauma’ (Miller, 2002, p. 15). Indeed, (Leys, 2000) identifies a problematic inclination to use the concept of trauma to describe a broad spectrum of experiences, some of which debase the term and undermine its significance. However, when the term first acquired its specific psychological meaning, its application was restricted to a tiny group of people. In the late nineteenth century, psychology and psychiatry began to reconceptualize trauma. At the Salpêtrière Hospital, Charcot’s *Leçons sur les maladies du système nerveux* (1872–1889) demonstrated that emotional shocks could produce physical symptoms without organic injury (Charcot, 1889). Building on this, Janet argued in *L’automatisme psychologique* (1889) and *Les obsessions et la psychasthénie* (1903) that trauma could fragment consciousness and memory, leading to dissociation (Janet, 1889; 1903). Freud and Breuer further developed these ideas in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), showing that repressed traumatic experiences could manifest as neurotic symptoms, a perspective Freud later expanded in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) to include repetition compulsion—the unconscious reenactment of trauma (Freud & Brener, 1895; Freud, 1920). Together, these works shifted the understanding of trauma from a physical wound to a psychic one caused by sudden, unexpected emotional shock. Their work re-conceptualised trauma as a wound of the mind caused by sudden, unexpected emotional shock. Leys (2000) describes how this understanding emphasised “the hysterical shattering of the personality consequent on a situation of extreme terror or fright.”

Many studies of trauma within non-medical fields centre on the question of bearing witness to a traumatic event. Much of the early academic work on trauma drew its foundation from the autobiographical writings of Holocaust survivors such as Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel,

Charlotte Delbo, and Jean Améry. In *If This Is a Man* (1959), later published as *Survival in Auschwitz*, Primo Levi recounts his experience as an Italian Jew imprisoned in Auschwitz, offering a stark meditation on the fragility of humanity under conditions of absolute dehumanisation. Elie Wiesel's *Night* (1960) continues this exploration, tracing his journey from a devout boy in Sighet to a survivor haunted by silence, loss, and the collapse of faith. Charlotte Delbo, in her trilogy *Auschwitz and After* (1965–1971), interweaves memoir, poetry, and fragmented reflection to capture the collective and gendered dimensions of suffering, particularly among women. Similarly, Jean Améry's *At the Mind's Limits* (1980) approaches the holocaust through a philosophical lens, portraying torture and exile as assaults not only on the body but also on the intellect and identity of the survivor. Together, these texts have shaped the intellectual terrain of trauma studies, establishing a model of testimony and remembrance that has profoundly influenced subsequent explorations of historical and postcolonial trauma.

The key issues that emerge from this phase of trauma revolve around the difficulties of bearing witness to such a terrible event or the possibility of representing this event in a just manner. The unexpected consideration of trauma in the Humanities in the late 1980s occurred "perhaps because trauma theory provided a welcome bridge back to social and political concerns in an era when high theory had become abstract" (Kaplan, 2005, p. 25). A similar explanation notes that "trauma theory aimed to help the humanities move beyond crises in knowledge posed by post-structuralism and deconstruction […] without abandoning their insights" (Radstone, 2007, p. 68).

There exist other forms of violence and suffering beyond the Holocaust that have left communities traumatised. It is observed that "trauma studies' radical aspect comes to the

fore less in its emphasis on acts of violence like war and genocides than when it draws attention to 'familiar' violence such as rape, and the abuse of women and children" (Rajiva, 2017). Nevertheless, much work done in trauma studies foregrounds the Western framework of conceptualising trauma.

Psychological approaches to postcolonial studies have often explored the effects of colonisation and decolonisation on both the colonised and the formerly colonised, as well as on the colonisers. These effects include the internalisation of racism, inferiority complexes, and the traumatic legacies of colonisation and slavery, such as post-slavery trauma, apartheid, wars, and twentieth-century genocides. More than three-quarters of the world's population today have had their lives shaped by the experiences of colonialism (Visser, 2015). It is challenging to determine how many people have suffered or been killed due to efforts and struggles for decolonisation; during the partition of India and Pakistan alone, it is estimated that perhaps up to a million people were killed, and around 75,000 women were abducted and raped (Agrawal, 2012). While some nations experienced relatively peaceful periods of colonisation, benefiting significantly from Western influence and power, resulting in a largely smooth transition to independence, many nations were disrupted and divided, leaving people marginalised and dispossessed, separated, thrown into conflict or exile, and thus traumatised.

Colonialism, therefore, is a traumatising phenomenon. Like the title of an essay collection by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Something Torn and New* (2009) evokes the essence of trauma and trauma healing in such a context; in his work, Ngũgĩ argues that the trope of dismemberment may best characterise colonialism in Africa. He offers the nineteenth-century example of Xhosa leader Hinsta Wa Khawuta and the Gikuyu chief Waiyaki Wa Hinga, whose bodies

were disfigured by colonial troops as symbols of colonialism, "even further reaching dismemberment: that of the colonial subject's memory from his individual and collective body" (Ngugi, 2009, p. 6). Ngũgĩ is undoubtedly not the first to point out the traumatic impact of colonial rule. Writers, scholars, journalists, and other intellectuals in postcolonial contexts have testified abundantly to the harms of colonialism. For instance, Gregory (2005) argues for the centrality of colonialism to the present age and its traumas. He suggests that the root of the terrorist attacks on 11th September 2001 can be found in 'amnesiac' histories in Palestine, Iraq, and Afghanistan of "colonial experiences and the informal quasi-imperial system that succeeded them."

In addition to highlighting some of the recurring symptoms of colonialism in these contexts, Gregory (2005) suggests that colonialism might itself, at least to a certain extent, represent a recurring history that, once quashed, returns in a different form. For this reason, he cites post-colonialism as an act of remembering past crimes, as it shapes, like chalk outlines at a crime scene, and as a way to recall the living bodies they so imperfectly summon to the present. His study suggests that the kind of memory work explored in postcolonial studies may assist in engagement with the past, which breaks the cycle, as post-colonialism is "an act of opposition […] which reveals the continuing impositions and exactions of colonialism in order to subvert them: to examine them, disavow them and dispel them" (Gregory, 2005). These assertions are critical to this study, as it is challenging to separate colonialism, post-colonialism, and trauma, given the close examination of these entities.

Postcolonial trauma emerges as one area where trauma is explored beyond the Western framework. Postcolonial trauma interrogates whether or not the kinds of wounds inflicted by colonialism can be accounted for by the concepts within trauma studies (Yusin, 2017).

This is the inspiration behind the study that sought to delve into a non-Western experience of trauma. In this study, postcolonial trauma refers to the psychological, emotional, and social consequences experienced by individuals and communities because of postcolonial subjugation and its aftermath (Visser, 2015). This trauma is rooted in the historical injustices, violence, and dehumanisation inflicted upon African people during the colonial period and the subsequent struggles for independence and nation-building.

The study of postcolonial trauma in African literature emerges from the recognition of the enduring impact of colonialism on the African continent. African nations have a complex history shaped by centuries of colonial rule, leaving indelible marks on their societies, cultures, and psyches. The legacies of colonisation manifest in various forms, including cultural dislocation, the erasure of indigenous knowledge systems, economic exploitation, political instability, and the disruption of social structures (Heldring, 2012). Literary fiction has played a vital role in capturing and articulating the collective experiences of Africans in the postcolonial era. African writers, such as those selected here, have employed the power of storytelling to examine and depict the traumas inflicted by colonialism, shedding light on the psychological and emotional effects experienced by individuals and communities through their narratives. These African authors explore themes of cultural identity, memory, loss, resistance, and resilience, offering insights into the profound and lasting impacts of postcolonial trauma.

Literary engagements with the traumatic legacies of colonialism are vividly articulated in the works of African writers such as Frantz Fanon, Mariama Bâ, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o—figures who have become central to postcolonial literary and theoretical discourse. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth*

(1963), Frantz Fanon examines the psychological dismemberment wrought by colonial domination, revealing how racial subjugation fractures both the self and the collective psyche. Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1979) captures the emotional and social aftermath of colonial modernity in Senegal through the intimate voice of a widowed woman whose personal grief intertwines with broader reflections on gender, identity, and neocolonial disillusionment. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) reconstructs precolonial Igbo life and charts its disintegration under British imperial intrusion, capturing the violent cultural rupture at the heart of colonisation. In *A Dance of the Forests* (1960), Wole Soyinka confronts the failures of post-independence Africa to reconcile with its colonial and precolonial past, using myth and allegory to interrogate collective memory and guilt. Similarly, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, in *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) and *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), exposes the psychological and linguistic violence of colonialism and advocates cultural reclamation through language and storytelling. Together, these writers construct a literary genealogy of decolonial thought, where narrative becomes both an act of resistance and a means of healing the psychic wounds of empire.

Each of these writers negotiates the possibilities of writing to engage with communal suffering and explore experiences of trauma, such as physical dislocation and racism in the postcolonial context, which have not been sufficiently explored in mainstream Western trauma studies. For example, the title of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* is based on a passage in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) that describes the conditions of colonial subjects. The struggle to form or maintain identity during colonisation under what Fanon (1963) called "the crushing objecthood of the white man's gaze" is also evident in Chinua Achebe's 1959 novel *Things Fall Apart*. This narrative recounts the fame and tragic fall of

renowned warrior and wrestler Okonkwo, alongside the passing of traditional Igbo culture as colonialists arrived in this region of Nigeria.

Anne Whitehead observes that “the desire among various cultural groups to represent or make visible specific historical instances of trauma has given rise to numerous important works of contemporary fiction” (Whitehead, 2008, p. 1). Nevertheless, this has been traced through the works of men, with women’s experiences being marginalised. As a reader, the researcher was intrigued by the range of trauma expression in fictional representations of African women’s experiences by African women writers, such as Chimamanda Ngozi and Tsitsi Dangarembga, and decided to study them critically. What especially fascinated the researcher in their postcolonial trauma narratives is the continuity of women’s trauma in the contemporary world, the identifiable similarities in the forms of trauma depicted in the texts and the link between these forms and colonial legacies. Therefore, it is essential to this study that the enduring effects of colonisation are unravelled in order to establish a link between it and the traumatic experiences of African women. The study explored postcolonial trauma, examining how African women, through selected writers and characters, navigate trauma and shape their identities.

Identity is a social construct mainly shaped by the relationship between the self and others. It is through our sense of identity that we see ourselves as members of various ethnic groups, nations, and social classes, which gives us a feeling of belonging (Fernandez, 2023). Similarly, nations are communities that foster a sense of belonging through individuals' feelings of connection to their fellow people. In other words, individuals perceive themselves as part of a collective body, namely a community known as a nation, an idea Abubakar describes as “an imagined political community” (Mustapha, 2022). The modern use of the

term 'identity' often refers to traits such as race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, religion, or sexuality (Kwame, 2006). These terms reflect the belief that each person's identity—in the traditional sense of who they truly are—is deeply influenced by such social features. Moreover, it is an undeniable fact of modern life that people increasingly believe this to be true (Kwame, 2006). In today's political and moral thinking, it has become common to assume that a person's projects are reasonably shaped by these features of their identity. This is, if not morally required, at least morally acceptable.

Considering the aspects of history vital to this study, it is evident that history has provided each of us with materials for our identities. The language of identity reminds us that we are "dialogically" constituted. Beginning in infancy, we develop a conception of our identities in dialogue with other people's understandings of who we are (Hurbert, 2020). Identity is always articulated through concepts (and practices) made available by religion, society, school, and state, mediated by family, peers, and friends.

In constructing identity, therefore, as explored in the selected texts in the study, one draws, among other things, on the kinds of persons available in one's society. Of course, there is not just one way that black or white men or women are to behave, but there are ideas around how black/white men/women ought to behave. These notions provide loose norms or models that shape the plans of life for those who make collective identities central to their lives. Therefore, collective identities provide what Kwame calls scripts: narratives that people can use to shape their life plans and tell their life stories. The study, therefore, explored the constructed narratives of colonialism and patriarchy that have constructed the female characters' identities in the selected texts.

In African women's fiction, therefore, postcolonial trauma is intricately interwoven with the construction of identity, revealing how historical violence and cultural disruption continue to shape the lives of female protagonists. Writers such as Ama Ata Aidoo, Nawal El Saadawi, and Mariama Bâ, along with those selected for this study, illuminate the lingering effects of colonisation not just in national histories but also in the intimate spaces of gender, language, and family. Their characters often grapple with fractured identities, torn between traditional expectations and the residual influence of Western norms imposed during colonial rule. Through their struggles with silence, resistance, memory, and voice, these women's narratives become sites of healing and reclamation, where personal identity is reconstructed against the backdrop of collective trauma. Thus, African women's fiction does more than tell individual stories-it becomes a powerful space where the legacy of postcolonial rupture meets the ongoing process of self-definition and cultural affirmation.

Despite the extensive scholarship on trauma in postcolonial studies, much of the discourse remains grounded in Eurocentric frameworks or generalised postcolonial experiences that often overlook the gendered dimensions of suffering within African contexts. The psychological, cultural, and historical traumas borne by African women—arising from colonial violence, patriarchy, and neocolonial continuities—remain insufficiently theorised and underrepresented in literary analysis. This gap creates a compelling research problem: the need for a comprehensive examination of trauma as experienced, expressed, and transmitted through African women's narratives. Such an inquiry not only challenges the dominance of Western trauma models but also foregrounds indigenous epistemologies and feminist perspectives essential for a fuller understanding of postcolonial subjectivity and healing.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The history of colonialism in Africa has had profound and long-lasting effects on the continent, including the perpetuation of trauma among its people. Despite the recognition of this issue, current literature presents minimal data on trauma in African women who are exposed to these aspects of colonialism as appropriated in literary fiction. This study, therefore, interrogated the specific and complex trauma experienced by African women in a postcolonial era as represented in *Purple Hibiscu*s (Adichie, 2004) and *Nervous Conditions* (Dangarembga, 1988). The study explores how aspects of colonialism continue to perpetuate cycles of pain, disempowerment, and inequality among African women in the selected texts, thus hindering their progress toward healing, reconciliation, and sustainable development. The study connects postcolonial trauma to struggles of African women in selected texts, offering suggestions to address colonialism's lasting effects, especially trauma, to promote healing for individual and collective women.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study are as follows:

i) To investigate the forms of trauma manifested in the female characters of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions.*

ii) To interrogate the literary techniques employed in the selected texts to manifest postcolonial trauma in the female Characters.

iii) To explore the role of postcolonial trauma in shaping the identities of the female characters in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions.*

1.4 Research Questions:

i). What forms of trauma manifest in the female characters of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*?

ii). Which literary techniques do the selected authors employ in portraying postcolonial trauma in the female characters of their selected texts?

iii). What is the role of post-colonial trauma in shaping the identities of the female characters of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions?*

1.5 Justification of the Study

Undertaking a literary study of postcolonial trauma in African women, as represented in Adichie's and Dangarembga's selected texts, provides valuable insights into their pasts, presents, and futures. Africa, which produces the two texts, has experienced significant trauma through colonisation, the transatlantic slave trade, apartheid, genocides and other forms of oppression. Understanding and acknowledging this historical suffering is crucial in fostering empathy, healing, and reconciliation among communities affected by these events. This can be achieved through providing a platform for characters and readers to explore and express difficult emotions, traumas and experiences, which can be cathartic.

The postcolonial trauma experienced by African women portrayed in the selected texts continues to have a profound impact on their contemporary African societies. Such trauma influences their social structures, intergroup relations, and collective memories. Studying this type of trauma could shed light on persistent social issues and contribute to strategies for addressing them effectively. Strategies such as voicing concerns through fictional

narratives and life writing play a significant role in literature, empowering more writers to explore the marginalised communities affected by this type of trauma.

Furthermore, a deeper understanding of postcolonial trauma experienced by African women, as depicted in the selected texts, could guide the development of more culturally sensitive and effective policies and interventions to meet the needs of affected communities. It could facilitate the implementation of programmes that promote healing, resilience, and community empowerment. This research can achieve this by advocating for the preservation and honouring of diverse cultures, traditions, and knowledge systems within the selected texts, which have been impacted by the traumatic legacy of colonialism, and by analysing the literary techniques used by the authors to depict the manifestation of trauma on individuals and communities.

By conducting a comparative study of postcolonial trauma among African women from different nations — specifically Nigeria and Zimbabwe — as represented by their postcolonial women writers Adichie and Dangarembga, this research aims to establish a link between the historical traumas of colonialism and the identities of African women depicted in the selected texts. This study is vital as it could enrich existing social and literary knowledge by broadening approaches to addressing postcolonial trauma and proposing a specific postcolonial feminist trauma theory relevant to African women's experiences in postcolonial contexts. Moreover, the silenced voices of these African women writers regarding trauma might be amplified and revitalised.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study of postcolonial trauma in African women holds immense literary significance. Africa has a rich and diverse history that spans centuries of triumphs, struggles, and resilience. By studying postcolonial trauma in the selected texts, this study offers an opportunity to more comprehensively and accurately represent the experiences of African women portrayed in them, without stereotypes. African histories are often presented through a simplified lens that focuses on external events and fails to capture the complexities, revealing the multidimensional aspects of African history (Fanon F. , 1963) and the impact of trauma on individuals, communities, and nations; this study is thus essential in understanding postcolonial trauma in African women as represented by the two selected texts.

Further, colonialism in Africa brought with it numerous forms of trauma, from slavery and exploitation to forced displacement and cultural erasure; the study of this legacy has allowed scholars to challenge the colonial impositions and highlight the resilience and resistance of African women against these oppressive forces.

This study aims to promote social change by inspiring awareness and empathy. Women readers from diverse African backgrounds can connect with the experiences and works of women writers, fostering cross-cultural understanding, breaking stereotypes, and promoting empathy and solidarity in history.

Using a comparative approach and a framework combining decolonised and postcolonial feminist trauma theories, the study highlighted postcolonial trauma in African women as a

key focus across feminism, trauma research, comparative literature, women's studies, and fiction.

In conclusion, studying postcolonial trauma in African women through literary studies of the selected texts is essential for reclaiming the selected African women's narratives, understanding the complexities of their history, promoting their healing and reconciliation, challenging colonial legacies, and fostering a deeper appreciation for the continent's diverse cultures and its peoples as portrayed in the texts. Through this literary endeavour, we can work towards a more inclusive and accurate representation of African women.

1.7 Scope of the Study

The study of how postcolonial trauma is portrayed in African women's literature is a broad scholarly topic. Numerous African women writers examine this theme, underscoring the need to conduct multiple research projects to explore it thoroughly. Consequently, choosing to analyse this extensive field through a critical examination of only two texts, *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga, was influenced by their authors, who are contemporary women writers, and their novels, which offer valuable insights into the experiences of individual women and communities affected by trauma caused by colonialism and its aftermath in Africa (postcolonial trauma).

The two novels explore the historical contexts of their settings, spanning colonial Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in the 1960s in *Nervous Conditions* (Dangarembga, 1988) and postcolonial Nigeria in the 1960s in *Purple Hibiscus* (Adichie, 2004). Investigating the historical events, social structures, and cultural dynamics of these periods is essential for understanding the female characters' experiences and struggles. Both novels highlight the profound influence

of colonialism on African societies. The disruption of traditional cultural practices often embodies the legacy of colonisation, the enforcement of new norms and values, and the establishment of social hierarchies. Examining the lives of the female characters and their responses to the aftermath of colonialism illuminates the specificities of trauma experienced by African women depicted in these texts. An additional crucial aspect shaping this study's scope is the psychological and social trauma endured by the female characters in the two diverse communities that produced the novels. This serves as a vital guide to representing the broader African community. Colonialism and its associated oppression, violence, and exploitation frequently leave lasting scars on individual psyches and collective memory. Analysing how these women cope with and navigate their trauma offers valuable insights into the resilience and challenges faced by postcolonial African communities. Furthermore, understanding trauma among African women today involves not only analysing historical experiences but also examining their ongoing realities and prospects. Exploring the strategies these women employ to manage trauma, pursue healing, and seek reconciliation within their societies can offer meaningful lessons for contemporary processes of societal healing, a key objective of this research.

The study, therefore, focuses on postcolonial trauma in African women through the literary analysis of only two selected texts by African women writers. Contemporary analysis and representation will be based solely on two African countries, Nigeria and Zimbabwe, which produce the texts.

1.8 Research Methodology

This section outlines the research design used in the study. It also explains the data collection and analysis methods employed to answer the research questions and produce reliable findings. The chapter further describes the sampling method, data collection procedures, and finally, the analysis process.

1.8.1 Research Design

This research study employed a critical research design that incorporated qualitative methods to understand social structures, power dynamics, and lived experiences. This design is based on the fact that the study involved in-depth, interactive engagement with selected texts and analytical interpretation of how these texts depict their characters' experiences, which then influence the researcher's opinions in this study. Meanings from the texts were read and interpreted through the critical lenses of the decolonising trauma model and postcolonial feminism trauma theory. The critical approach was suitable for this study, as it allowed the researcher to identify patterns among extensive details describing the subject matter (Kim, 2024). The study explored postcolonial trauma in African women in literature as depicted by Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) and Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988).

The study followed a close and critical reading of the sampled texts. Close reading techniques were employed to analyse the selected literary works. According to Allen (2017), close reading involves investigating the internal workings of discourse to discover what makes a particular text function persuasively. It attempts to "reveal the detailed, often

concealed, tools that give a particular text stylistic consistency and rhetorical effect." (Allen, 2017, p. 177).

The primary data generated from the texts were coded and analysed, focusing on themes, narrative strategies, and character development related to postcolonial trauma in African women. Particular attention was paid to complicity, guilt, and alienation from culture and how they play critical roles in trauma manifestation in African women and the coping mechanisms of the female characters depicted in the selected texts. Furthermore, a comparative analysis of the identified literary works was conducted to identify commonalities, differences, and recurring patterns in the representation of postcolonial trauma in African women across the diverse African contexts represented by the selected texts.

Secondary data were collected through library research, including reading relevant articles, books, the internet, and other publications on colonisation, pain, memory, trauma, and identity. Research materials were accessed through public and private libraries, as well as websites with relevant information.

1.8.2 Sampling

The selected texts were picked using a purposive sampling technique. This technique enabled the study to rely on the researcher's judgment in selecting the population to be studied (Dawson, 2009). The technique was relevant to this study since it does not seek generalisations but rather an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

The selection of texts considered the postcolonial feminist context, which is vital to the study's engagement with the unravelling of postcolonial trauma in African women. Another

critical purpose of this study is to advocate for collective healing and representation of African women, as the selection of texts is based on different geographical locations and diverse cultural practices, which is vital to this objective. Further, the authors of the selected texts are two contemporary African women writers, who were also an excellent motivation for choosing literature from a wide range of African women writers. Subjectively, as a young, emerging female scholar, the researcher easily identifies with these writers and the female characters' struggles with colonial legacies, as a descendant of the colonised.

1.8.3 Ethical Considerations

Since the study is textual and does not involve direct contact with respondents, there were no ethical issues regarding human subjects. However, ethical research practices were followed, including obtaining necessary permissions and acknowledging potential sensitivities regarding trauma-related content. The work was further checked using a plagiarism checker to confirm that the information in the research study is original.

1.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has introduced the study by situating it within the broader discourse of postcolonial trauma and African women's writing, focusing on Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. It has provided the background to the research, articulated the problem statement—the lack of a comprehensive examination of trauma specific to African women's postcolonial experiences —and justified the study's significance in decolonising trauma theory through African feminist perspectives. The chapter has also outlined the research objectives and questions that guide

the analysis, along with the critical, interpretive methodology employed to examine the selected texts.

The chapter is structured in this way to offer conceptual clarity and to establish the intellectual and methodological foundation for the entire study. It prepares the ground for chapter two, which presents the literature review and theoretical framework. This next chapter deepens the discussion by examining existing scholarship on trauma, postcolonialism, and African women's narratives, while explicating the theoretical lenses that inform the textual analysis in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter reviewed the literature on postcolonial trauma studies and highlighted the theories used to analyse the study's findings. The literature review identified gaps that the current research aims to fill and provided essential material to advance the study. Likewise, the theoretical framework offered a comprehensive basis for analysing and interpreting the selected texts.

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.1 Forms of Trauma in Postcolonial Narratives.

Trauma studies, an area of cultural investigation that came to prominence in the early 1900s to the mid-1990s, prides itself on its explicit commitment to ethics, which sets it apart from the poststructuralist criticism of the 1970s and early 1980s, from which it has its roots. Standing accused of irrelevance or indifference to “real world” issues such as history, politics, and ethics because of its predominantly epistemological focus, this earlier ‘textuality’ paradigm was largely eclipsed around the mid-1980s by overtly historicist or culturalism approaches, including new historicism, cultural materialism, cultural studies and various types of advocacy criticism (feminist, lesbian and gay, Marxist and postcolonial). Trauma studies can, with some justification, be regarded as the reinvention in an ethical guise of this much-maligned textualism (Anderson, 2021). This section explores related literature in trauma studies and postcolonial literature.

In “The Harmony of Illusions” (1997), Young questioned whether the trauma category, originating in the nineteenth century, can be identified historically in works like Pepys’s diary, Shakespeare’s plays, or The Epic of Gilgamesh, as some scholars claim. The Study concluded that this was not possible, that none of these pre-nineteenth-century texts refer to what we know as traumatic memory because this form was not available to their writers. The assumption is that our sense of identity is shaped as much by our conceptions of what memory is as a historical and cultural product, without denying its reality in the individual and collective investments made in it and in people’s beliefs and convictions. Young argues, “This disorder is not timeless, nor does it possess an intrinsic unity. Rather, it is diagnosed, studied, treated, and represented by the various interests, institutions, and moral arguments that mobilised these effects and resources” (Young, 1997). The emergence and diagnosis of trauma attracted the attention of clinicians and researchers throughout the world. Its influence rapidly spread across the Americas, Britain, Australia, Europe, and Israel, and it was used to describe and shape responses to extreme events in many different situations. Trauma is not a universal category found in many different places and times, but rather a discourse of memory that emerged at a specific time, in the late 19th century, and that is embedded in and inseparable from the particular concerns of Western culture.

Building on Young’s (1997) work, a group of professional aid workers articulated their growing concerns about the uncritical export of trauma discourse to non-Western societies (Anderson, 2021). Based on their own experience of helping adults and children to rebuild their lives after the devastation of war, the contributors of this volume underline that because the concept of trauma derives from a particular (Western) cultural orientation to suffering, its relevance to non-western communities may be limited; that trauma, in other

words, should be regarded not as scientifically neutral but culturally specific in its concepts and interventions. The volume highlights three particular assumptions that are inherent to and embedded within current trauma, where discourse operates based on a strongly individualistic approach to human life, with a marked emphasis on the disengaged self and intra-psychic conflicts. However, this notion of the self may not be valid in many non-Western cultures, predicated on alternative notions of the self and its relationship to others. In non-Western contexts, the idioms of distress likely vary considerably; the emergence of a particular symptom does not necessarily mean that it has the same meaning or significance across different cultures. Thus, the emergence of a professionalised trauma discourse has tended towards the handing over of memory to experts to pronounce its meaning and significance. The assumption that the West represents the Centre of expertise, which is exported to non-Western war zones, risks ignoring local concepts of suffering, misfortune, and illness and eliciting those discourses of loss and bereavement that may fulfil the role for the local community that in Western cultures is provided by the trauma discourse. The contributors to the volume provide a compelling argument that its dominance in approaching the suffering of non-Western societies can silence local perspectives on what is essential and blind them to alternative ways of helping.

Although the critique of trauma discourse articulated by Anderson (2021) emerges from those engaged in emergency relief work, the issues raised also have significance in a literary context. Postcolonial texts invite readings in terms of trauma because they are concerned with articulating the ongoing after-effects of colonial domination and violence in contemporary society. Postcolonial writers often emphasise that the encounter between Western and non-Western societies remains traumatic because the processes and systems

of empire continue to inform and shape the present. However, the question arises as to whether using this category of trauma to interpret a postcolonial text represents a Western-dominated approach that may not be relevant to the text and may, in addition, silence aspects of the text itself.

The assumption of trauma discourse highlighted in the previous paragraph can be rephrased in the context of literature as follows: first, do postcolonial texts depict specific aspects of trauma related to the individual self, or do they focus on alternative notions of self and their connection to the broader community? Second, can we link ongoing suffering, struggle, and pain to a colonial past? Finally, do postcolonial writers express their narratives through a style that reflects the unique trauma experienced by non-Western communities? This study aimed to demonstrate this by answering these questions, showing that the portrayal of trauma in postcolonial literature responds to and reflects the concerns of non-Western societies. The analysis examines the representation of postcolonial trauma among Nigerian and Zimbabwean women through selected works by Dangarembga and Adichie.

In her article, "Journeying through Hell: Wole Soyinka, trauma and Postcolonial Nigeria", Whitehead (2008) depicted how Soyinka represents a prominent voice in what has become designated as the "second generation" of Nigerian novelists, namely the writers publishing in the immediate aftermath of the Nigerian civil war. According to Whitehead (2008), a large part of Soyinka's creative output has been dedicated to a vigorous critique of postcolonial leadership in Nigeria and the prolongation of the destructiveness colonialism caused by that leadership. Unlike Whitehead's sustained analysis of Soyinka's works, this Study attends to texts from two distinct communities—Nigeria and Zimbabwe. This is

intentionally done to articulate the commonality of the trauma that affects African women in postcolonial countries and, at the same time, distinctively distinguish this type of trauma from that of the West.

In "*The Heterotopic Space of Postcolonial Trauma in Michael Ondaatje's Anil's Ghost*", Burrows (2008) explores the achievement of Ondaatje's narrative form. She asserts that Ondaatje's famously fragmentary and ambivalent narrative exposes how the developed world turns away from the trauma that so often blights the lives of many postcolonial subjects worldwide. Her focus, too, is on the ethnocentric blindness of trauma theory itself. The Study discussed in detail how much trauma theory grew out of the holocaust studies, which sought ways to enable particularised forms of profound historical trauma to be narrativised. The Study further explains how Lawrence Langer, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, Saul Friedman and Dominick La Capra, the most prominent scholars of trauma, painfully and evocatively describe this trauma. Burrows (2008) recognises that little has been done to think through the more contemporary and different situated effects of trauma that have evolved through the legacies of colonialism.

She argues that, for instance, few studies examine the relationship of trauma to the long-term effects of African American slavery, most notably revolving around the work of Toni Morrison and especially her extraordinary novel *Beloved*. Trauma theory and its motivations remain largely race-blind and ethnocentric. This Study, therefore, draws primarily on Burrows' school of thought. However, it takes a different trajectory by criticising Cathy Caruth, the most prominent trauma theorist in literary criticism today, whom Burrow uses. Caruth maintains that in this age of violence and natural and technological catastrophe, trauma itself may "provide the very link between cultures: not

as simple understanding of the pasts of others but rather, within the traumas of contemporary history, as our ability to listen through the departures we have all taken from ourselves" (Caruth C. , 1995). However, instead of providing this link, her trauma theory creates a divide between these cultures by assuming a universal approach to address. Moreover, her theory fails to address a specific kind of trauma found in women, mainly from third-world countries, exposed to the legacies of colonialism. Noting the limitations of Caruth's theory in addressing postcolonial trauma, this study sought to venture into the specific issues of African women's experience of trauma. Thus, taking a gendered perspective.

Durant et al. (2008), provide an in-depth exploration of postcolonial trauma in their analysis of the work of three postcolonial novelists, J.M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris, and Toni Morrison. They explore how these writers witness complex and painful colonial histories and argue that a series of negotiations with the haunting legacies of colonialism underpin their work. These negotiations regarding legacies of colonialism include Coetzee's attempt to bear witness through remembering the way colonialism silenced those it subjugated as well as those it implicated in its crimes; Harris' desire to re-establish the foundation of community in a shared sense of loss and collective responsibility; and Morrison's refusal to allow closure on African American histories of racial oppression.

This study emphasises how post-colonialism involves remembrance and mourning, suggesting it pervades writers' works and characterises postcolonial narratives. (Durant. et al., 2008). This is mainly due to the traumatic nature of colonial histories of oppression (here slavery, apartheid and the colonisation of the new world) - histories which are 'impossible' to access directly and which threaten to overwhelm the narratives in which

they are (scarcely) contained. Durant et al.'s concluding suggestion that "community is the impossible destination of postcolonial narrative" encapsulates the relentless nature of the project these writers undertake; it affirms the necessity of some tomorrow within postcolonial contexts, without underplaying the trauma that leaves victims alienated and isolated from each other.

While the above studies link postcolonialism and trauma, further investigation is needed, especially a broader examination of how various postcolonial narratives contribute to mourning and commemorating the trauma of the past. Therefore, this Study attempted to construct and reconstruct a colonial community and its aftermath of traumatic encounters by exploring how two different kinds of African women's narratives negotiate postcolonial traumas. The study focuses on the experiences of African women, differing from the general postcolonial experiences examined in Durant's study. This investigated the root causes of societal challenges and ongoing women's struggles stemming from the colonial legacy and postcolonial trauma.

2.1.2 Literary Techniques and the Portrayal of Postcolonial Trauma

The question of form and content is significant while studying postcolonial trauma in female characters in the postcolonial novel. The portrayal of female characters and their experiences is substantial in understanding trauma in the postcolonial context.

Fragmentation

Guignery (2009), explores how marginalised members of a traumatised society are further alienated from the wider societal experiences. While exploring fragmentation as a literary technique, he suggests that breaking the narrative into smaller parts enables the

examination of silenced voices and figures in postcolonial society. While examining fragmentation as a powerful technique, Olive (2014) posits that women and girls form the majority of marginalised members of a traumatised society. Their silences are majorly forced and a total departure from the mainstream narrative. It is therefore important to explore the pockets of silence as key fragments in the story of a society that is traumatised by colonialism and its annexes. However, the majority of studies examine fragmentation as a literary device applied to male characters, who are often central in postcolonial novels that explore trauma. In so doing, female characters are pushed into the dark, cold periphery with little or no attention given to their experiences as equal members of a collective traumatised society. In cases where attention has been given to them, it does not equal that given to their male counterparts. This study, therefore, looked into silences in narratives authored by female characters to explore their personal experiences that have been ignored or camouflaged in dominant male narratives.

Repetition

In a study by Johnson (2018), repetition as a literary technique is identified as critical for understanding the suffering of women and girls in postcolonial narratives. The Novel as a literary piece offers an opportunity to examine the regularity of experiences at an individual or societal level. In a classical example of lines that exist between male and female characters regarding trauma, Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* presents the suffering of Ila, a female character, along gender lines and in a repetitive manner. The parallelism, or even juxtaposition, that Ghosh employs between Ila and Tridib, Ila's age-mate and male character, draws a line between the two worlds. Ila's world is diminutive and robs her person of worth, pointing to the problem of suffering and identity. On the

other hand, although Tridib is physically and geographically with Ila, he appears superior and better equipped to navigate his experiences. While pointing to these stark differences, Dalley (2015) argues that suffering in solidarity tends to numb the nerves of the sufferers, or the oppressed, to a point where it stops hurting. The individual and the oppressed group begin to reinvent themselves, shedding the pain their experiences bring. This repetitive representation of both the individual and the society attracts attention towards understanding postcolonial trauma in female characters. This study thus examined the experiences of the female characters not only in isolation but also as a collective, and how they navigated their trauma by seeking solidarity among themselves.

Other Literary Techniques

Studies explore various techniques of postcolonial trauma. Scholars agree that characters' experiences reflect their societies, but some argue writers hold significant power in portraying these experiences (Craps S. a., 2008). Female writers tend to present the suffering of women and girls more clearly than male writers do when presenting the experiences of girls and women in their societies. Thus, storytelling, narration, vivid description, symbolism, and foreshadowing are some significant techniques that paint the desired picture to the audience. This study examined how selected authors employ literary techniques to portray postcolonial trauma in female characters within their texts.

In conclusion, literary techniques are central to postcolonial trauma narratives. Besides, female characters have been portrayed differently across various contexts, despite sharing authentic experiences. Thus, focusing on how they are portrayed is the beginning of understanding why they act the way they do in these stories.

2.1.3 Postcolonial Trauma and Shaping Identity

Ngũgĩ Wa Thiongo's *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) demonstrates how postcolonial theory can be applied to a literary work to provide insight into the complex processes of colonialism. Baytar (2023), in his article, negotiates these assertions. He argues that in *A Grain of Wheat,* the impact of the colonisers on indigenous people is conveyed through the narrative of various locations, people, and events. Baytar's Study explores how Ngũgĩ's text highlights the indigenous people's struggle against colonial oppression. Apart from physical destruction, he looks into how the characters in the novel suffer from social genocide. The coloniser instils fear in the protagonist, leading to ambivalence towards their cultural identity. Each character in the novel, according to Baytar, offers a unique perspective on the effect of social annihilation, with fear being the fundamental component of genocide.

Through social genocide, the characters become conflicted and lose their original identities rather than becoming archetypal figures. For instance, Mumbi, one of the main characters, is forced to betray her community and language, which symbolises the immense impact of social genocide. Similarly, Kihika is portrayed as a hero for leading his people's fight against the colonisers but is eventually killed, highlighting the brutal reality of social genocide.

The novel, therefore, provides a critical analysis of colonialism's impact on African society and the resulting loss of cultural and personal identities. Essential to this Study is the notion of memory and trauma central to each character's life in the text. These shape their

personal and collective experiences. Mugo and Gikonyo share the same burden of betrayal and seem increasingly detached from the world around them. The novel provides a nuanced understanding of memory and its role in shaping identity. In the novel, the quote: 'memory is the only possession that cannot be taken away from us, and it is the glue that binds identity together' (1986, p. 12), emphasises the importance of memory in constructing a sense of self. The novel portrays memory as a personal possession that ties communities and nations together. Memory is a repository of the past, helping us make sense of our experiences and providing a framework for our present and future actions. These aspects in *A Grain of Wheat*, as explored by Baytar in his Study of Culture and Civilisation, are relevant to this Study. The researcher drew on the knowledge aspect of memory in shaping identities, as the examined trauma is historical. However, unlike Baytar, the current research delved into a specific strand of postcolonial trauma theory while addressing issues of postcolonial trauma specific to African women, represented by the female characters in the selected texts.

In terms of the colonial/postcolonial binary, the question of who can affect the closure of historical traumas is bound up with the imagined dismantling of colonialism. The focus of this thesis is, to depict how there are ongoing traumas for many millions of people in African postcolonial countries, whose lives, are still disproportionately circumscribed by the often-intense suffering created by the changing face of power structures that have metamorphosed into neo-colonialism, cultural imperialism, and now the injustices (racial, gendered, and classed) inherent in the universalistic notion of global capitalism. Only those who can ignore "the belated scar(s) – both metaphorical and literal – inscribed on the lives

of millions who *live the consequences of colonialism* can retreat, in the words of Robert Young, into the "safety of its politics in the past" (Young., 1991).

In one of the objectives about the role of postcolonial trauma on the aspect of the formation of identity of African women, belatedness then is also vital in aiding to answer this by addressing the power politics of relation and location, as Frankenberg (1996) suggests: "post" means 'after in time'. However, what happened during that time – presumably, in this instance, a time between 'colonialism' and 'coloniality', and now? In what sense are we now situated 'after'? What about the 'colonial'? Is it over, and for whom?" (Ashcroft, 2015). The politics of location involves both the territorial (the physical location of the body mapped by ownership of land or nation) and the abstract (the psychic mapping of interpellation(s). Moreover, the whole idea of *who will listen* is intrinsic to trauma theory and the possibility of resolution through testimony, as well as to the politics of the postcolonial arena. In postcolonial theory itself, the question was raised by Gayatri Spivak, most notably in the title of her now-famous essay, "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" (Spivak et al., 1988). However, over time, the focus of her critique shifted, and Spivak answered her rhetorical question by posing another: "For me, the question 'Who should speak?' is less crucial than 'Who will listen?" (Spivak et al., 1988, p. 57). This is important because it highlights the significance of postcolonial women writers' narrative style in articulating their trauma experience, which is also a crucial objective of this Study. Amalgamating trauma theory and post-colonialism is not just about individual traumatic experiences not being assimilated at the time of occurrence. However, the synthesis is complicated by cultural imbalances that are bound by issues of psychic and material domination inherent in ethnocentrism and the invincible power structures of whiteness. These structures of

power change in form but still too often continue after the supposed demise of colonialism… Although the radical disruption of time involved in the concept of belatedness has a positive side, it unsettles the ostensible notion of historical "progress". The articulation of postcolonial trauma(s) that can belatedly be narrativised requires not only a voicing of unresolved historical loss and pain but also access to empathetic listeners.

Surviving trauma depends, to a greater or lesser degree, on being heard and empathetically acknowledged on both personal and social levels (Burrows, 2004). In S*urvival in Auschwitz* (Levi P. , 1996), he recalls a dream in which he attempts to tell his sister and others about his experiences in Auschwitz. They are indifferent and behave as if he is not there. It is a dream, he tells his readers, from which many other concentration camp survivors suffer. Meditating on this psychic enigma, Levi then poses a poignant and ethically significant question that is also relevant to thinking about postcolonial trauma: "Why is the pain of every day translated so constantly into our dreams in the ever-repeated scene of the *Unlistened-to* story? (Levi P. , 1996, p. 60).

Postcolonial trauma is, of course, of a different nature to the horrors of the Holocaust, but the intrinsic pain remains the same. To be released from trauma's encryptions, a narrative (personal and social) has to be constructed and then physically released through the act of being compassionately listened to and affirmed. This study, therefore, examined the literary techniques employed by the two selected African women writers and how they represented the manifestation of postcolonial trauma among African women in postcolonial countries, suggesting avenues for healing and reconciliation.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, a Kenyan writer who formerly wrote in English and is now writing in Gikuyu, is a novelist and theorist of postcolonial literature. In 1986, Ngũgĩ wrote his best-

known and most-cited nonfiction work, *Decolonising the Mind*: The Politics of Language in African Literature (Ngugi, 1986). It is a collection of four essays about language and its constructive role in national culture, history, and identity. It advocates linguistic decolonisation. In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ examines the role of language in any country. In this study, the researcher utilised Ngũgĩ's language theory to describe the functions of colonial language in causing traumatic fragmentation and the loss of identity in African women, as represented in *Purple Hibiscus* (Adichie, 2004) and *Nervous Conditions* (Dangarembga, 1988). Ngũgĩ (1986) asserts that communication and culture are the products of each other, "communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries language, particularly through oratory and literature. The entire body of values by which we perceive ourselves and our place in the world" (Ngugi, 1986, p. 4). Ngũgĩ argues that communication between human beings propels the evolution of culture, but language also carries a culture's history, values, and aesthetics. We can carry culture from one generation to the next through oral and written literature.

Ngũgĩ's understanding of imperialism, as he articulates in his work, is more based on cultural imperialism as he said – "Imperialism is total: it has economic, political and military, cultural and psychological consequences for the people of the world today" (Ngugi, 1986, p. 5). Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus* provides an accurate account of imperialism in its entirety, as explored in the later chapters of this study. Ngũgĩ associates language with two mutually opposed forces in Africa. The first is an imperialist tool, and the second is a weapon of resistance for colonised people. Ngũgĩ considers English in Africa as a "cultural bomb" that continues a process of wiping out pre-colonial histories

and identities. He defines "cultural bomb" as the effect of the cultural bomb to annihilate a people's belief in their names, languages, environments, heritage of struggle, unity, capacities, and ultimately in themselves. (Ngugi, 1986, p. 16). He determines that English separated African people from their heritage and from themselves. Ngũgĩ asserts that linguistic oppression is the greatest threat of imperialism.

Ngũgĩ defines *linguistic oppression* as 'colonial alienation', which is the deliberate dissociation of the language of their daily interactions in the home and community, and they read and write in English at school and in other official work. Ngũgĩ defines colonial alienation – "Colonial alienation is like separating the mind from the body so that they occupy two unrelated linguistic spheres in the same person. On a larger scale, it is like producing a society of bodiless heads and headless bodies (Ngugi, 1986, p. 28). Ngũgĩ's observations are vital in this study, and I, therefore, sought to advance them by explicitly identifying and studying how colonial language is vital in causing neuroses in the female characters of the texts *Purple Hibiscus and Nervous Conditions.*

Shahanaz et al. (2019), in their article, "The Impact of Colonisation: A Crucial Study of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*," studied the impact of colonisation in Africa in general and on Nigeria in particular. They explore various effects of colonialism concerning culture, language, and religion. Issues related to discrimination, white supremacy, and linguistic and cultural imperialism are addressed. In addition, the article highlights the diversity of Nigerians and their traditions. The current study, however, advanced on their findings by investigating how the impact of this colonialism is traumatic and continues even into the contemporary generation by unravelling specifically postcolonial trauma in African women as regards colonial legacies. The researcher discusses how it is crucial not to

generalise the experiences of colonial victims, following the issue of women facing the tragedy of double colonisation.

Abubakar (2016), in his study titled "Traumatic Experiences of Nigerian Women: An Archetypal Representation in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus,"* explores the traumatic experiences of Nigerian women in their various facets. He incorporated trauma theory and examined women's responses to trauma caused by domestic violence, sexual assault, penury, wounded emotions, oppression of tyrannical leaders and social forces. Abubakar's study is significant to this study as it has identified strategies employed by women to manage the violence of partners or societal-inflicted trauma. However, Abubakar does not in any way link the trauma of Nigerian women, as represented by characters in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), to colonial legacies, which is the primary concern of this Study. Moreover, He uses the hegemonic trauma theory, which is Western in nature. In contrast, this study aimed to distinguish the unique and complex aspects of postcolonial trauma, focusing on the decolonising trauma model and postcolonial feminist trauma theory. Utilising his findings, the current study aspired to associate the troubles and suffering of Nigerian women with the enduring effects of colonisation.

In another study, Rackley (2015), uses Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Purple Hibiscus* to explore trauma, specifically, the traumatic effects of the Biafran war and domestic abuse and their impact on middle-class Igbo women's gender performances. Her Study exposes middle-class Igbo women's ability to adapt and challenge their position within local, national, and transitional society. Rackley's study is essential to this study because it examines the traumatic experiences of postcolonial Africa as represented in her two selected texts. Moreover, it exposes the culturally specific practice of storytelling as the

primary method for initiating the healing process, both individually and nationally, after personal trauma and the national trauma of Nigeria's past. However, Rackley's study does not focus on connecting the traumatic experiences of the characters in the novels to the colonial legacies. For instance, the study does not highlight how the suffering of women in the texts is due to their husbands' internalisation of the coloniser's values from their encounters with Western ideologies.

This study's goal is to expose how patriarchy excelled in oppressing women due to the influence they received from their colonisers through adapting their religious and educational standards. Rackley's study is again within the Nigerian community, exploring texts written by the same author, Adichie. In contrast, the current study comparatively analysed two texts from disparate African communities to identify commonalities and differences resulting from the legacies of colonisation. This is essential to advocate for the healing of the continent as a whole by drawing empathy and solidarity from African women.

Najeeb (2018), has significantly pointed out that factors such as patriarchy, culture, religion, and colonial education have contributed to violence and conflict. His study focuses on gender violence in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. He attempts to shed light on violence and oppression directed at both male and female characters in the novel as a result of religious fanaticism and traditional African culture. Reviewing his study is necessary because he provides an accurate picture of Nigerian society during a challenging period marked by a military coup. Thus, it fits well in the postcolonial context that this study is interested in. The current study expounds on the critical approaches of Najeeb's findings by depicting how the physical, psychological, and mental violence denoted in the novel

are traumatic and have enduring effects on the women of the Nigerian community and Africa as a whole. Moreover, the study looked into how religious extremism orchestrated by Western missionaries and a fragmented culture due to colonialism could lead to disastrous outcomes, such as a distorted identity that has not been exhaustively explored by Najeeb (2018).

One of the most comprehensive and significant contemporary texts on trauma and literature (specifically women) is *Trauma Narratives and Herstory* (Andermahr, 2013), which is a collection of essays about novels from diverse cultures that focus on women's traumatic history as it is retold in literature and visual arts. The volume, which, as noted above, features a wide array of women's articulations of trauma from around the world, explores the possibility of new writing and art "to disclose silenced accounts of history, experiment with ways in which trauma can be represented, and attempt to deal with these experiences of human suffering." The focus of the contributors of formerly underrepresented groups in terms of trauma literary studies and the volume's commitment to the 'gender specificity of trauma' presents a foundation on which this Study hinges its recognition of the necessity of the specificity of postcolonial trauma experienced by African women, which needs to be regarded on its terms and not subsumed within broader taxonomies. The researcher considers that the recent trauma theory, while laudable, has not presented sufficient specific frameworks for transcultural explorations of African women's trauma novels. Any significant attempt at this would require a collective retrieval of African women's perspectives and memories of colonialism from the margins of history.

Despite the substantial contributions of Trauma Narratives and Herstory, the two essays on Black women's writing in the anthology primarily focus on Morrison's Beloved and Walker's *The Colour Purple*. This study sought to extend this type of analysis to a broader range of texts. The two novels by American writers Morrison and Walker have been the crux of many discussions about black womanhood in literature. Despite their importance as constant fixtures in studies of black women's writing, this research pursues a distinctive approach that incorporates writing beyond African American authors and considers fiction from Africa. This Study, therefore, examined two contemporary novels by African women from diverse regions, West Africa and South Africa: Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, respectively. Through comparative reading of these novels, the research focuses on postcolonial trauma and reveals the intricacies of African women's experiences within the enduring legacies of colonialism. The selected texts not only prove that significant similarities abound in the experiences of African women in terms of oppression but also highlight the dearth of collective postcolonial trauma theory specific to African women's writing. Through their literary recollections of colonialism's echoes in the present, the Study argues that the writers connect present traumas to past oppressions. They situate the forgotten into present memory to encourage remembering, healing, and material recovery.

In examining the discourse on postcolonial trauma within African texts, it becomes clear that while scholars have extensively explored the broader implications of colonialism and its lasting psychological effects, there remains a significant gap in addressing the specific experiences of postcolonial trauma among African women. This gap is crucial because it overlooks a nuanced understanding of how gender interacts with colonial histories to shape

unique forms of trauma and resilience in African women. Postcolonial trauma in these women involves a complex interaction of historical legacies, patriarchal systems, and cultural identities. These women have endured the violence and exploitation of colonialism. Nevertheless, their experiences are often marginalised or ignored in scholarly conversations that tend to emphasise more general narratives of national or continental trauma. By prioritising male experiences or overarching national struggles, existing literature, such as the works reviewed here, fails to reveal the distinct ways in which African women have navigated and internalised trauma across diverse socio-political contexts.

Furthermore, excluding African women's voices maintains a narrative gap that masks not only their historical contributions but also their ongoing struggles and successes amid persistent socio-economic challenges. Understanding postcolonial trauma through a gendered perspective, the core idea of this study, is vital for breaking down stereotypes, empowering marginalised voices, and encouraging inclusive discussions that recognise the intersectional aspects of trauma and resilience.

Therefore, this research needs to focus on and highlight the narratives of African women, examining how their experiences of colonisation, displacement, and cultural erasure have shaped their identities and psychosocial well-being. By prioritising these voices, this research can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of postcolonial trauma in Africa, paving the way for more nuanced interventions, policies, and support systems that meet the specific needs and realities of African women in their postcolonial contexts.

In conclusion, this study of postcolonial trauma in African women, as portrayed in the selected texts, is not just an academic exercise but a moral obligation rooted in social

justice and equity. It encourages us to confront historical silences, elevate marginalised voices, and create pathways towards healing and empowerment in striving for a more just and inclusive global discourse.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework provides a conceptual lens through which this research study examines the historical legacy of trauma in literature. It draws on postcolonial feminism and decolonising trauma theories as sub-strands of broader postcolonial theories to analyse the selected texts and their relationship to postcolonial trauma among African women.

2.2.1 Postcolonial Theory and its broader perspective

Postcolonial theory, or post-colonialism, can be characterised as the investigation of the impact and legacy of colonialism from post-WWII to the present. It explores the colonial legacy's socio-political, psychological, and political impact. Postcolonial theory also investigates the conduct of recently freed social orders as they struggle for self-determination. It examines the rejection of colonial, social, and political guidelines and frameworks that had long been abandoned and overwhelmed colonisers. Postcolonial theory additionally examines literary forms and cultural viewpoints that emerged during the postcolonial period, after colonialism waned, through diverse ways and strategies. Visser (2015) asserts that postcolonial literary theory emerged after Western theory failed to adequately address the complexities and diverse cultural determinations of postcolonial writing. Since the publication of Said's Orientalism in the late 1970s, postcolonial theory and studies have taken an interest in the range of socio-political and literary responses, offering alternative points of view and contestations. The distinction between the field and

the various postcolonial contexts has elicited diverse responses across postcolonial theory and studies.

Darby and Paolini (1994) characterise post-colonialism as the pursuit and reclaiming of the moral and passionate stance in confronting Western advancement led by experts from developing nations or researchers from the West. The progression of such a process is fragile, leading to significant methodological and progressive viewpoints.

Thus, scholars find numerous perspectives that focus on the application of theory in distinct postcolonial fields. It is worth noting that colonial powers administered over 80% of the world for more than three centuries, until their collapse following World War II. The impact of the imperial period and the aftermath of decolonisation shaped the literary and theoretical enthusiasm for its diverse issues, in which the much-touted encounters of the ex-colonised countries suggested that the postcolonial era could be a free world. Thus, there is no altered physical definition of the term postcolonial, since colonised cultures were entirely influenced by the colonial movement from the start of colonialism to today (Visser, 2015, p. 3). Many experts and scholars contributed to the advancement of postcolonial theory. Visser names four exceptional figures that "show up over and over as scholars who have formed postcolonial theory: Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak" (Visser, 2015, p. 4). Thus, postcolonial theory and response in the lion's share of critics and scholars emerge from the legacy of colonialism; as Bhabha (1994) attests, postcolonial perspectives arise from the colonial evidence of third-world countries and the discourse of "minorities" within the geopolitical divisions. These points of view include cutting-edge ideological debates that aim to standardise the administration of development and history across social orders, races, and nations.

Hence, postcolonial theory and studies identify distinctive decolonisation groups and tendencies within its margins and debates. The guarantee of postcolonial theory is bound to the perspectives and experiences of nations that have lived under colonial rule. As Young (2001) argues, postcolonial theory and feedback fail to capture the precise encounters of colonial history; instead, they focus on the aftermath of colonialism. Additionally, postcolonial theory and studies examine social orders and nations whose encounters contest for space in a world where recognition becomes a primary dilemma. Postcolonial theory provides valuable insights into power dynamics, cultural hybridity, and the enduring legacies of colonialism. However, it often overlooks the specific struggles of African women in the face of colonial legacies. In this regard, this Study must employ a specific strand of postcolonial theory in its inquiries. The theory is postcolonial feminism, which seeks to delve into specific African issues related to colonial legacies. By employing a postcolonial feminism lens, this research explored how postcolonial trauma in African women intersects with colonial histories, power imbalances, the ongoing struggle for decolonisation, and a collective African womanhood that fits in the global present.

2.2.2 Decolonising Trauma Theory.

Literature is regarded as one of the media that best reflects trauma. Traditionally conceived as an event that has not registered memory, experienced belatedly, and one that altered the traumatised person's sense of self and time, literature seemed appropriately put into words. During the 20th century, numerous narrative testifies to the atrocities of war, the Holocaust, and genocide. In the last few decades, the analysis of trauma in literature has expanded to include the representations of suffering beyond Anglo-centric frontiers and

the historical and collective traumas of oppressed subjects within the borders. Decolonising trauma, therefore, refers to the critical re-examination and reinterpretation of trauma through frameworks that challenge Eurocentric psychological and literary paradigms. It seeks to reclaim indigenous, cultural, and collective understandings of suffering, memory, and healing that colonial epistemologies have marginalised. In literary and cultural studies, decolonising trauma involves centring postcolonial experiences, languages, and narratives to expose how colonial violence continues to shape subjectivities, while also restoring agency to those historically silenced by dominant Western models of trauma.

Trauma theory, long shaped by Western psychoanalytic and literary traditions, has been increasingly critiqued for its narrow conceptual scope and its limited capacity to address the complex historical and collective dimensions of suffering in formerly colonised societies. Decolonising trauma theory emerges as a corrective response to this imbalance, calling for a more inclusive and contextually grounded understanding of trauma. As Irene Visser (2015) observes, decolonising trauma studies involves re-evaluating what remains of classical trauma theory's Eurocentric foundations and envisioning new frameworks that respond to the realities of postcolonial and non-Western experiences. It insists that trauma cannot be understood purely as an individual psychic wound but must be located within the historical, political, and cultural continuities of colonialism and its afterlives (Visser, 2015).

At the heart of decolonising trauma theory lies a commitment to contextuality and collectivity. Whereas classical Western models often isolate trauma within the individual psyche, decolonial perspectives highlight its embeddedness in structural and historical

processes. Colonialism, as a project of domination, inflicted not only physical and psychological harm but also epistemic and cultural violence—disrupting indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and communal structures (Goozee, 2020). Thus, trauma in the postcolonial sense is sociogenic, in Frantz Fanon's terms: it is generated by social and political conditions that shape consciousness and identity (Fanon F. , 1963); (Goozee, 2020). Decolonising trauma theory thereby reframes trauma as an ongoing condition that permeates both individual and collective existence, rather than a single catastrophic event.

A second defining tenet of this theoretical orientation is its recognition of multiple modalities of memory and healing. Western trauma scholarship, influenced by psychoanalytic thought, often privileges confession, witnessing, and the written word as the primary means of articulating pain (Caruth C. , 1995; LaCapra, 2001). Decolonising approaches, however, broaden the scope of what counts as legitimate testimony. Oral narratives, ritual practices, communal storytelling, and performance traditions are valued as authentic sites of remembering and recovery. These cultural forms resist reduction to clinical symptomatology; instead, they encode trauma in collective memory and embody resilience through ritual continuity (Visser, 2015; Onah, 2024). By foregrounding such practices, decolonising trauma theory recognises the plural epistemologies of memory that emerge from non-Western contexts.

Equally central to this framework is its non-linear understanding of time. Western trauma theory, grounded in the Freudian notion of belatedness, conceives trauma as a past event that ruptures the present and returns belatedly through repetition or flashback (Caruth C. , 1996). Decolonising perspectives, by contrast, emphasise the continuity of colonial trauma—its refusal to remain confined to the past. As Baleid Taha Shamsan (2025) notes

in his study of postcolonial memory, the psychological residues of colonialism in Libya persist as living realities that shape identity, national consciousness, and historical narrative. In this sense, trauma is both historical and contemporary: it is not merely remembered but relived through neocolonial economic relations, racial hierarchies, and cultural marginalisation. This cyclical temporality underscores that the colonial wound is not closed; it bleeds into the present.

Another fundamental aspect of decolonising trauma theory is its ethical orientation toward voice, agency, and epistemic justice. Colonised subjects were historically denied the authority to define their own suffering, as colonial discourse pathologised them while simultaneously silencing their testimonies (Fanon F. , 1963). Decolonising trauma theory seeks to restore that voice, framing narration not as confession to a Western listener but as an act of reclamation and resistance. Literature, particularly postcolonial writing, becomes a space of narrative reparation where silenced histories can be re-inscribed and trauma can be transformed into a discourse of survival (Pérez Zapata, 2022). This emphasis on storytelling as agency challenges the Eurocentric assumption that the only valid form of healing lies in the psychoanalytic or therapeutic encounter. Instead, it valorises indigenous epistemologies and communal healing rituals as legitimate means of working through trauma (Visser, 2015; Onah, 2024).

When juxtaposed with Western trauma theory, these distinctions become even more apparent. Western trauma theory, exemplified by the work of Cathy Caruth (1996) and Dominick LaCapra (2001), conceptualises trauma as an individual psychic wound—an event so overwhelming it escapes comprehension and representation. Such a framework privileges the individual subject, the event-based temporality, and the linguistic expression

of trauma. Decolonising trauma theory critiques this model for its universalising tendencies, arguing that it abstracts trauma from its political and cultural conditions. Stef Craps (2013) earlier identified this problem as a form of "Eurocentric blindness," in which trauma studies privilege Western catastrophes (such as the Holocaust) while marginalising the traumas of slavery, colonisation, and racial oppression. Decolonising trauma studies thus work to re-centre structural violence and collective suffering as integral to understanding the full spectrum of human trauma (Visser, 2015; Goozee, 2020).

Within this decolonial framework, postcolonial trauma theory emerges as a particularly apt lens for interrogating the colonial legacies that constitute trauma in contemporary societies. It bridges the personal and the political, linking psychic wounds to the material and historical conditions that produce them. Colonial trauma, in this view, is not a discrete event but a prolonged structure of domination that continues to shape subjectivities and social relations long after formal decolonisation. Postcolonial trauma theory also acknowledges the intergenerational transmission of suffering—a process through which colonial violence is inherited as cultural memory, shaping the identities of later generations (Shamsan, 2025). This perspective allows scholars to read trauma not as a static symptom but as a dynamic force within postcolonial cultural production.

Moreover, postcolonial trauma theory is ethically reparative. By privileging the testimonies and cultural forms of formerly colonised peoples, it aims to redress the epistemic injustices of colonial representation. Storytelling, ritual, and cultural performance thus become not only modes of remembrance but also strategies of resistance and healing (Onah, 2024); (Pérez Zapata, 2022). In this sense, trauma is reconceived not solely as damage but as a potential site of transformation—what Pérez Zapata (2022) calls

"decolonising selves." This turn towards reparation reflects an ethical commitment to recognising historical responsibility and promoting epistemic inclusivity in trauma studies.

In sum, while Western trauma theory has provided valuable insights into the psychology of suffering, its individualist and universalising orientation often obscures the collective, historical, and political dimensions of trauma. Decolonising trauma theory, and by extension postcolonial trauma theory, offers a more contextually grounded and ethically responsive framework. It reframes trauma as structural and intergenerational, acknowledges non-Western epistemologies of healing, and centres the voices of those historically silenced. Such a framework is particularly appropriate for analysing the colonial legacies that continue to shape global inequities and cultural identities today. By situating trauma within the enduring structures of colonialism, postcolonial trauma theory transforms the study of suffering into an act of epistemic justice and historical redress (Visser, 2015; Goozee, 2020; Onah, 2024).

In its critical inquiry of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, this study employed the above-mentioned key tenets of decolonising trauma theory to uncover how colonial violence, structural oppression, and cultural dislocation continue to shape the lived experiences of African women. The analysis explored how both novels depict trauma not as a singular event but as a prolonged, intergenerational experience rooted in colonial legacies and perpetuated through familial, religious, and educational institutions. By foregrounding the communal and collective dimensions of trauma, the study considered how entire families and societies carry the psychological weight of colonial histories. It also interrogated the complicity of both men and women in sustaining hegemonic systems, such as patriarchal authority, religious orthodoxy, and class

privilege, highlighting how trauma is embedded not only in external domination but also in the internalisation and reproduction of oppressive norms within the home and community.

Moreover, this study emphasised the value of indigenous knowledge systems and spiritual practices as alternative modes of healing, often marginalised by Western therapeutic paradigms. In both texts, suppressed or silenced spiritual traditions re-emerge as powerful tools for resistance and self-recovery.

Despite its transformative potential, postcolonial trauma theory is not without limitations—particularly when applied to the specific experiences of African women in postcolonial contexts. While it powerfully repositions trauma within the historical and structural legacies of colonialism, it tends to generalise the colonial subject and to overlook how gender intersects with race, class, and cultural identity in shaping the contours of suffering. Much of postcolonial trauma scholarship focuses on collective or national trauma—such as dispossession, slavery, and war—often privileging male-centred narratives of resistance and nationhood (Visser, 2015; Pérez Zapata, 2022). In this framing, the psychic, embodied, and domestic dimensions of trauma that disproportionately affect women risk being obscured. The theory's emphasis on the collective can sometimes mute the gendered textures of pain, such as sexual violence, reproductive trauma, or the intergenerational scars of patriarchal colonial systems that continue to define postcolonial societies (Adams, 2023). Consequently, the experiences of African women—who occupy a unique locus of both colonial and patriarchal subjugation—are often subsumed under a homogenised notion of the colonised subject.

Moreover, postcolonial trauma theory's privileging of historical and political structures of domination can inadvertently underplay the embodied and emotional registers through which trauma manifests in women's everyday lives. While it effectively critiques Eurocentric models for their psychocentric biases, it risks producing another form of abstraction—where the lived, intimate experiences of pain, silence, and survival are read primarily as allegories of the postcolonial condition rather than as complex human realities. This structural orientation also tends to valorise public acts of memory and resistance, often neglecting the quieter, private modes of endurance and care through which African women navigate trauma (Nnaemeka, 2021). In short, postcolonial trauma theory, though invaluable for understanding colonial legacies, struggles to adequately account for the intersecting oppressions—colonial, patriarchal, and cultural—that shape women's traumatic realities.

These limitations underscore the necessity of employing a postcolonial feminist trauma theory to more fully engage with the specificity of African women's experiences. Such an approach recognises that the colonial wound was also gendered, that women's bodies were both targets and terrains of domination, and that their stories require interpretive frameworks attuned to the nexus of gender, culture, and power. By extending and critiquing the insights of postcolonial trauma theory, a feminist lens foregrounds the embodied, relational, and affective dimensions of trauma that traditional postcolonial readings often marginalise. In this way, it becomes possible to illuminate how African women not only inherit and endure trauma but also transform it through acts of resistance, community, and reimagined subjectivity—areas that lie beyond the analytical reach of postcolonial trauma theory alone.

2.2.3 Postcolonial Feminist Trauma Theory

Postcolonial feminist theory, as a specific branch of postcolonialism, developed as a critique of both Western feminism and postcolonial theory. Unlike postcolonial theory, which concentrates on the ongoing economic and political effects of colonialism, postcolonial feminism is concerned with the failure of postcolonial theory to address gender issues. It emphasises the representation of women from former colonised nations and in Western colonies. It also examines the construction of gender differences in colonial and anti-colonial contexts, particularly in the work of women writers. In postcolonial theory, the postcolonial feminist movement examines the gendered history of colonialism and its enduring impacts on women.

Some of the leading proponents of this theory include Hazel Cardy, Audre Lorde, Gayatri Spivak, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Alice Walker, Agbõnè Leslie, Catherine Acholonu, Ania Loomba, and Ogunyemi. These critics believe that while postcolonial theorists address the misrepresentation of colonial subjects by the hegemonic order, the postcolonial feminist faces a more complex task of breaking free from double colonisation. Carby acknowledges that for black women worldwide, being both black and a woman often leads to an identity crisis; being a black man, despite its own complexities, is a stereotype against the universal white. Being a black woman is twice as traumatic because, in the postcolonial context, for instance, black female accounts often become eroded in the shadow of the universalised male struggle against colonial oppression. (Loomba, 2015).

Despite the resistant efforts of post-colonialism, however, women's history, like the history of colonised people in the hands of the colonisers, is similarly under-represented through the universalised male outlook. Loomba recognises this oversight in her explication of colonialism by first identifying that the colonisation of history is evident from even the Oxford English Dictionary definition of colonialism:

> A settlement in a new country … a body of people who settle in a new locality, forming a community subject to or connected with their parent state; the community formed consists of the original settlers and their descendants and successors, as long as the connection to the parent state is kept up. (Loomba, 2015, p. 80)

Loomba (2015) explains that the definition does not refer to other human beings apart from the colonisers, thereby annihilating any trace of the word 'colonialism' of the connotation of an encounter of conquest and domination between two groups. On the other hand, she determines that post-colonialism, instead of just a successor of colonialism, is a construct to question colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism. This is in order to include others like 'people geographically displaced by colonialism, such as African Americans or people of Asian or Caribbean origin or Britain (Loomba, 2015). In this inclusivity effort, the postcolonial female becomes a part of the universal male, thereby overlooking the authentic lived experiences and struggles specific to women in a colonial context.

Spivak (1988) articulates this othering of women in initial postcolonial endeavours as follows: 'If in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in the shadow' (Spivak et al., 1988). This is to say that in reclaiming the identity and history significantly changed by decades of colonialism, women tend to be forgotten, thereby doubling the identity crisis of female postcolonial subjects. For this reason, this Study is an attempt to view traumatic colonial

history from the perspective of African women. The aim is to reclaim African female identity that is doubly in crisis, first as a result of colonialism and as a casualty of postcolonial endeavours to rewrite history or tell the past. This reclamation begins with a rewriting of history without the gender blindness (Spivak et al., 1988) that pioneer postcolonial theorists and literary artists focused on, which universalised male history, male trauma and identity.

Loomba (2015) supplements this argument by investigating the intricacies of colonial and postcolonial subjects and identities. She poses the question of how 'colonial encounter restructures ideologies of racial, cultural, class and sexual difference' (Loomba, 2015) and the different ways patriarchal oppressions and colonial domination are historically connected. To examine the postcolonial oversight of neglecting women's history in a bid to reclaim the identity of the universal male figure, Loomba's exploration of colonialism and post-colonialism proves helpful. It concerns how women with colonial backgrounds are represented in postcolonial discourse, especially regarding literature and women's writing. Among Loomba's grievances against the male postcolonial theorists is the double colonisation that the postcolonial female subject suffers, as coined by Anna Rutherford and Kristen Holst Peterson. This suffering manifests in the woman's struggle to be free from colonialism and its consequences while at the same time fighting off unfair representation within. Because post-colonialism has been viewed as a male-dominated discipline that is more concerned with universalising the male role in reclaiming the colonial past, colonial oppression has been likened to sexual domination (Loomba, 2015).

While Loomba (2015) did not specifically centre African women in her work, this study aligns with her postcolonial feminist theory by employing a postcolonial discourse framework. This framework draws on approaches that view African women's fiction as

aiming to recover their distorted or forgotten history and identity. It also seeks to evoke healing from the insidious trauma caused by colonialism and slavery, along with their lasting effects.

African Feminism

African feminism emphasises female autonomy and cooperation, prioritising nature over culture; the centrality of children, multiple mothering, and kinship (Chioma, 1981). African feminist literature, she posits, concerns itself with the liberty of all African people. However, indebted to the global feminist movement, African feminist discourse delineates those concerns peculiar to the African situation. It also questions feature of traditional African cultures without denigrating them, understanding that these might be viewed differently by the different classes of women. One sphere that has increasingly held the attention of theorists like Steady has been the question of men's involvement. The rationale is that, if African feminism is to succeed as a human reformation project, it cannot accept separatism from the opposite sex. Eschewing male exclusion then becomes one defining feature of African feminism that differentiates it from feminism as it is conceptualised in the West.

It could be argued that Ogunyemi's womanism is just one among many forms of African feminism, such as motherism—a theory proposed by Catherine Acholonu that focuses on motherhood, nature, nurture, and environmental respect—and 'stiwanism', which derives from the word 'STIWA', meaning Social Transformation Including Women in Africa. This concept was developed by Moara Ogundipe Leslie, and Stiwa, as a result of womanism, represents a social change approach rooted in the experiences of African, African American, and other women of colour.

African feminism, on the other hand, concentrates solely on the experiences of African women and how to promote societal change by involving both men and women. The key difference between feminists and womanists lies in their perceptions of patriarchy and what they believe can be addressed, writes Ogunyemi in her book Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English. She distinguishes radical feminism from womanism by stating that, according to radical feminism, sexism is the only patriarchal system oppressing women, often referring to white middle-class educated women. Naturally, black women are excluded from this. As a result, radical feminists see confronting and transforming sexism as a victory for women across all cultures globally. Beyond this, radical feminism aims to establish a separatist society free from male authority. The treatment of black and African American women is just one aspect of womanism. When asked about the status of women's writing in South Africa, Beata Lipman, a white South African journalist, replied, "Racism is a more important concern than sexism." (Ogunyemi, 2018, p. 122). Lipman's comment offers a broad yet culturally specific definition of womanism. Womanism addresses more than sexism and racism; it also considers cultural, national, economic, and political factors in the fight against oppressive patriarchal systems. Therefore, the womanist views patriarchy as encompassing racism, cultural oppression, national suppression, and political subjugation, in addition to sexism.

The oppression of black and African people by white patriarchal institutions is well-known. The womanist confronts patriarchy as a constraining reality, both as a woman in relation to her black African male counterpart and as a person oppressed and exploited politically and economically by the white race. Furthermore, rather than exclusivity, womanism promotes

a sense of wholeness and unity that includes men, women, and children. Unlike radical feminism, it is not separatist or anti-male.

Building upon the limitations identified in postcolonial trauma theory regarding its insufficient attention to the gendered dimensions of trauma, this study employs Ogunyemi's Womanist theory to provide a nuanced lens for examining the experiences of African women. Womanism, as articulated by Ogunyemi (2018), is inherently Black-centered and accommodationist, affirming women's freedom and independence while simultaneously promoting unity among Black women, men, and children. This accommodationist orientation makes it particularly suitable for postcolonial contexts, where liberation cannot be achieved in isolation but must address the intersecting social, cultural, and historical forces that shape women's lived experiences. By foregrounding collective responsibility and relational accountability, Womanism extends the analytical reach of postcolonial trauma theory, emphasising that African women's suffering—and their processes of resilience—must be understood within the broader communal and structural dynamics of postcolonial societies.

A central contribution of Womanist theory to the study of trauma is its insistence on the interconnectedness of gender, race, and community. Ogunyemi (2018) conceptualises Womanism as a tool for uniting Black African women in their struggle against oppression while simultaneously fostering men's awareness of women's humanity and equality. In this sense, Womanism not only addresses the gendered experiences of trauma that postcolonial trauma theory may underplay—such as sexual violence, domestic abuse, and patriarchal subjugation—but also situates these experiences into the broader fabric of racial, cultural, and historical oppression. The inclusion of men and children in the liberation project reflects

the theory's emphasis on inclusive social transformation, demonstrating that addressing trauma is inherently relational and community-oriented.

Womanist theory's holistic, intersectional view aligns with postcolonial feminist trauma scholarship. Ogunyemi (2018) highlights that Womanism considers racial, cultural, national, economic, and political aspects of women's experiences, showing that female subjugation goes beyond just patriarchy or sexism. This intersectional perspective complements postcolonial feminist trauma theory by highlighting the embodied, relational, and contextual realities of African women's suffering, recognising that their trauma is both personal and historically situated, shaped by colonial legacies and ongoing structural inequalities. At the same time, Womanism valorises the strengths, resilience, and positive features of Black life, offering a framework that attends to both the vulnerabilities and the agency of African women as they navigate and contest oppressive structures.

By integrating postcolonial feminist trauma theory with Ogunyemi's Womanist framework, this study foregrounds a theoretical approach that is simultaneously historically grounded, gender-conscious, and culturally attuned. Whereas postcolonial trauma theory illuminates the colonial and structural dimensions of trauma, Womanism ensures that the specific, gendered experiences of African women are fully accounted for, situating their suffering and resilience within a collective and relational matrix. Together, these frameworks provide a robust lens for analysing the selected texts, allowing the study to interrogate how African women articulate trauma, reclaim agency, and negotiate social, cultural, and familial constraints, while also contributing to broader projects of postcolonial liberation and communal healing.

A womanist reading of Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) offers a culturally grounded and inclusive way to analyse how trauma is represented in African women. Both novels feature young female protagonists, Tambu and Kambili, who experience gendered and psychological trauma within family structures influenced by patriarchy and colonial history. Womanism, emphasising Black-centered and accommodating values, helps critique the sexist behaviours of male characters like Babamukuru and Papa Eugene without advocating for separation or gender hostility. Instead, it interprets their oppressive actions as outcomes of colonial conditioning and internalised hierarchies that can be addressed through re-education and community healing. Womanism, therefore, supports a vision of liberation where men, women, and children are united, not divided, through collective change.

Additionally, the study utilised womanism's insistence on incorporating racial, cultural, economic, and national contexts to explore the roots and expressions of female trauma in both novels. Tambu's and Kambili's struggles are not simply with patriarchy, but with systems of power entangled with colonial education, religious dogma, and economic dependence. A womanist perspective enabled the analysis to go beyond identifying individual suffering, instead highlighting how African women's trauma is linked to the dismantling of cultural identity and family cohesion under colonial legacies. At the same time, womanism recognises the resilience and humanity of African women, valuing the nurturing roles of mothers like Beatrice and Ma'Shingayi, while also calling attention to their silences and complicity. By embracing both critique and cultural affirmation, womanism allowed the study to foreground not only the wounds of postcolonial African

women but also their potential for healing, empowerment, and leadership in uniting fractured families and communities.

In summary, black womanism is a worldview that honours black culture, upholds black values, and positively presents black femininity. It is about the struggles for black sexual power, as well as the world's persecution of black people. The ideal state of black unity is one in which every black person has some power and may be a brother, sister, father, or mother to someone else. Its goal is to convey the energy of completeness and healing found in the uplifting, integrative aspects of womanist literature. (Ogunyemi, 2018, p. 72).

In reading the primary texts, the study merged the decolonising trauma model and postcolonial feminist theories into a postcolonial trauma theory that explicitly explores African women's trauma in literary fiction.

This study examines the relevance of current Western trauma theory and postcolonial theory in studying the trauma of African women specifically. It also explores the similarities and differences in the trauma and identity of African women across various cultures and how these similarities and differences call for cross-cultural solidarity among them. Additionally, the study examines the contributions of selected authors and their novels to understanding African women's trauma and identity in the context of colonialism. It explores how writing about these traumas can lead to the reclaiming of collective African womanhood, history, healing, and material recovery. These questions are driven by the gap in trauma studies, which often overlook both a clear postcolonial perspective and the perspective of African women in reclaiming history through fiction.

2.3 Conclusion

By integrating the above theoretical frameworks, the research study comprehensively analysed postcolonial trauma in African women. It presented a detailed overview of the history and present situation of the decolonising trauma project, the sociocultural context in which it is portrayed, and how literature serves as a medium for representation, healing, and resilience for postcolonial African women.

CHAPTER THREE

FORMS OF TRAUMA MANIFESTED IN THE FEMALE CHARACTERS OF *NERVOUS CONDITIONS* AND *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the forms of trauma experienced by female characters in *Nervous Conditions* and *Purple Hibiscus.* First, it briefly outlines the studies' context by summarising the texts and providing relevant background information. Then, it analyses the forms of trauma in each work to create a basis for comparison. Additionally, the chapter explores how the female characters attempt to overcome the trauma inflicted by oppressive colonial and patriarchal regimes but ultimately succumb to pressure, demonstrating that this oppression is systemic, supported and enforced by society and its institutions, and therefore beyond individual control.

3.2 Synopses and Contextual Background of *Nervous Conditions* and *Purple Hibiscus*

Nervous Conditions is the first novel published by Dangarembga. It is set in the backdrop of Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe) in the late 1960s and early 1970s, before independence. It highlights the conditions of the natives and the aftermath of colonial rule. The novel narrates the history of Rhodesians' plight under colonial rule and the devastating effects of colonial rule on the lives of natives. The novel opens with the news of the protagonist Tambu's brother's death. Tambu does not feel sad about her brother Nhamo's death because he used to live away from home in a missionary school. Tambu's only desire is to study, but

her family cannot afford her education because of poverty. Tambu's uncle Babamukuru, who has fully adopted English ways, visits Tambu's place and asks her parents to let Tambu replace Nhamo in the missionary school. The novel explores Nyasha's frustration and that of other characters. Each character is disturbed and nervous about the Englishness of the society. The novel narrates history through different perspectives, thus deconstructing the traditional official history of colonialism.

The novel's title is taken from Sartre's preface to Fanon's most famous work, *The Wretched of the Earth,* in which he states, "the condition of the native is a nervous condition" (Fanon F. , 1963, p. 20) . Dangarembga illustrates the nervousness of native identity in colonial Rhodesia through a series of mini-narratives. Dangarembga (1988) describes the colonial strategies through which the colonisers ruled the natives hegemonically. The exercise of power by the colonisers resulted in trauma and identity crises in native characters. Dangarembga (1988) shows the consequences of colonial suppression, which resulted in violence against native subjects. Each character inflicts pain on others inferior to him in the power hierarchy because of the disturbed state of mind caused by colonial oppression. Dangarembga (1988) narrates history from marginal perspectives, thus providing an alternative history through the amalgamation of fictive characters. Set in Rhodesia on the edge of independence, the novel focuses on the complexities of colonialism and the educational strategies by which the colonisers hegemonically controlled the native population. Dangarembga narrates the historical facts of colonial history through fictional characters and breaks the frame of reality as a fictional construct. Tambu, the novel's protagonist, narrates the history of colonialism in Southern Rhodesia through her life experiences. Her idea about the colonisers comes from the knowledge passed to her by her

grandmother and brother, Nhamo. Tambu's understanding of the missionaries comes from her life in Rhodesia, where natives longed to have the opportunity to be educated in white ways.

The missionary school system in Africa began in 1890, initiated by Cecil John Rhodes during the European occupation. According to him, mission "work as one of the best means for opening up and civilising a country" (as cited in (Schmidt, 1992, p. 123)). The mission schools served not only academic purposes but also aimed to teach natives "cleanliness and orderliness," reflecting the colonial mindset that perceived natives as dirty, savage, and retarded individuals in need of civilisation by the white man, considered the white man's burden. Tambu's perception of the white person as a "holy" and "superior" figure exemplifies the social and power dynamics at the highest societal levels. The native was positioned as the inferior, dirty savage. Goldberg (2002) asserts that "racial rule is accordingly taken to be legitimated in virtue of the assumption that non-Europeans are inherently inferior to Europeans, indeed, so inferior as to be incapable of most self-governance" (Goldberg, 2002, p. 82). Through Tambu's fictional character, Dangarembga depicts historical events in colonial Rhodesia, thereby blurring the lines between fact and fiction within the colonial context of *Nervous Conditions*.

Purple Hibiscus is Adichie's debut novel, published in 2004. It features two Igbo families: Papa Eugene's family, consisting of his wife, Beatrice Achike, commonly called Mama; a daughter, Kambili; a son, Chukwuka, who is always referred to by his childhood nickname, Jaja; and himself. They also have a household help, Sisi, and a driver, Kevin. They live in Enugu. Papa Eugene is a wealthy businessman who owns several factories, high-value

properties, and the Sunday Standard newspaper, which is the only paper that dares to give a critical voice to the corrupt and oppressive military government of Nigeria. The second family is Aunty Ifeoma's family, consisting of two sons, namely: Obiora and Chima, one daughter, Amaka, and their widowed mother. Aunty Ifeoma is a lecturer at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka. She embodies critical thinking, especially towards gender and colonial ideologies. Papa Eugene and Aunty Ifeoma are siblings, children of Papa Nnukwu, and are both Roman Catholic practising families. Papa Nnukwu, their father, did not convert to Christianity, but remains a practising believer in African Indigenous ways of belief and worship, a stance that allows the reader to judge the different types of Christianity embraced by his children, Ifeoma and Eugene, judged by their attitude towards their father. Religion is central to the plot of *Purple Hibiscus*, highlighting both colonised and decolonised hybrid minds.

Kambili, a 15-year-old daughter of Papa Eugene, is the narrator of their stories. The narrative setting of *Purple Hibiscus* is the 1980's, specifically under the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida, a period marked by political instability, corruption, and human rights abuses following the Nigerian civil war which lead to escalated violence against critical citizens, lack of petrol, water, electricity and money to pay workers their salaries, a context that leads to multiple public strikes amongst medical personnel, students, lectures and many other profession- also, bringing most services to a standstill and hiking prices of food and the available services. It also led to migration to other countries, as the conditions of living and survival became harder. This political context constitutes post-independence disappointments (Mustapha, 2022). This novel thus explores the lasting effects of colonialism and the tensions within a family living under this authoritarian rule.

Studying *Purple Hibiscus* by Adichie (2004) and *Nervous Conditions* by Dangarembga (1988) together helps us understand how colonialism has deeply affected individuals and families in different African countries. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili lives under her father's strict and abusive control, which reflects how colonial influence shaped family life and religious beliefs in Nigeria. The story shows how this control causes emotional and physical pain that constitutes the characters' trauma and limits personal freedom.

In *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Tambudzai faces challenges growing up in colonial Zimbabwe, especially as a young girl trying to get an education. She struggles with issues of gender, race, and identity, showing how colonialism created unfair systems that affected women's dreams and family dynamics.

Studying both books together is important because it shows how postcolonial trauma affects women in different places but in similar ways. Both Kambili and Tambudzai, the protagonists of the two texts, struggle to find their voices and identities amidst cultural pressures and family expectations shaped by colonial history. Together, these books help readers understand the long-lasting impact of colonialism on personal lives, cultures, and societies, making them valuable stories for exploring identity, freedom, and attempted resilience that are systemically controlled.

Postcolonial feminism theory and the concept of decolonising trauma will be used in this chapter to study forms of trauma in *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) and *Nervous Conditions* (1988) by focusing on how colonialism and patriarchy together oppress women and girls in postcolonial societies. These theories will highlight how gender, culture, and colonial history intersect to shape the experiences of female characters like Kambili and Tambudzai.

In *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), the two theories help us understand how Kambili's father uses both religious and cultural authority, rooted in colonial influence, to control and silence her and her mother. The trauma they face is not only personal but also linked to the larger effects of colonialism on family structures and gender roles.

In *Nervous Conditions* (1988), the theory reveals how Tambudzai and her female counterparts struggle against both colonial oppression and traditional gender expectations. Her desire for education and independence clashes with societal norms that limit women, showing how colonialism deepens existing gender inequalities.

By using postcolonial feminism theory and the concept of decolonising trauma, we can explore how both novels show the double burden of colonial and patriarchal oppression on women, leading to physical, psychological, and social trauma, while also highlighting their attempted resilience and fight for freedom.

3.3 **The forms of trauma in *Nervous Conditions***

Nervous Conditions (1988) is an exemplary novel depicting insidious trauma caused by colonial oppression and discrimination. In this context, insidious refers to cumulative and ongoing experiences of marginalisation, objectification, and intimidation faced by indigenous communities targeted by racism, as well as women subjected to both racism, sexism, and poverty. The novel explores the traumatised condition of "the native" as a consequence of colonial interventions disrupting the traditional Shona culture in colonial Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Dangarembga's first-person narrator, Tambudzai (subsequently referred to as Tambu), offers insight into the coming-of-age awareness of a teenage narrator struggling to cope and survive in a distorted

colonial world. Tambu's complex identity, which will be discussed in chapter five of this study, provides the reader with an elaborate analysis of the sources underpinning the nervous conditions of the colonised.

Nervous Conditions (1988) subdivides the nervousness of the characters into gendered categories and provides an account of the extent of Westernisation that pollutes and distorts the traditional gender roles. The patriarchal system played a crucial role in the study of the female characters' traumatic experiences. In *Wretched of the Earth* (1963), Fanon describes the colonial world as "a world in which the world of the native is the negation of the world of the settler." Dangarembga (1988) goes beyond the limits of Fanon's canonical general narrative of post-colonial psychiatric thought and literary criticism, presenting patriarchal and colonial domination from a woman's point of view. The author challenges Fanon (1963) by exploring other psychological realities that he leaves unexamined – most specifically the role of gender in the colonial context (Kubra, 2023). In Dangarembga's critique of patriarchy, she underlines how "the sexualities of native men and women are contained and mortified by colonialism and by Shona and Western patriarchy respectively" (Kubra, 2023). With her novel, Dangarembga seems to imply that the condition of a female native has more additional burdens. (Hawley, 2002).

3.3.1 **Trauma of Colonial dismemberment—Alienation.**

Denotatively, dismemberment means to 'cut off the limbs of a body'. In *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance* (2009), Ngugi elaborates on the two stages of dismemberment: social, physical, and mental. Social and physical dismemberment involves removing Africans from their homeland and relocating them to an environment where they

are enslaved to the desires and plans of their colonisers. In mental dismemberment, which he also refers to as decapitation, Ngugi details how the coloniser did not literally cut off the heads of the colonised but "rather dismembered the colonised from memory, turning their heads upside down and burying all the memories they carried" (Ngugi, 2009, p. 7). He further expands on this term, using it metaphorically and on several levels: linguistic, cultural, political, and economic. However, it is essential to note that, in a synergistic process, dismemberment as a colonial process is followed by re-membering, which takes many forms today. While African countries have managed to liberate themselves from colonialism since the 1950s through revolutionary means and political negotiations, the enduring effects of colonialism, in this case trauma, persist in African countries that appear to have achieved their freedom and independence. Their state of being colonised continues in more subtle ways than the historical territorial occupation, settlement, and political subordination, as highlighted in chapter two of *Nervous Conditions* (1988) through Tambu's recalling of her grandmother's story:

> Wizards well-versed in treachery and black magic came from the south and forced the people from the land. On a donkey, on foot, on a horse, on an ox-cart, the people looked for a place to live. However, the wizards were avaricious and grasping; there was less and less land for the people (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 18).

This section of this study delves more into emotional dismemberment than the physical and social, as the enduring effects of colonialism go beyond social dismemberment. Moreover, there are a few instances that explicitly depict physical dismemberment.

Before relocating to Babamukuru's home, Tambu admires her uncle's lavish lifestyle and Western education. Her admiration can be interpreted as confirming Dangarembga's critique

of postcolonial trauma. In other words, through Tambu's desire to be part of Babamukuru's world, Dangarembga exposes how Westernisation and modernity dismember Africans by creating the need to be accepted in certain social circles. Tambu states that "Maiguru was well looked after by Babamukuru, in a big house on the mission. I decided it was better to be like Maiguru, who was not poor and had not been crushed by the weight of womanhood" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 16). Being educated like Maiguru becomes her main goal in achieving the freedom she assumes from the burden of womanhood and poverty.

After direct colonialism, in what this research refers to as 'supposed' post-colonialism, most African neo-colonialism takes over from direct colonialism, perpetually dismembering most Africans from their identity and tradition. The once colonised gradually move away from their tradition and become dependent on the former coloniser's ideologies for acceptance. Baharvand and Zarrinjooee (2012) discuss how Babamukuru labels his brother Jeremiah's traditional marriage a sin before God. He arranges a white church wedding for his brother to save him from the sinful traditional marriage. Viewing traditional ways as sinful draws attention to the colonised desire to be acknowledged by the Western colonial culture. Tambu, for instance, experiences self-hate and the endless need to break away from her impoverished background, and the textual presentation of the colonised mental condition accentuates a state of dependency. Viewing the coloniser's ways as superior and as a requirement for acceptance can be perceived as the continued legacy of postcoloniality aimed at dismembering the colonised from their cultural identities and traditions. This view is confirmed in Tambu's narrative, in which she asserts: "I could not imagine anyone wanting to go there, unless, like me, they were going to see their mother. This time the homestead looked worse than usual" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 125).

The above quote alludes to 'self-hatred', a state of mental trauma through which the colonised develops a hatred for his or her background, the very basis of his or her existence. In doing so, the colonised or the oppressed aspires to be accepted into the coloniser's culture, which he or she perceives as civilised and empowering. This colonised perception, which can also be viewed as a form of mental postcolonial trauma, links with Fanon's (2008) assertion regarding the hierarchical discrimination of humans into the two zones of 'being' and 'non-being'. In this hierarchy, the colonised and the oppressed fall into the zone of non-being, while the coloniser, considered superior and more civilised, is placed into the zone of being. After exposure to Babamukuru's Westernised home at the mission, Tambu acquires a new, colonised view that her impoverished home in the village is backward. This change indicates psychological dismemberment.

Another female character who experiences trauma due to alienation from their cultural identity in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) is Nyasha. The character of Nyasha best exemplifies the African woman's alienation from her roots. Her estrangement is simply the result of being caught between two different cultures. At the same time, her father's insistence and acceptance of the colonial concepts as being the best, as well as wanting her to behave as an ideal native Shona woman, deepens this alienation. The time she spent in England has turned her into an Anglicised person who has lost most of her mother tongue: Shona. Upon her return to the homestead, Nyasha, wearing a very short skirt, seems unsure of how to smile and appears out of place. She is sullen at home and disrespectful at the homestead. Maiguru, Nyasha's mother, tries to explain her children's behaviour to her niece Tambu:

> They picked up all these disrespectful ways in England… and it is taking them time to learn how to behave at home again. It is difficult for them

> because things are so different. […] They did not see these things while growing up in England, so now they are a bit confused (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 74).

Nyasha also favours a Western projection of femininity where women are depicted as having a curve-less figure. This comes out when Tambu admires her reflection in the mirror, and Nyasha expresses approval of her cousin's looks, but simultaneously criticises her curves: 'Not bad at all. You have got a waist. One of these days, you will have a bust. Pity about the backside […] It is rather large.' (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 91). This shows that Nyasha has internalised Western concepts of female beauty and does not want to end up with 'heavy, strong hips' which are esteemed in Shona culture (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 18). She prefers 'bones to bounce', a non-curvaceous form, which is so unlike the typical African female image (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 197).

In fact, the Afro-American author Alice Walker, who coined the term 'womanism', writes that a womanist 'loves roundedness […] loves herself' (Walker, 1983, p. ix). Meanwhile, the Nigerian writer, Catherine Acholonu, also proposes that a 'motherist' loves roundedness (Acholonu, 1995, p. 63). Despite not having a specific definition of 'roundedness' as used by these two writers, it can be taken to convey some glorification of feminine physicality. In fact, the Shona cultural concept of roundedness can be seen as a symbol of femininity, as a voluptuous woman often represents fertility. In contrast, a thin woman is generally regarded as undesirable.

While Nyasha has unconsciously adopted Western notions of femininity, favouring the thin Western figure over the voluptuous cultural ideal, she still harbours an intense emotional longing to feel connected to her native Shona society. Hence, while she rejects the African

curvaceous figure, she longs to have a better insight into her native culture and becomes obsessed with her 'craze of making clay pots' (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 149). This mixture of the internalisation of Western notions and an outward longing to feel part of Shona culture manifests a sense of distress in the person who ends up with a hybrid identity that is neither British nor native Shona, as discussed in chapter five of this study. Nyasha becomes alienated at multiple levels: from her Shona roots, from the British culture which she experienced during her childhood years, and from the colonial state which she finds on her return to Rhodesia. Hence, she continuously identifies with the cultural values and experiences found in both societies while rejecting them at the same time. When discussing her feelings with her cousin Tambu, Nyasha says, 'I know […] It is not England anymore, and I ought to adjust. However, when you have seen different things, you want to be sure you are adjusting to the right thing' (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 117).

When she reaches a point where she is not able to assimilate any further cultural anxieties, she suffers a mental breakdown and has to be admitted to the hospital. The reaction of the white psychiatrist, as described by Tambu, is that 'Nyasha could not be ill, that Africans did not suffer in the way we had described. She was making a scene. We should take her home and be firm with her' (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 201). Thus, Dangarembga's fictitious psychiatrist echoes the Western belief that African women do not suffer from mental disorders. Colonial and gender preconceptions often colour psychiatry in Africa. This is confirmed by the work of Dr Megan Vaughan, who cautions that, 'it was men who […] found themselves defined as schizophrenic and confined to a colonial lunatic asylum' while 'African women, on the contrary, were said not to have reached the level of self-awareness required to go mad' (Vaughan, 1991, p. 21). This shows that even the psychological

organisation of the colony exerted some racist and sexist system in distinguishing between male and female mental health. In reality, nervous breakdowns can actually be more common in African women than men, as women are doubly affected because 'their position within the traditional African patriarchy duplicates their inferior status as colonised subjects' (Enajite, 2022). Hence, Dangarembga's depiction of Nyasha's mental state acts as an attempt to redefine the dogma of mental illness by including the psychological experience of women living under colonial rule. This has been explored further in the next section of this chapter, which delves into a psychological form of trauma that manifests in African females as represented by the female characters of *Nervous Conditions* (1988).

To conceptualise the trauma of alienation regarding postcolonial feminismctrauma theory used in this study, it is essential to explore how some male characters experience the trauma of dismemberment, as it is through their alienation that the trauma of the female characters is exacerbated. For instance, Babamukuru, Nyasha's father himself, who, ironically enough, is the one with whom Nyasha continuously argues with, just like Nyasha, experiences stress, poor eating habits, and "bad nerves" (Andrade, 2002, p. 51). Babamukuru constantly tries to reprimand his daughter for her choice of clothes, the books she reads, and the people she talks to, and even makes her eat all the food placed in front of her. He is submissive in the presence of the white ruler, and then he compensates for his humiliation by tyrannising his family members, expecting unquestioning obedience from them.

Hence, in her narrative, Dangarembga depicts 'triple jeopardy. According to Uwakweh, (2023) African women face three layers of oppression: colonialism, patriarchy, and tradition, a convergence that renders them particularly vulnerable in postcolonial societies. In *Nervous*

Conditions (1988), Babamukuru embodies these overlapping systems of dominance. As a Western-educated patriarch and the family's benefactor, he represents the internalised authority of both colonial power structures and traditional patriarchy. He uses his elevated social and educational status, granted through colonial systems, to justify authoritarian control over his family, particularly the women.

For example, his decision to force Tambu's parents into a Christian wedding, despite their own beliefs and customs, is a precise instance of how colonial values are imposed under the guise of morality and respectability. This act humiliates Tambu's mother and reinforces her subjugation. Similarly, his treatment of Nyasha, his daughter, is marked by contradictions: he demands obedience while neglecting her intellectual and emotional needs. He deems her rebellious behaviour as defiant, failing to recognise it as a response to oppressive cultural and gendered expectations. Thus, although Babamukuru has patriarchal authority within his family, his abusive actions could be read as a response to his lack of power within the colonial state: he, in turn, plays the role of a coloniser in an attempt to free himself from his inferiority complex. Andrade corroborates this when she states that 'a colonised adult would seek to control what bodily practices he can through benevolent tyranny, serves to underscore his powerlessness in a system in which he is ostensibly a star product and emblem of power' (Andrade, 2002, p. 51).

Babamukuru is described as 'the perfect product of the British colonial system' (Uwakweh, 2023). Rendered fatherless at a very tender age, he realised that the only way to move forward and help his widowed mother was to be diligent and hardworking. Babamukuru's mother, 'being sagacious and having foresight, had begged (the holy wizards) to prepare him

for life in their world' (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 19). Soon after, Babamukuru becomes 'a good boy, cultivatable, in the way that land is, to yield harvests that sustain the cultivator' (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 19).

As Uwakweh points out, this 'probably meant total loyalty to the colonial machinery' (Uwakweh, 2023). Hence, the white man's system and culture serve as a model for Babamukuru. He is later chosen from amongst the natives to be sent to the West so he would be 'trained to become useful to their people', the white man's people (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 14). He is educated in the West and then propagates his embrace of European attitudes to fellow indigenous people upon his return to Africa. These 'chosen' ones become brainwashed into thinking that the white rulers are benevolent men who should be taken as models of civilisation. Such blind compliance with the white rulers is exactly what Nyasha tries to warn Tambu about: 'It is bad enough […] when a country gets colonised, but when the people do as well! That is the end' (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 147).

Babamukuru's representation of the colonial culture is evident in the whitewashed house he owns, the very same house in which he lives with the rest of the family in the presence of an 'albino hound' (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 65). Considering the home as one's intimate space and the place where one identifies, Babamukuru's home should be the place that truly defines him. In fact, Nourtaghani (2022) asserts that one's home creates a 'bonding or emergence of person and place, such that the place takes its identity from the dweller and the dweller takes his or her identity from the place. There is an integrity, a connectedness between the dweller and the dwelling.' (Nourtaghani, 2022). However, Babamukuru tries to mimic the white

man's type of lodging, which clearly indicates that the effect of colonialism has affected his innermost core.

Most of the rooms found in Babamukuru's house seem impeccable, with 'heavy gold curtains flowing voluptuously to the floor, the four-piece lounge suite upholstered in glowing brown velvet, and the lamps with their tasselled shades' (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 68). Notwithstanding, other parts of the house, such as the kitchen, are not given the same attention: 'the cooker had only three plates, none of which was a ring […] the kitchen window was not curtained; a pane of glass was missing. This missing pane caused many problems because through the hole a draught blew' (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 67). Thus, some areas of the house, which are not seen by 'visitors whom it was necessary to impress', are neglected (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 68).

Babamukuru wants to distinguish himself from the other Africans by copying the ways of the white man, even in his lodging. However, the impression given is that he lacks the means to introduce the same sense of elegance throughout the house. Therefore, the parts he knows are off-limits to non-family members are unimportant. As a result, he is partially imitating, or mimicking, the white man's culture. Bhabha describes the notion of mimicry as 'a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86). Bhabha sees the colonised intellectual as imitating the language, behaviour, and culture of the white ruler, yet unable to achieve the same kind of equality. This is because 'the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, excess, its difference' (Zainab, 2024). This difference between Babamukuru's house and that of the white man also comes across in the gleaming whiteness which

Babamukuru tries to imitate in his own house, trying to give an impression of sterility which is so difficult to maintain in the dry, hot weather of Africa. He ends up with appliances that 'gleamed greyly' with a 'lack of brilliance' instead. Babamukuru's niece, Tambu, perceptively notes this when she remarks that:

> The antiseptic sterility that (her) aunt and uncle strove for could not be attained beyond an illusory level because the buses that passed through the mission, (…) rolled up a storm of fine red dust which perversely settled in corners and on surfaces of rooms. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 71).

Nonetheless, Tambu is eager to leave her village because she starts internalising the colonials' mental picture of rural Africa as grimy and unhygienic. She ascends to a new type of self: a 'clean, well-groomed, genteel self', separated from the dirt and the flies of her rural home (Dangarembga, 1988, pp. 58-59). Although Tambu cannot imagine losing touch with her African origins, she is eager to attend the mission school where her uncle is headmaster, and is even ready to succumb to colonial conventions. The colonial education that she gets there affects her identity and even her perception of her community: she becomes captivated by Western culture and can no longer find confidence and comfort in her native society.

In *Nervous Conditions* (1988) therefore, Dangarembga presents trauma of dismemberment as a psychological and cultural splitting experienced by Tambu and the women around her, resulting from the intersecting forces of colonialism and patriarchy. Viewed through the lens of the decolonised trauma model, this trauma is not just individual but collective, rooted in the historical violence of colonial rule that alienates the colonised from their traditions, language, and sense of self. Postcolonial feminism highlights how this dismemberment is gendered. Nyasha's mental breakdown, Ma'Shingayi's bitterness, and Tambu's internal conflicts all reflect the silencing and erasure of African women's identities in a world that

privileges both white and male authority. Dangarembga uses these fractured female experiences to expose how colonial education, Christian morality, and patriarchal expectations dismember women's bodies, voices, and choices, leaving behind a legacy of unresolved trauma and fragmented selves.

3.3.2 **Manifestation of Psychological Trauma**

The theme of trauma continues to call forth literary production due to its profound impact on the mind, memory, and body of those who undergo traumatic experiences. Van der Kolk in *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society*, posits that exposure to trauma can invariably "alter people's psychological, biological, and social equilibrium (Van der Kolk, 2014). This means that trauma can change our moods and cognition through nightmares, flashbacks, and intrusive thoughts; it can change the way we articulate life, our emotions, and social relationships, giving room for isolation; it changes our biological response due to stress, contributing to a decline in physical health and an individual's overall balance.

Within the realm of psychology, trauma is defined as "an affliction of the powerless" (Herman, 1994). Herman explains that understanding psychological trauma entails recognising it as a condition where individuals bear witness to horrible events which leave them deeply scarred. Thus, this assertion underscores how witnessing trauma or being in an abusive environment (experiencing trauma) can render one powerless, that is, torn between fight or flight responses, and vulnerable due to fear.

Although the study of trauma is an interdisciplinary field, in Literature, it can be used as a powerful lens for writers who wish to explore the complexities of the human psyche. Literary

writers like Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) and Dangarembga in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) explore this theory by telling stories of characters who undergo traumatic experiences. Their characters become conduits through which to understand how trauma alters the overall balance of an individual, as expressed by Dr Bessel Van der Kolk.

Utilising Van der Kolk's trauma model and Judith Herman's psychological trauma concept which focuses on three stages-the impact of trauma, the establishment of defenses, and the process of healing and recovery-this chapter section sought to explore how trauma is portrayed in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) and Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), its effects on the characters, the character's experiences, their inner struggles, their journey to attempting resilience, and their capacity for agency in the face of trauma and patriarchal control.

In the novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988), the protagonist, Tambudzai, and other female characters struggle with mental health implicitly, which is portrayed through passages depicting their inner chaos, emotional distress, and psychological challenges. While the novel does not explicitly diagnose them with specific mental health disorders, it offers insights into their mental health through their experiences and interactions.

The extract "I was not sorry when my brother died," quoted from the opening of the novel, provides insight into Tambu's mental health and emotional state. It speaks about her psychological struggles. Her relationship with her brother Nhamo is characterised by jealousy and rivalry resulting from gender disparities and unequal treatment they experience within their family. So her lack of sorrow at his death could be read as the appearance of unresolved feelings towards him, reflecting the complex dynamics of their sibling

relationship. Additionally, it could be a manifestation of internalised gender norms that discourage emotional expression and vulnerability in women. Another potential analysis suggests that Tambu may struggle to express her true feelings openly, indicating that she might suppress them as a coping mechanism.

> I felt a constriction, a sense of panic. I felt something reaching out from inside me to meet him, to ward him off. I was afraid of something. I knew that being afraid was not the same as knowing you are afraid. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 71)

The above internal monologue provides an affecting insight into Tambu's inner struggles and emotional confusion. Her introspective reflections reveal anxiety and distress that fill her psyche, highlighting the profound impact of her emotional experiences on her mental well-being. Tambu's realisation that being afraid is not the same as knowing one is afraid emphasises the nature of her emotional state and the intricacies of her inner world. "Who am I? What do I want? These questions echoed in my mind, haunting me day and night. I felt lost, adrift in a sea of uncertainty and self-doubt" (Dangarembga, 1988). This is another quote from the text that indicates doubts of insecurities that contribute to her disordered mental health.

> My Tambu's persistent stomach contracted, a squeezing sensation that radiated upwards to my throat, threatening to choke me. I felt nauseous, dizzy, my head spinning with a whirlwind of thoughts and emotions I could not control". (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 137).

Dangarembga describes the physical manifestations of Tambu's emotional distress, offering insight into the profound toll the mental health struggles take on Tambu's physical well-being. The vivid description of the feelings in the stomach and resultant dizziness acts as an outward manifestation of Tambu's inner struggles. These physiological responses serve as

an illustration of the profound impact of Tambu's mental health struggles on her physical body, highlighting the interconnectedness of mind and body in her experience of trauma.

Tambu did not think her uncle's plans for her parents' wedding were something to laugh about. She took the matter of her parents being subjected to a white wedding seriously, until her body reacted in a very alarming way:

> Whenever I thought about it, whenever images of my mother immaculate in virginal white satin or (horror of horrors) myself as the sweet, simpering maid fluttered through my mind, I suffered a horrible crawling over my skin, my chest contracted to a breathless tension. Even my bowels threatened to let me know their opinion. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 151).

The passage depicts Tambu's psychological distress as she struggles to come to terms with the aftermath of colonialism, which attempts to convince her that her entire life is a joke. According to her uncle, her parents lived a sinful life. To Tambu, being a product of her parents' marriage also means, in her view, that she is a product of sin. She experiences inner turmoil, as the status of Babamukuru, her benefactor, prevents her from directing her anger towards him.

Nyasha experiences psychological trauma rooted in traditional and colonial constraints. Caught between two cultures – her family's traditional Shona culture and the Western culture she encounters in England - Nyasha struggles with internal conflict and confusion. Her father, despite having studied in England, subscribes to traditionalist views, especially the belief in women's inherent inferiority to men. As a result, he tries to instil Shona norms in his children, Nyasha and Chido. However, Nyasha rebels against these cultural expectations, becoming a symbol of the clash between traditional and Western values in her family. Her father's efforts to shape her into a submissive and conforming Shona woman strain their

relationship. Her rejection of these norms heightens the conflict, leading to physical punishment and the erosion of her femininity as consequences of her rebellion.

The psychological trauma from these experiences overwhelms and permeates her overall well-being. Tambu poignantly describes Nyasha's dissociation from the traumatic event thus:

> I sensed the conflict that she was going through of self-versus surrender ...she was growing vague and detaching herself from us. She was retreating into a private world that was beyond our reach. Sometimes when I talked to her, she not only preferred not to answer but also did not hear me. Once, when I passed my hand in front of her eyes, she did not see me either, and I had to shout very loudly to bring her back. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 120)

The kind of limitation that made Nyasha insensitive to her environment implies that there is something attritional happening to her. Her subconscious, emotionally shattered by her father's excessive control, creates a protective barrier, illustrating how dissociation from the events becomes a strategy for coping with overwhelming traumatic experiences. She becomes barricaded from the present and perceived in another world of her own. In addition, she experiences what Bessel Van der Kolk defines as "speechless terror" (2014, p. 8); a phrase that encapsulates the profound impact of trauma, rendering individuals unable to articulate the depth of their emotional pain and turmoil. Nyasha's dissociation, however, extends beyond the psychological realm and manifests physically, as vividly depicted by Tambu.

> She had grown skeletal. She was pathetic to see...Nyasha grew weaker by the day... She sat on her bed, her sunken eyes fixed on me, her bony knees pressed together, her nightdress falling through the space where her thighs had been, her agitation and nervousness evident as she picked at her skin. (Dangarembga, 1988, pp. 201-204)

This physical toll of trauma on Nyasha, with the description of her skeletal appearance, which implies an anorexic condition, echoes Van der Kolk's idea that "the body keeps the score" of trauma. This means Nyasha's body attacks itself and reflects the damage done to her psyche. Thus, the overwhelming effect of the trauma affects her overall well-being.

Tambu's mother, Mainini, is another poignant example of a female character grappling with psychological trauma within the narrative. Mainini, a mother to three daughters (Tambu, Netsai, and Rambani) and a son (Nhamo), experiences profound grief and anxiety following the unexpected loss of her only son, Nhamo. For this reason, she becomes mentally "disconnected from the present" as she also grapples with societal expectations of her as a woman (Herman, 1994, p. 49). This societal expectation that Mainini grapples with is seen in how Nhamo's death posed a double-barreled effect on her. As earlier stated in chapter two of this research, there is a profound preference for the male child in most African cultures, and not having one exacerbates a woman's trauma within a family. To further shed light on child preferences in most African cultures, particularly the traditional Shona culture in Zimbabwe, Matikiti et al., in their research, emphasise that "if a wife fails to produce sons, she would be marginalised...she would be regarded as a social outcast" (Matikiti, 2018, p. 31). This means that having a boy child brings a woman respect within the family she marries, and not having one reduces her worth in society. For this reason, this study elucidates that Mainini's psychological trauma may not only represent the traumatic loss of her child, Nhamo, but also highlights her intense fear of the societal expectations that consider women without male offspring as inherently inferior. The narrator describes Mainini's trauma in intense detail. The following lines capture her description of the extent of Mainini's suffering:

> My mother's anxiety was real...she ate hardly anything, not for lack of trying, and when she was able to swallow something it lay heavy in her stomach...she was so haggard and gaunt she could hardly walk in the fields, let alone work in them (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 57).

In her description of Manini's trauma, the narrator not only captures the psychological impact of losing a loved one on Manini but also creates poignant imagery of the physical toll of grief on her, using words such as "haggard" and "gaunt." Manini's loss of "her basic sense of self" is depicted in a way that shows how pain renders her powerless and permeates her physical existence (Herman, 1994, p. 68). Her struggle with anxiety and psychological trauma is also represented through imagery, such as the weight of the food in her stomach serving as a metaphor for the heaviness of her grief. Manini's reaction to the traumatic event echoes Van der Kolk's assertion that traumatic stress has an overwhelming effect on both the mind and body (Van der Kolk, 2014).

These passages and extracts from *Nervous Conditions* (1988) offer insight into the female characters' struggle with disordered mental health, portraying their inner chaos, emotional distress, and psychological challenges. While the novel does not provide a clinical diagnosis, it sensitively portrays their experiences and emotions, inviting readers to empathise with their struggles and complexities as they navigate their environments and assert their agency within oppressive structures.

3.3.3 **Trauma of double oppression: colonialism and patriarchy**

As mentioned by Chaney et al (2021), double oppression refers to the idea that individuals who belong to multiple marginalised groups, such as being both a woman and a person of colour, experience compounded discrimination. This means that African women may face discrimination that is more severe due to the intersection of their gender and race (Melese,

2022). They face discrimination and marginalisation based on both their race and gender, which creates unique challenges and disadvantages. For instance, they may encounter stereotypes and biases from both racial and gendered expectations, leading to limited opportunities and increased vulnerability to various forms of violence and exploitation.

According to a Nigerian gender scholar, Nzegwu, in "Family Matters: Feminist Concepts in African Philosophy", patriarchy in Africa can be traced to Africa's colonial history, and aside from the coloniser and the colonised at the time of colonialism in Africa, there were two other categorisations of humans: men and women. The Europeans, according to Nzegwu, separated men and women based on gender; they also interacted more with the male chiefs to structure policies while neglecting the female chiefs (Nzegwu, 2006). Through this claim, Nzegwu believes that men became more visible and given power over their female counterparts, which gave rise to patriarchy in Africa. However, according to this study, this is not the case because patriarchy in Africa was in existence before the arrival of the colonial masters, but colonialism intensified it.

To date, patriarchy remains a central and enduring theme of exploration because of how it devalues and oppresses women in society. By highlighting its complexity as a social phenomenon, several scholars have produced diverse perspectives on the definition of patriarchy. Scholars such as Itang in "Gender Complementarity in African Literature" define it as a systemic structure that privileges male superiority while subordinating females (Itang, 2018). Okoye, in "Cracking the Eggshell, Infiltrating Patriarchy", takes a feminist perspective, defining patriarchy as:

> A system of male authority which oppresses women, making them submissive, docile, and religiously adherent to tradition and culture which considers them as mere appendages to society. It is a system that emphasises the logic of women's isolation and subtle exclusion from participation in national politics (Okoye, 2009).

Thus, it explains that women are treated as mere appendages to society, with patriarchy restricting their autonomy and perpetuating gender inequalities.

African female writers such as Dangarembga and Adichie explore the intersectional experiences of African women, highlighting how race, gender, and sometimes other identities intersect to shape their lives. Double and triple oppression concepts help unveil the layered nature of oppression faced by African women. The research by Jessica Remedios et al (2020) underlines the significance of recognising the intersectional nature of social identities, emphasising how overlapping identities influence lived experiences. This intersectional perspective is crucial in comprehending the nuanced forms of discrimination faced by African women, as it considers the intertwined effects of race, gender, and other social categories. This chapter focuses on discrimination based on race and gender to highlight the double traumatic experience imposed on African women as represented by textual characters in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and *Purple Hibiscus* (2004).

Nervous Conditions (1988) opens with the shocking Tambu's comment, "I was not sorry when my brother died. Nor am I apologising for my callousness, as you may define it, my lack of feeling" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 1). The occasion of Tambu's brother's premature death is the first event that can be accounted for as traumatising due to colonialism (oppression based on race), and it is the first event in the story that puts Tambu in a position to write this account. Tambu's coldness towards her brother's death is a tragic sign of

confusion and breakdown in social relations and cultural values under the pressure of colonisation. As Okereke and Itang underlines, Tambu's acknowledgement in the very first sentence of the novel that "I was not sorry when my brother died" is perhaps the most important instance of an overt rupture" of traditional familial bonds (Okereke, 2014). In her "critical self-examination, Tambu is quite conscious about rejecting the guilt associated with unnatural sisterhood, inhuman lack of feeling. She says, "as he was our brother, he ought to be liked, which made disliking him all the more difficult" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 11). She explains in the opening chapters how she came into this position.

In Tambu's excuse for her lack of feelings for her brother, another crucial element comes to light, namely that of patriarchy. Colonial patriarchy worsens Tambu's condition as a colonial subject. Initially, she likes him, which is normal for a sister. Later, however, her feelings drastically deteriorate as she is confronted with her brother's sexism. Tambu's first-hand experience of unfair inequality structures relying solely upon one's biological sex, uttered by her brother Nhamo, triggers her negative feelings towards him and initiates her nervous condition. His words, "I go to school. You go nowhere" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 21) Deeply shook her. Tambu recalls, "Nhamo was not interested in being fair: maybe to other people, but certainly not to his sisters, his younger sisters, for that matter" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 12). The moment she learns that Nhamo blatantly advocates universal gender inequalities that preclude her from going to school, she states, "My concern for my brother died an unobtrusive death" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 20). Nhamo fully approves the sexist mindset that boys shall have first access to education, and thus appropriated sexism into his repertoire of values. The novel effectively depicts how socialisation has worked in favour of Nhamo, contributing to his alienation from Tambu. Tambu recalls how he refused to carry his bags,

expecting his sisters to do so, and also refused to help with the housework. She complains about her "brother's laziness" and says, "I hated fetching my brother's luggage" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 10).

Worrying about his development, Tambu notes that "any of the tasks he used to do willingly before he went to the mission, became a bad joke" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 7). Moreover, Nhamo tried to prevent his sister from going to school and thus oppressed her emancipation by overthrowing Tambu's attempts to grow maize to provide herself with school fees. This behaviour shows his affiliation with the patriarchal ideology, which Tambu links directly to the missionary education that Nhamo was acquiring. Disappointed in her brother, Tambu states, "Our home was healthier when he was away" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 10). From Tambu's revelation of her feelings towards her elder brother Nhamo, one can see how missionary education, coupled with patriarchy, acts as a force at work behind the colonial system. It is the intense clash of two distinct cultures and ideologies that causes dramatic imbalance and breached familial bonds in traditional Shona families.

Since Nhamo's status as a boy and elder brother is a threat and an impediment to the education Tambu desires, his death is a good riddance, which Tambu welcomes because it gives her the privilege of obtaining education in a "colonial system which makes education scarce for females" (Sugnet, 1997). Because she has no elder siblings, she becomes next in line to receive a colonial education at the mission school. The patriarchal system renders Nhamo's death not a tragedy to her but a salvation: "She could not have survived on the homestead" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 59). His death is celebrated as the occasion for her education at the mission school and an opportunity to become a full-fledged, educated person

and escape the poverty of her native homestead. Tambu vindicates herself, “Thinking about it, feeling the injustice of it, this is how I came to dislike my brother” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 12). Moreover, Tambu observes her uncle Babamukuru’s approval of sexism, apparent in his maltreatment of his wife and daughter, Nyasha. She comments on “Babamukuru condemning Nyasha to whoredom, making her a victim of her femaleness, just as I had felt victimised at home” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 118).

She states her indignation at sexual injustice that is fundamental to colonialism, “what I did not like was the way all the conflicts came back to this question of femaleness. Femaleness as opposed to and inferior to maleness”, (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 118). Tambu identifies the maligning nature of patriarchy, “The victimisation I saw was universal. It did not depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 118). Her realisation of the scope of female oppression intensifies her traumatic realisation of gender inequalities. This realisation about her uncle's sexism disillusions her image of him. Her previously immensely admired uncle, “who was as neatly divine as any human being could hope to be” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 167), loses his reputation in her eyes. The disenchanted Tambu states. “Even heroes like Babamukuru did it” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 118).

Further, the novel investigates the relationship between indigenous men and colonial authorities. It reveals another aspect of colonial patriarchy: the embodiment of Western cultural consensus on the level of political and socio-economic dominance. The colonial relationship between Europeans and natives was executed “in terms of the natural ascendancy of men over women” (Krishnaswamy, 2023). The notion of sexual dominance was transferred onto colonial masculinity and engendered an immense break in native

masculinity by rendering it effeminate. The "racial effeminacy" of African men was analogous to the Western "dominance of men and masculinity of women and femininity" (Krishnaswamy, 2023). The colonial congruence with "the existing western sexual stereotypes and the philosophy of life which they represented" (Krishnaswamy, 2023), deprived native men of their masculinity and created tension in the relationship between African men and their women. African men, in turn, suppressed their women and thus participated in the double oppression and colonisation of the women nearest them. The novel suggests that "men of colour invalidate the existence of colonised women in much the same way that the selfhood of all colonised people is annihilated by the Europeans (Lugones, 2008).

For instance, through the narrator, Tambu, we learn that Maiguru, despite her academic achievements and her job as a teacher, does not have access to her salary. When asked about who takes her salary, she sarcastically replies that the government takes it. However, unknown to Tambu, the government in this context serves as a metaphor for Maiguru's husband, Babamukuru, which further portrays the impact of patriarchy on women. Babamukuru, a patriarch, asserts control over Maiguru's financial resources. Although he is revered within his community for his honourable deeds, thanks to the wealth he displays, Maiguru is relegated to domesticity, much like the other women in his family.

Dangarembga delineates how Babamukuru oppresses his well-educated wife, Maiguru, who holds a Master's degree in Philosophy from London and has her own job. Maiguru struggles to cope with the oppressive social situation. She has to give away her entire salary for the sustenance of Babamukuru's relatives and is unable "to stand up to her husband or protect

her daughter" (Okereke, 2014). Tambu remarks, "… it was a great shame that Maiguru had been deprived of the opportunity to make the most of herself, even if she had accepted the deprivation" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 103). Maiguru's inability to act independently under oppressive circumstances and keep her salary to herself causes her daughter, Nyasha, to lose respect for her. Maiguru has to fulfil the traditional expectations of an obedient and good wife despite her European education. She is at pains to comply with the Shona tradition and fulfil the obligations of a working wife and mother. Caught in her powerless situation, she desperately laments, "I am not happy. I am not happy any more in this house" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 175). As the only Western-educated woman of her indigenous community, she is not accepted among married women. Her desperate situation shows how "English education … renders women into outsiders in their own communities" (King, 1998).

Mainini's attitude of indifference is her reaction to oppression. She laments:

> This business of womanhood is a heavy burden; how could it not be? Aren't we the ones who bear children? When it is like that, you cannot just decide today I want to do this tomorrow, I want to do that, the next day I want to be educated! When there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one to make them. Moreover, these things are not easy; you have to start learning them early, from a very early age. The earlier the better so that it will be easy later on. Easy! As if it is ever easy. And these days it is worse, with poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other. Aiwa! What will help you, my child, is to learn to carry your burdens with strength (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 16).

The above passage depicts the double oppression faced by Mainini, likely since her childhood. She urges her daughter Tambu to confront societal expectations with resilience, as women of colour truly require strength to overcome such dual traumatic oppression.

The horizontal oppression triggers trauma in all the characters in the novel. As a result, the chain reaction of patriarchal oppression poses a threat to the mental and physical health of the colonised woman. Maiguru and Mainini "both give numerous hints of repressed rage they harbour over their assigned roles through their attempt to hide these feelings" (Lugones, 2008). The oppressed women in the novel are often characterised by silence. In many instances, female characters refrain from expressing their opinions. They reluctantly conform to the traditional silence of women unless questioned. Especially for the partly Western-educated Maiguru, the situation is difficult to bear. Her excessive submissiveness profoundly unsettles her. Tambu also suffers under the oppressive circumstances and often wants to say what she thinks, but cannot, as she must revere her benefactor, Babamukuru, who represents a colonial patriarchal figure.

When the powerful Babamukuru tries to silence all the women in the family, his daughter Nyasha accurately designates her father "a historical artefact" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 162). This concept of "a historical artefact" stems from Fanon, and Dangarembga extends his concepts to indigenous women. Her novel demonstrates that not only native men, but also native women are not natural but "historical artefacts" constructed by the oppressive colonial and patriarchal systems (Andrea, 2015). Mainini's lamentation above shows her powerlessness and hopelessness, and even Maiguru is denied agency, control, and even identity as an African-educated woman.

In addition, Dangarembga critiques the patriarchal culture, drawing her readers' attention to how men are revered as gods in most African societies. This is portrayed in the text in the way men are served the best part of a meal, while women consume stale food (Dangarembga,

1988, pp. 82,137); a cock or a hen is killed for the man to have meat in his food while the women who make the meals enjoy none but consume leftovers (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 8). Hence, all these sacrifices go unnoticed because of women's subordinate position in society. Drawing on this, Tambu observes that the needs and sensibilities of women in her family, which represent those of women in most African societies, are not considered legitimate or a priority, and that these women bear the weight of womanhood without protest to fit societal expectations. For this reason, she further echoes her mother's sentiment that "the business of womanhood is (indeed) a heavy burden" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 16), an assertion that encapsulates the idea that societal expectations and the responsibilities placed on the woman because of her gender are the burdens she is left to carry.

Moreover, the novel shows the sharp edges of colonial education offered to indigenous African men. The patriarchal colonial rule sought to maintain hegemony by electing African men who received a colonial education. These men were catapulted to the colonial elite. This indirect rule facilitated the colonisation of the rest of the indigenous population through their "traditional" leaders. For instance, Jeremiah and Takesure, alongside other men in *Nervous Conditions* (1988), are forced to bow to Babamukuru's authority without question. For instance, when Babamukuru insists that Jeremiah has to have a white wedding, this is accepted without question as he is the educated brother, even though Jeremiah was the eldest. Thus, the colonial education of the African elite "served colonial economic and political needs" (Loomba, 2002). Africans' "status as the agents of colonial hegemony" offered "privilege, material reward, and apparent security" (Andrea, 2015). Colonial education, however, has a double edge. It represents "literary and cultural temptations of Europe" and is a booster of "cultural transgression" (Krishnaswamy, 2023). By transmitting Western

values and belief systems, colonial education extinguishes the traditional values of the indigenous population. It is an intricate tool used to achieve the goal of colonial authorities, which was to colonise the natives' minds. Concerning all these characters, the novel shows how female "self and sexuality are constructed and controlled by indigenous patriarchy and British colonial practices" (Chatterjee, 2020) and how patriarchy and colonisation collude as double oppression that constitutes women's trauma.

3.3.4 **Attempting Rebellion: Possibility of Emancipation**

To achieve a complete sense of one's individuality and attain self-realisation, one must overcome the "nervous condition" discussed earlier in this chapter. In some way or another, many characters in the novel need to conquer their personal "nervous conditions" to gain empowerment. If they cannot free themselves from the specific "nervous condition" that afflicts them, their chances of achieving personal empowerment will be limited.

For instance, Babamukuru suffers from "bad nerves", and this is indicative of the deep-seated "nervous condition" from which he suffers. Many of the pressures and constraints to which he is subjected, directly or indirectly, are a result of colonialism. This undermines his sense of secure selfhood and his inner psychological balance, as well as the balance and harmony in his family. Having noted how difficult it was for men, even those who were considered significant, to attain empowerment (albeit within certain social constraints), it is then evident how much harder it is for women in the text to break free from that which confines them. In various cases, this entails overcoming the particular "nervous condition" from which they suffer. Connected to these are the forms of discrimination and double oppression imposed on them. Various women in the story try to escape, but the methods

which some of them employ turn out to be unsuccessful and self-destructive, as is evident in the case of Nyasha, whose rebellion is unsuccessful.

Nyasha is unable to beat her "nervous condition" because, as we have already seen, she lacks the basic foundation upon which to base her resistance. She is more forceful, determined, and insightful, and has more material and educational advantages than the other female characters in the novel; however, she still fails to attain a sense of independent selfhood. Nyasha is unable to strike a balance between the two cultures in which she is caught and attain self-actualisation, despite seeming to have so much potential for personal empowerment. She fails in her attempts to assert herself because she has many conflicting thoughts, feelings and parts of herself that she fails to integrate, which Maiguru describes as "loose connections" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 107). Ultimately, the nervous breakdown from which she suffers is indicative of the extent of her defeat.

Maiguru, too, has to beat her "nervous condition" of being confined in her role of a submissive, dutiful wife and mother, but as we have seen, she chooses security over self. At one point, Maiguru strives for self-realisation. However, she fails because when she leaves her home, she only seeks refuge in the house of another man, her brother, and eventually returns to her husband and to the security of domesticity. Nyasha comments on this, saying, "It is such a waste. ... Imagine what she might have been with the right kind of exposure" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 175). Although Maiguru returns home somewhat changed, she is unable to overcome her "nervous condition" because she continues to be a "good" submissive wife, at the cost of her own personal growth and confidence.

Mainini, on the other hand, remains trapped for other reasons. Mainini's "nervous condition" stems from poverty, but she is not able to overcome this economic and material deprivation. She lacks the willpower to change her life, and she is also overwhelmed and exhausted by the burdens she has to carry. As a result, she is reduced to a state of passivity. Instead, she laments on many of the obstacles that hinder a woman from attaining self-actualisation, such as the weight of womanhood, interconnected with the poverty of blackness. As this search maintains, "Mainini has long resigned to her fate and does little to change her circumstances and passively endures her degrading circumstances" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 92).

This research asserts that the nature of Mainini's life does not allow her sufficient space to reflect on anything other than her immediate situation: "Her daily tasks leave little space for recreation or philosophical reflections" (Berndt, 2005, p. 92). This is borne out by the fact that Mainini has resigned herself to her situation, indicating that she has reached a dead end, with nothing else to look forward to. The following description illustrates how Mainini has decided to accept her lot and suppresses her thoughts, feelings and desires: "My mother, lips pressed tight, would hitch little Rambanai more securely on her back and continue silently at her labours. The ferocious swings of her arms as she grabbed and stripped a maize stalk restrained Netsai and me from making the slightest murmur of rebellion" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 7).

It is clear from the above quotation that Mainini never allowed herself to think about her condition. Instead of questioning why she is sidelined when Babamukuru comes to the homestead to make decisions that affect the entire family, including herself, she resorts to self-repression. As she continues to bear her burdens, she is unaware that she is passing on

her attitude of passivity to her younger daughter, Netsai, thereby obstructing her chances of breaking free from situations that confine her. She does not offer hope to her daughters, having lost it herself completely. Her words to Lucia are indicative of this, as she laments: "Does it matter what I want? Since when has it mattered what I want?" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 153). It transpires that Netsai is beginning to act in the same way, directing all her feelings and energies towards her work, instead of speaking out. Tambu notices this, observing:

> Netsai turned on what I thought was an excessive amount of steam when Mother grew silently ferocious. She would have outstripped me by an indecent number of yards, an embarrassingly high quota of cobs, if I had not been ashamed to lose face by letting my younger sister outwork me. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 8).

As a mother, Mainini is not an ideal role model for her daughters, and this may make the possibility of empowerment for them difficult, as she is already familiarising them with passivity and teaching them to endure oppression and thus suffer trauma due to complicity. In contrast to Mainini, Maiguru and Nyasha, Lucia and Tambu are the only women in the novel who have not yet become resigned to their fate and given up hope or been completely defeated in their struggles for self-actualisation.

Lucia strives to attain what she desires, and yet she also adapts easily to changes in her environment. She is confident and not intimidated by patriarchal systems of authority. Her independence and her free spirit enable her to express not only her thoughts and feelings but also her sexual desires openly. This is important because once a woman can accept who she is and does not allow external forces to influence her thoughts and behaviour, she has a chance of attaining a sense of self-awareness that Mainini and other women lack. According to Berndt, Lucia can achieve empowerment because "her boldness might be rooted in the

Zimbabwean landscape and the culture it engendered and connected with both, a rootedness in her own body" (Berndt, 2005, p. 101). Thus, Lucia not only has a connection with her roots, both in terms of her culture and traditions and the land to which she belongs, as does Tambu, but she also has the power to act on her physical desires and express herself freely and fully.

In contrast, the reason why Nyasha's rebellion is unsuccessful could be that she lacks this sense of belonging and rootedness. Thus, she fails to attain a sense of full selfhood that could enable her to attain personal empowerment. Meanwhile, Lucia can go beyond gender stereotypes, in terms of which women are expected to be mothers and take care of their husbands and children. She refuses to be controlled by men, but she makes use of them when she needs them, saying: "A woman has to live with something, even if it is only a cockroach. And cockroaches are better. They are easy to chase away, aren't they?" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 153). As this indicates, she does not allow anyone, least of all a man, to tell her what she ought to do. However, this echoes Ongunyemi's theory of womanism as Lucia does not advocate for anti-male, but urges the importance of uniting both men and women as both are useful to each other.

As a result of the extent to which Lucia is not ashamed of expressing her physical and sexual desires, she is not ashamed of falling pregnant. Even though Mainini rarely speaks for herself, she does not object to her sister's pregnancy, voicing her support for her sister when the family council, consisting of the men of the family, seeks to pass judgment on her for her behaviour (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 136). It can be that Mainini admires Lucia's independence and her capacity for self-assertion, which she knows she does not possess. As

Lucia moves on, building a life of her own, she refuses to be entrapped by stereotypical gender roles that require her to be a submissive traditional mother and wife.

As further proof of her strong sense of selfhood, Lucia gives Babamukuru the impression that she respects his wishes, while also challenging his authority on occasions. Thus, she manages to cajole Babamukuru, who is regarded as a godlike figure by his family, into supporting her ideas and finding her a job which liberates her from depending on the patriarchy. She knows that Babamukuru is eager to strengthen his position as head of the family; therefore, when she needs his assistance, she does not question his authority, thereby furthering her own goals. Through this, she manages to cajole Babamukuru into getting her a job, so that she can be financially stable and self-sufficient. While Nyasha thinks that she is compromising herself, Lucia has a different way of viewing things from other women in her society, such as Mainini, Maiguru and even Nyasha, maintaining that one can borrow from various cultures whenever it is possible and convenient for one's own sake. This she does by drawing on potentially valuable aspects of Western culture, such as education, while "borrowing" models of female subservience temporarily from Shona culture to further her aims. Consequently, she says, "Babamukuru wanted to be asked, so I asked. And now we both have what we wanted, isn't it?" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 160). Lucia further empowers herself by deciding to acquire an education. In this way, she becomes an independent woman who can advance herself in life to an extent that she rids herself of patriarchal dominance but not male presence. Then, her decision to acquire an education will carry her further away from poverty and oppression.

Although it may not be possible for women in this society to break free from forms of oppression that confine them within Shona tradition and colonial forms of authority and control, Lucia and Tambu are among the characters who achieve empowerment. They both realise that the only way they can escape from their poverty is through education. For instance, Tambu demonstrates that her opportunity to acquire education enables her to escape from extreme poverty and break out of the socially-imposed silence of her earlier life. However, most importantly, she perceives it as her path to personal empowerment. For Tambu, this seems to be an almost impossible feat at first. However, when Babamukuru undertakes to provide her with a good education, nothing can stop Tambu from embracing the opportunity with both hands.

Initially, Tambu is content to be a meek and obedient female after moving to Babamukuru's home. However, she later takes a significant step towards empowerment by questioning Babamukuru's authority. However, initially, in her excitement at this change in her life, it does not matter to her that she is moving from her father's control to another man's control. Tambu also believes that the only possible way to escape from her degrading life of poverty and limited opportunities is by leaving everything that had to do with life back at the homestead and concentrating on equipping herself for the future.

However, later on, Tambu realises that it is important to strike a balance between the choices she makes and her own culture. It becomes evident that if she chooses to be different, by separating herself from her own culture and people, she might become a misfit and have nothing to sustain her in arduous times, and risk deep psychological damage, as is the case with Nyasha, who has nothing stable to rely on, except Tambu's friendship. As a result,

Tambu comes to understand the importance of her family. Thus, she pays heed to her mother's words that if she is not careful, the "Englishness" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 203) will get the better of her, exposing her to the above-outlined risks. Hence, she says: "I was not like Nyasha, who could forget where she was so entirely that she could do whatever she fancied and as a result did it well. I was always aware of my surroundings" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 110). Thus, Tambu retains an awareness of her roots, and she is also mindful of the way in which other environments she inhabits may differ both in constructive and potentially harmful ways.

Another reason why Tambu can achieve empowerment is her relationship with her grandmother and, in certain respects, her bond with her mother. Khani Begum (1993) comments on this: "Drawing strength from her matrilineal links, Tambu understands herself through their struggles and triumphs" (Khani, 1993, p. 27). Tambu identifies with the stories that her grandmother tells her, which offer her insight into racial oppression and the effects of colonialism. She also receives important support from her grandmother, who teaches her how to cultivate crops, enabling her to grow mealies for sale and raise funds for her school fees later. Moreover, Tambu initially questions some of her mother's views when she tries to discourage her from wanting to attend school, and when she tells her that womanhood is a burden she will have to bear (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 17). So, it is only later that she learns to value her mother's wisdom (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 203). Even though Tambu's mother is against the idea of her daughter attending The Sacred Heart Convent, she plays a valuable role by warning her daughter to be wary of assimilation.

In light of what Tambu has seen in the lives of some around her, such as Nyasha and Babamukuru, who have fallen prey to the risks of assimilation, her mother's warning fosters a sense of solidarity between them. It also deepens Tambu's respect for her mother's values and wisdom (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 203). It is possible that when Mainini recognises her daughter's strong will to achieve more in life than she has, she also encourages her to proceed carefully. This supports bell Hook's observation that "women need to have the experiences of working through hostility to arrive at understanding and solidarity" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 63).

Although Nyasha fails in her battle against the patriarchal system, her rebellious behaviour influences Tambu to some extent, as it opens her eyes to specific issues in her society that she was previously unaware of. Consequently, she helps her develop the ability to question and challenge such situations. As a result, Tambu recognises that she admires Nyasha's perceptiveness, which broadens her mental horizons and sharpens her critical faculties (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 89). Nyasha acts as a catalyst for Tambu's development by helping her cultivate a more critical and inquisitive mind. Conversely, Nyasha greatly benefits from Tambu's friendship; when Tambu goes to boarding school, she is left feeling empty, with no one to "bridge the gaps in her life" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 196). Her inability to attain personal fulfilment and a sense of independent selfhood primarily results from this in significant respects.

Unlike Nyasha, Tambu retains her sense of rootedness in her Shona culture, leaving her with a sense of belonging. Her connection with the countryside reinforces this, as she wonders why her brother used to hate walking in the countryside, which she describes as refreshing

(Dangarembga, 1988, pp. 2-3). Her love of the river near her home and her regular visits to the homestead help her retain her links with her people and her land. Other characters like Nyasha, Chido and to an extent, Babamukuru lack this sense of connectedness to their land, and this contributes to their identity crises. Berndt concurs with this, noting that, like Lucia, Tambu's connection with the countryside, of which she often speaks, helps her to acquire a sense of strength and stability:

> The landscape remains a source of strength and security in Tambudzai's life. The importance of this is especially highlighted by the fact that the other characters lack this feeling of safety. Some of Tambudzai's family members have lost their connection to the rural landscape and, therewith, the rootedness it can provide. (Berndt, 2005).

Berndt's (2005) assertion aligns closely with the tenet of decolonising trauma theory, which emphasises the role of land, culture, and traditional spirituality in healing trauma. Decolonising trauma theory challenges the universality of Western therapeutic models. Instead, it advocates for approaches grounded in indigenous knowledge systems, where reconnection with ancestral land and spiritual practices fosters restoration and wholeness. In *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Tambudzai's rootedness in the rural landscape contrasts with the disorientation and fragmentation experienced by family members who have become alienated from their cultural environment. This connection to land serves not only as a symbol of identity and belonging but also as a vital space for resilience, aligning with the decolonial idea that healing from colonial and patriarchal trauma requires returning to and reclaiming indigenous ways of knowing and being.

However, it should be noted that as Tambu continues her journey for self-realisation, she does not find the journey a straightforward path because education, her chosen path to

personal empowerment, has various problematic aspects. Tambu's awareness of these features of her education is illustrated when she commences her studies at the Sacred Heart and later, after she completes her education (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 203). At this stage, Tambu realises that the education she receives is highly ambiguous. However, she is also aware that there are minimal ways in which women can escape from the constraints and confinements that come with a lack of education, and many of these ways are too complex for most women.

Nonetheless, she learns that colonial education restricts those who receive it in certain respects, while indoctrinating them in the ways of colonialism. Nyasha is aware of this, drawing Tambu's attention to the way in which education can function as a form of assimilation (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 191). In the end, Tambu discovers this, but can move ahead with her life, "refusing to be brainwashed" although she acknowledges that it (the process of expansion) is a "long painful process" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 204). In this way, Tambu is made aware that education is not necessarily a passport to an easier, happier life or to freedom. She learns, for instance, that the Western colonial education that Nyasha receives hampers her capacity for self-actualisation and personal empowerment.

Bearing in mind the problematic nature of education in colonial Rhodesian society and the limited access that women have to education, sometimes speaking out may be the only option. Lucia does a great deal to demonstrate that one can escape, even without an education, by speaking out. On the other hand, in Maiguru's case, it can be challenging to speak out even if one is educated. Tambu discovers this, but she realises that it is more comforting to speak out, which is also better for an individual's psychological well-being

and personal growth. She realises this particularly when Babamukuru punishes her for refusing to go to her parents' wedding, as she says, "I went about these chores grimly, with a deep and grateful masochistic delight: to me that punishment was the price of my newly acquired identity" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 169). Nonetheless, the dangers of speaking out, which could result in experiencing a pychic split, like the one with which Nyasha is afflicted, is illustrated by Tambu's words: "Babamukuru 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 in my head" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 167). We see that Tambu can resolve this by taking a firm decision based on her own sense of who she is and where she belongs.

Despite the threats Babamukuru levels against her, Tambu feels empowered from within because she knows she has taken a significant step in her self-actualisation by deciding not to go to the wedding. This demonstrates that Tambu understands the only way to break free from her inner turmoil is by speaking out, and she has done so, feeling relieved as a result. It is also clear that speaking out does not come easily; it involves many risks and much pain, so Tambu is courageous. At this stage, Tambu manages to speak for herself, showing that she has learnt to trust her own judgement and not allow men around her to make decisions for her. Although it angers Babamukuru, she achieves something greater inside. Tambu feels that the wedding makes a mockery of her people and her culture. Therefore, by refusing to attend it, she affirms her sense of rootedness and belonging to her people and her land, which provides her with a solid and stable foundation from which she can grow.

As this indicates, speaking out can be a powerful weapon for women like Tambu, offering a sense of inner peace that comes from within. When a woman speaks out, she expresses her feelings and makes her desires known. This may prevent her from being treated in a manner that she does not desire. For instance, if Mainini had firmly stated that she did not like the idea of a wedding, the wedding would not have taken place, but she never tried to do so, on account of her disempowered, defeated nature. For her part, Maiguru eventually attempts to change her situation by finally objecting to the way in which Babamukuru treats her, saying: "When I keep quiet, you think I am enjoying it. So today I am telling you I am not happy. I am not happy any more in this home" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 172). She also describes how she resents her husband's lavish support of his brother's family, partly from her wages. Saying: "I am tired of my house being a hotel for your family. I am tired of being nothing in a home I am working myself sick to support" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 172).

Babamukuru has been depriving Maiguru of a voice, but at this stage, Maiguru finds her voice, albeit only to a limited extent, stating that she is not happy (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 172). When Maiguru speaks out, she temporarily leaves her home and returns as a changed person, more "able to talk about sensible things" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 175). Broekman (1999) discusses the way this manifests itself, stating that Maiguru has managed to prove that she is not utterly helpless in her situation, because she forces Babamukuru to demonstrate his appreciation and need for her by coming to fetch her home (Broekman, 1999, p. 29). The extent to which she changes is further revealed in that Maiguru can express her own feelings about women and education and can override Babamukuru's objections that the Sacred Heart Convent will not be suitable for Tambu, thereby enabling Tambu to continue her education there.

Lucia is another female character who shows that speaking can be a powerful tool towards acquiring self-realisation. She is a clever woman who refuses to be bound by traditional patriarchal norms that seek to demean her. As a result, Lucia becomes a strong figure from whom Tambu draws the courage that she looks for in a mother but fails to receive. Lucia demonstrates that a woman can stand up for what she believes in and not let male authority figures dictate how she should live her life. Her ability to challenge a patriarchal dare, which is only a gathering for the male members of the family and patriarchal aunts, shows that she is strong-willed. She strides in, disrupting the gathering, attacking Takesure and speaking fearlessly: "Tell me, Babamukuru, would you say this is a man? Can a man talk such nonsense? … Takesure, have you ever seen me riding a hyena's back? Answer me" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 144). Lucia empowers herself further by speaking for herself instead of succumbing to shock and horror over the allegations made by Takesure that she is a witch. Such allegations are severe in African countries, but many women in diverse African societies might lack the courage to repudiate them in this way, consequently suffering the adverse punishment imposed on them by their communities. In the above extract, Lucia speaks her mind to Babamukuru and talks to him at will without fear.

In her capacity for fearless self-assertion, among much else, Lucia is an inspiration not only to Tambu, who needs such encouragement in her own journey to self-realisation, but also to the women of the Sigauke family, who are bound by their status as wives and mothers, to the extent that they are incapable of voicing their concerns. Although these women may be disempowered in this respect, Lucia offers glimpses of alternative ways of being that relate to Ogunyemi's theory of womanism, specifically the ability to be audacious and strong-willed, as discussed at the outset of the chapter. Her strength awakens a kind of sisterly

solidarity, and they all admire her fearless conduct, as shown in the conversation between Tete and Maiguru:

> That Lucia! Aiwa! That Lucia is mad. And Mukoma's (Babamukuru's) face! Truly, you would have thought that Lucia walked in naked." Then Maiguru responds: "They should not meddle with women like Lucia!" At which point, Tambu tells us, "they puckered their faces up and dissolved into helpless giggles." (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 148)

Their laughter indicates how they feel able to ridicule patriarchal authority. Tete, a matriarchal aunt, cannot find the words to describe Lucia's audacity, so she only says: "That Lucia!" Tete notices the expression of alarm on Babamukuru's face; she also indicates that Babamukuru felt the impact of Lucia's challenge, for he could not have imagined that Lucia would challenge him and other members of the dare in this way. Berndt comments on this, observing:

> Lucia manages to rouse solidarity among the women of the Sigauke clan, who, too afraid to criticise their men themselves openly, gratefully take the chance to watch Lucia confronting them. They observe with awe her undaunted standing up for her rights, and they are pleased by the irritation on their men's faces (Berndt, 2005, p. 101).

The point of this study relates to the situation above, in that Lucia differs in many respects from the other women, who do not share her views of men or her attitude to life. Nonetheless, she inspires and delights them, resulting in a unique sisterly bond, and the women can communicate with one another in a way they rarely do. Although this temporary solidarity brings some merriment amongst the women and is, to a certain extent, inspirational, it is not enough to empower women such as Mainini and enable them to free themselves from their degrading positions. In conclusion, temporary solidarity of this kind is insufficient in

societies such as the one depicted in *Nervous Conditions* (1988). Therefore, women need to bear this important point in mind as they journey towards personal empowerment.

> We can reflect on Nyasha's words to Tambu: "You have to keep moving," she said. Getting involved in various activities, discovering one thing and another. Moving, all the time. Otherwise, you get trapped" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 96).

This suggests that life is a constant process of discovery, exploring new possibilities, and being open to new experiences and forms of knowledge that could assist personal growth, which Tambu accomplishes. Nyasha's words also emphasise the importance of being active and shaping one's own life, rather than becoming passive victims of circumstances or being deterred by obstacles. Although Nyasha herself fails in her endeavour for individuality, black African women must follow her advice in order to attain a sense of hope and self-actualisation. As Black women, we must continue to move forward to achieve what brings us fulfilment.

Hence, this intricate web of interconnectedness in the narrative underscores the pivotal role of communal support in challenging oppressive structures and fostering an environment where women can collectively redefine their roles and resist societal expectations. It further posits that in *Nervous Conditions* (1988), the empowerment of one woman catalyses the emancipation of other women, illustrating the power of change embedded in shared experiences and women's collective solidarity.

3.4 Forms of Postcolonial Trauma in *Purple Hibiscus*

One of the most reprehensible forms of subjugation among cultural practices in Nigeria is the oppression born out of widowhood, poverty, polygamy, and patriarchal oppression. Trauma, however, is today regarded as one of the leading causes of death. As such, its

theorists put to light its various sources as: intimate partner violence, natural disasters, loss of a loved one, sexual assault or any physical or mental wound, rape, and witness of violence. Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) is the epitome of the difficulties and traumatic experiences faced by Nigerian women. This section will explore the alignment between postcolonial feminist Trauma theory and the fictional representation of Nigerian women's trauma in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004).

Trauma of Colonial Dismemberment

Eugene Achike, the patriarch in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), stands as one of postcolonial Africa's most complex representations of colonial dismemberment. His trauma does not originate within the domestic sphere but within the colonial project that shaped his consciousness. As a product of missionary education and Christian indoctrination, Eugene becomes what Frantz Fanon (1952) would call the "black skin, white mask". A man who has internalised the coloniser's values to such an extent that his African self feels alien and inferior. Fanon's concept of the "epidermalisation of inferiority"—the process by which the colonised subject adopts the coloniser's gaze and comes to despise their own cultural identity—encapsulates Eugene's fractured psyche. His outward piety and devotion to Western Catholicism are not signs of spiritual fulfilment but desperate performances aimed at colonial approval. In this sense, Eugene's violence towards his family reflects the psychological disfigurement inflicted by the colonial encounter: he is both victim and perpetrator, broken and brutal, a man whose faith and identity have been violently torn apart.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (2009) provides a complementary perspective with his idea of "the dismemberment of the African mind." He contends that colonialism not only stripped Africa of its material possessions but also shattered African consciousness, dividing the colonised from their indigenous knowledge systems and cultural traditions. Eugene's dedication to Western Catholicism and his rejection of his father's traditional faith exemplify this mental divide. When he forbids Kambili and Jaja from visiting their grandfather, insisting, "Heathens will not see my children!" (Adichie, 2004, p. 70), he reenacts the colonial logic of purification, equating African spirituality with impurity. This rejection of his own lineage, language, and spirituality represents a deep psychological mutilation—a form of cultural amputation that leaves Eugene spiritually empty. His insistence on moral perfection, his intolerance of deviation, and his obsession with ritual discipline— illustrated by his command for "love sips" of scalding tea that burn Kambili's tongue:

> I waited for him to ask Jaja and me to take a sip, as he always did. A love sip, he called it, because you shared the little things you loved with the people you loved. Have a love sip, he would say, and Jaja would go first. Then I would hold the cup with both hands and raise it to my lips. One sip. The tea was always too hot, always burned my tongue, and if lunch was something peppery, my raw tongue suffered. (Adichie, 2004, p. 15).

The quote above demonstrates how colonial violence has been internalised as a family ritual. In Eugene's world, love is inseparable from pain, and faith from punishment.

The trauma of colonisation in Eugene endures not just as a distant historical remnant but as a living pathology that perpetuates itself through cycles of domination. Fanon (1952) observed that the colonised man, caught between imitation and rejection of the coloniser, "turns his aggression inward, upon those nearest to him." In Eugene's case, this internalised aggression manifests in his household, primarily through the subjugation of women. His

violence towards Beatrice and Kambili becomes a distorted mirror of the violence colonialism once inflicted upon him: the coloniser's control is reenacted through the husband's control; the missionary's judgment through the father's authority. He believes he is protecting his family from sin and damnation, yet his methods echo the colonial pedagogy of fear, punishment, and erasure. When Beatrice miscarrys after a beating, the physical dismemberment of her body literalises the symbolic dismemberment of the postcolonial family—a tragic inheritance of colonial violence.

Beatrice's endurance and Kambili's silence symbolise the gendered response to Eugene's colonial trauma. Beatrice, described as "a small woman with big eyes that looked like they had seen so much but said nothing" (Adichie, 2004, p. 30), personifies the quiet suffering of women caught within postcolonial patriarchies. Her repeated miscarriages, "There was blood on the floor of the living room, watery blood" (p. 33), testify to the violence inflicted by Eugene's colonially conditioned piety upon her body. Her trauma is both physical and existential: she exists within the tensions of love and abuse, faith and fear. Kambili, conversely, inherits silence as a means of survival. "Silence hung over us, but it was a different kind of silence, one that let me breathe" (p. 305), she reflects later, indicating her gradual move from repression to self-awareness. The domestic violence she suffers is also epistemic violence; it erases her ability to express herself, her sense of belonging, and her confidence in her own voice.

The Achike household thus becomes a microcosm of the colonial state: authoritarian, hierarchical, and steeped in moral absolutism. Beatrice's passivity and Kambili's silence are not simply personal weaknesses but survival mechanisms within a system of patriarchal and

colonial subjugation. The women's trauma is relational, derivative of Eugene's own, yet it is also gendered, exacerbated by the patriarchal structures that amplify male power. As postcolonial feminist trauma theorists like Visser (2015) and Craps (2013) argue, trauma in postcolonial contexts must be understood not only as an individual psychic rupture but as a historically situated, culturally mediated experience shaped by power asymmetries. Eugene's trauma, born of colonial disempowerment, becomes a weapon of gendered oppression, turning the domestic sphere into an extension of colonial domination.

From a postcolonial feminist trauma perspective, these female experiences exemplify how colonial legacies persist in intimate spaces, shaping gendered subjectivities and relational dynamics (Visser, 2015). The women's trauma is not isolated; it is historically inscribed in the postcolonial condition itself. They become the bearers of a "double trauma"—the inherited trauma of colonisation and the lived trauma of patriarchy. Eugene's obsession with Western moral purity replays the colonial fantasy of control, but in doing so, it transforms his wife and daughter into the new colonised subjects within his home. Their oppression is not simply domestic tyranny but a reenactment of imperial hierarchies, now translated into familial idioms.

Adichie does not leave these women in perpetual victimhood. Through a Womanist lens, both Beatrice and Kambili embody the potential for healing and wholeness. Ogunyemi's (2018) womanist theory emphasises that Black women's liberation is inseparable from the collective healing of their communities. Womanism advocates not a separatist ideal but a reconciliatory struggle that seeks to restore relational harmony, confronting sexism without reproducing division. Beatrice's decision to poison Eugene, though tragic, represents a

moment of moral agency—a desperate attempt to end the cycle of violence and reclaim the possibility of peace for her children. Her act aligns with Ogunyemi's view of Womanism as "accommodationist," not in submission, but in its insistence on preserving unity while resisting oppression.

Kambili's evolution, too, reflects the Womanist ethic of self-discovery and communal connection. When she visits her Aunty Ifeoma, she encounters an alternative model of faith and family, one that values open dialogue, laughter, and affection without fear. This contrast enables her to imagine a new kind of womanhood untethered from patriarchal and colonial strictures. Kambili's gradual awakening to her own voice, her ability to narrate her trauma and find meaning within it, exemplifies what postcolonial feminist trauma theory identifies as "narrative reclamation" (Craps, 2013). By telling her story, she transforms silence into agency, trauma into testimony.

In this synthesis of postcolonial and Womanist readings, *Purple Hibiscus* emerges as a narrative of both inherited dismemberment and the quest for re-membering—restoring what colonialism and patriarchy have severed. Eugene's dismemberment, rooted in colonial indoctrination, is not resolved by his death; instead, it is confronted through the acts of his wife and daughter, who refuse to perpetuate silence. Their resistance, though constrained, signals a deeper process of decolonial healing.

3.4.1 **Trauma of Domestic Violence**

In Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), the extent of domestic violence that prevails in the patriarchal society of Nigeria is shown or projected through the characters of Chief Eugene and his wife, Mama (Beatrice). Chief Eugene frequently batters Mama. It is ironic that

Eugene, a man who has dedicated his life to fighting for his people's political freedom from the threats of the nearly emerged government, is a wife beater. His wife, Mama, seems to be of a very calm, reserved and repressive nature. She comes out as a woman who is always quiet, silently accepting his torture, which he inflicts in the guise of religious ideology. Eugene's extreme devotion to the new religion drives him to adopt harsh and insensitive villainous measures in the treatment of his wife and children's religious mistakes. His wife, Mama, to tolerate Eugene's violence, uses this excuse. Mama is traumatised as a result of physical and domestic violence, which she experiences on various occasions from her husband. Eugene beats his wife severely to the point of miscarriage for trying to thwart the will of God by putting her desires first. As a result, she is not only a victim of physical assault but also of mental breakdown, which will be discussed later in this section.

> I heard the sounds. Swift, heavy thuds on my parents' hand-carved bedroom door…I sat down, closed my eyes and started to count… I stepped out of my room just as Jaja came out of his. We stood at the landing and watched Papa descend. Mama was slung over his shoulder… There is blood on the floor, Jaja said. I will get the brush from the bathroom. We cleaned up the trickle of blood. (Adichie, 2004, p. 33)

Colonial administrators often governed through fear, strict discipline, and the suppression of dissent (Elkins, 2022). Eugene mimics this authoritative, almost dictatorial leadership style within his household. He expects obedience, punishes deviation harshly, and imposes rigid rules without room for emotional expression or dissent. His violent discipline echoes the punitive measures of colonial rule. Just as colonial governments used force to maintain control, Eugene uses violence to enforce order and compliance at home. His behaviour reflects how the colonised male may reproduce the systems of dominance to which they have been subjected.

Correspondingly, Mama loses another pregnancy to Eugene's violence. He beats her unscrupulously and also smashes a table on her belly. This is what some unlucky women go through in their matrimonial homes. The devilish egos men possess drive them to do many reckless things. Eugene crosses miles to satisfy himself demonically whenever he loses his patience. Women who are married to hot-tempered men experience the same trauma. In the case of Mama, she has witnessed various forms of domestic violence as she vocally reports:

> You know that small table we keep the Bible, nne? Your father broke it on my belly…My blood finished on that floor even before he took me to St. Agnes. My doctor said there was nothing he could do to save it." (Adichie, 2004, p. 48)

While patriarchy pre-dates colonialism (Brueys, 2021), colonial rule often reinforced male dominance, particularly through missionary institutions that upheld male authority and strict gender roles. Eugene embodies this legacy with his belief that he has the right to "discipline" his wife and children, and his religious extremism amplifies this belief. Eugene's interpretation of Catholicism merges with patriarchal power, enabling him to see his violence as a duty rather than a moral failure. This shows how colonial religious frameworks, when combined with traditional patriarchal structures, can justify oppression and abuse.

The teenage Kambili, Eugene's daughter, is also a victim of her father's male tyranny. Kambili liked her grandfather and saw him as a human, while Papa Eugene detested his father, a traditionalist who believed in Igbo Gods and traditions. Papa Eugene, who followed Christianity, considered his father a pagan and his custom a heathen one. As a result, Papa Eugene punishes his daughter by pouring boiling water on her feet for living under the same roof with her pagan grandfather at Nsukka.

> Kambili, you are precious." His voice quavered now, like someone speaking at a funeral, choked with emotion. "You should strive for perfection. You should not see sin and walk right into it." He lowered the kettle into the tub, tilted it toward my feet. He poured the hot water on my feet, slowly, as if he were conducting an experiment and wanted to see what would happen. He was crying now, tears streaming down his face… I watched the water leave the kettle, flowing almost in slow motion in an arc to my feet. The pain of contact was so pure, so scalding, I felt nothing for a second. And then I screamed. (Adichie, 2004, p. 194)

Eugene is portrayed as a devout Catholic and a staunch supporter of Western ideals. He views traditional Igbo culture and religion as inferior or even sinful. This internalised colonial mindset, where Western norms are seen as superior, was a key consequence of colonisation, primarily through Christian missionary efforts (Stone, 2024). Eugene's rejection of his father (Papa-Nnukwu), who follows traditional Igbo religion, shows how he has come to associate colonial religion with purity and traditional culture with corruption. Eugene uses religion as a justification for controlling and punishing his family. His extreme discipline is framed as a means to keep them on the "righteous" path, illustrating how colonial-era religious indoctrination can morph into violent authoritarianism within the family structure.

In another incident, Papa lashes Kambili and her mother with the leather belt for disobeying the catholic law. An hour before attending church, Kambili suffers from monthly cramps. Her mother gives her a tablet for her cramps and some food to help her with strength. They are caught by Papa Eugene, who immediately rips them with the leather belt.

> It was a heavy belt made of layers of brown leather with a sedate leather-covered buckle. It landed on Jaja first, across his shoulder. Then Mama raised her hands as it landed on her upper arm…he swung the belt on Mama, Jaja and me (Adichie, 2004, p. 102).

Eugene, as a man, can never understand a woman suffering from their monthly woes. He can never understand the hormonal changes involved in a woman's body. Apart from being abused verbally and physically, Kambili is also psychologically abused. Any child affected psychologically will lose her self–confidence. Papa Eugene broke Kambili's self-confidence, leaving her a naive child. Kambili endures numerous hardships, unable to retaliate or voice her opinion, as she is a female. The child remains scared and isolated until she meets her cousins at Nsukka. Her mother watches silently the horrifying disasters taking place in her house, unable to strike back since society has made it mandatory that women should be submissive to their husbands and should not retaliate.

Papa Eugene did not allow his family to visit any traditionalist Igbo house as he believed them to be pagan. Papa Eugene discovers that Kambili held a picture of her grandfather in her bedroom. She is kicked and stamped by her father so violently that he breaks her ribs. Papa Eugene's actions have always been violent and inhumane towards women, especially.

> What has gotten into you?" Papa asked. "What is wrong with you?
>
> I lay on the floor, curled tight like the picture of a child in the uterus in my Integrated Science for the Junior Secondary Schools.
>
> Get up!" Papa said again. I still did not move. He started to kick me. The metal buckles on his slippers stung like bites from giant mosquitoes. He talked nonstop, out of control, in a mix of Igbo and English, like soft meat and thorny bones. Godlessness. Heathen worship. Hellfire. The kicking increased in tempo, and I thought of Amaka's music, her culturally conscious music that sometimes started off with a calm saxophone and whirled into lusty singing. I curled around myself tighter, around the pieces of the painting; they were soft, feathery. They still had the metallic smell of Amaka's paint palette. The stinging was raw now, even more like bites, because the metal landed on open skin on my side, my back, my legs. Kicking. Kicking. Kicking. Perhaps it was a belt now because the metal buckle seemed too heavy. Because I could hear a swoosh in the air. A low voice was saying, "Please, biko, please." More stings. More slaps. A salty

> wetness warmed my mouth. I closed my eyes and slipped away into quiet. (Adichie, 2004, p. 211)

His rigidity failed with his son, Jaja, who started retailing at an early age. Even though Jaja knew his father's temper, he soon started ignoring his father's advice, and he even once walked out of the dining room halfway through dinner time. Papa Eugene was unable to control Jaja because he was a boy; hence, he was given more space. It is heart-wrenching to see Papa Eugene abuse Jaja verbally while Kambili and Mama are abused physically, psychologically, and mentally since they belong to the weaker sex.

Domestic violence results in significant trauma for its victims. Trauma in this context refers to the psychological and emotional impact of experiencing or witnessing abuse. Beatrice Achike (Mama) and Kambili experience a range of psychological effects, such as anxiety, depression, and fear, as a result of domestic violence. This has been discussed in detail in the next section of this chapter. Moreover, victims of domestic violence may experience trauma symptoms that affect their ability to escape abusive situations or seek help. For instance, Mama makes up all manner of excuses for Papa Eugene's abuse:

> Eugene has not been well. He has been having migraine and a fever," she said. "He is carrying more than any man should carry. Do you know what Ade's death did to him? It is too much for one person." "Ginidi, what are you saying?" Aunty Ifeoma swiped impatiently at an insect that flew close to her ears. "When Ifediora was alive, there were times, nwunye m, when the university did not pay salaries for months. Ifediora and I had nothing, yet he never raised a hand to me." "Do you know that Eugene pays the school fees of up to a hundred of our people? Do you know how many people are alive because of your brother?" "That is not the point, and you know it." "Where would I go if I leave Eugene's house? Tell me, where would I go? (Adichie, 2004, p. 255).

As always, she uses the above assertion to convince anyone who cares to listen to the reason why she should accept all forms of violence from her husband. Eugene subjects his family

to all forms of physical, psychological, and emotional trauma, and it affects their psyche drastically. Kambili could not talk boldly with Amaka; she found out that their family was different from theirs as a result of her father's authoritative way of ruling the family. Eugene's abuse of his family ranges from physical to psychological, which affects all the members of his family. In some traditional contexts, silence in the face of suffering, especially for women, is valorised (Gatwiri, 2015). A "good wife" is expected to endure pain for the sake of her family and reputation. Beatrice (Mama) internalises this belief. Despite multiple violent episodes, including a miscarriage caused by Eugene's beating-she remains silent for most of the novel. Her endurance reflects how cultural norms reinforced by colonial patriarchy may pressure victims to remain quiet and uphold the family's image rather than seek help or speak out. This systemic silence is not just personal; it is cultural. Beatrice's mother even once tells her to stay, reinforcing the norm.

Wood (2004) believes that those who violate people do so "to gain or sustain self-esteem, to win the respect of others, to maintain control over people and situations" (2004, p. 294). Colonialism often fractured identities, forcing colonised peoples to navigate between their native cultures and imposed Western identities (Gonzales, 2021). Eugene's rejection of his heritage and the adoption of Western customs suggest an identity torn by colonial influence. He becomes a symbol of the colonial subject who has so thoroughly absorbed the values of the coloniser that he becomes alienated from his roots. Eugene's violence can be interpreted as an external expression of his internal conflict. The inability to reconcile his dual identity creates psychological turmoil, which he projects onto his wife and children in a desperate attempt to maintain control and clarity in a world where his cultural self has been destabilised in this context, by colonial ideologies.

Eugene ends up losing his family's respect; they are only afraid of him and do whatever they like when he is not around. They were banned from watching television, associating with their cousins and grandfather, playing, and even talking in the house. Their life was so regimented by their father's presence, and they talked in whispers when he was around.

3.4.2 **Trauma of the Psyche**

According to Van der Kolk (2014), it is important to ascertain when a traumatised individual became fixated on their trauma and the events that shaped their psyche, an assertion that is profoundly relevant in analysing Kambili's struggles within the narrative. The narrator, Kambili, experiences psychological trauma stemming from witnessing her mother's physical suffering, in what Van der Kolk calls the "we experience" whereby trauma transfers from a mother to a child in the abusive environment indirectly (Van der Kolk, 2014, p. 25). Kambili's helplessness in witnessing her father physically abusing her mother constitutes her trauma. Also, Kambili's trauma stems from her own experience as a victim of domestic abuse, all solely based on their gender. Kambili's experience of the "Swift, heavy thuds on my parents' hand-carved bedroom door," Papa running and carrying "Mama... slung over his shoulder like jute sacks of rice," "the trickle of blood which trailed away as if someone had carried a leaking jar of red watercolor," her wiping the blood from the floor, and finding out later that the blood was her unborn sibling that was miscarried, all disrupted Kambili's psyche and appeared in repeated flashbacks. For this reason, Van der Kolk writes:

> Traumatic experiences do leave traces, whether on a large scale or on a smaller scale. They also leave lasting impressions on our minds and emotions, affecting our capacity for joy and intimacy, and even influencing our biology and immune systems. Trauma affects not only those who are directly exposed to it but also those around them." (Van der Kolk, 2014, p. 4)

This assertion further highlights the pervasive impact of trauma on an individual and how trauma can be transferred from one person to another subconsciously, like in the case of Mama and Kambili. Kambili's mind stuck on the event as she describes in the narrative, "The words in my textbooks kept turning into blood each time I read them" (Adichie, 2004, p. 37), "I still saw my baby brother's spirit strung together by narrow lines of blood" (Adichie, 2004, p. 52), and "I knocked my glass over as I reached for it, and the blood-colored juice crept over the white lace tablecloth. Mama hastily placed a napkin on the spot, and ...I remembered her blood on the stairs" (Adichie, 2004, p. 99), all echo Van der Kolk's emphasis on fixation in traumatised victims because her mind froze at the time of the event. In addition, this research suggests that Kambili experiences trauma of guilt for not fulfilling the promise she and Jaja had made about the baby. That is, "We will take care of the baby; we will protect him" (Adichie, 2004, p. 23). Also, witnessing such abuse as a child in her formative years disrupts her overall physical and mental well-being.

Mama is another character within the narrative who succumbs to her experiences within the household and "loses her basic sense of self" (Keyes, 2014). As a woman in a patriarchal system, Mama becomes conditioned to societal expectations for women. She becomes a passive character, adopting a pleasing attitude to be an ideal wife. Despite her efforts to be society's ideal wife to Eugene, she is subjected to incessant abuse that not only leaves indelible marks on her physical body but also on her mind. Thus, it is imperative to assert that Mama's trauma does not stem only from domestic abuse but also from the burden of loss. That is the trauma of witnessing the murder of her unborn children by Eugene. To lay credence to this claim, Keyes et al posit that "unexpected death of a loved one is associated with depression and anxiety symptoms...and heightened risk for prolonged grief reactions"

(Keyes, 2014). That means, the death of Mama's unborn children triggered a psychological trauma that left her scarred.

Adichie, in a bid to examine the impact of traumatic events on women in an abusive environment, through her narrator, describes Mama's trauma after the first miscarriage in intense detail:

> Her eyes were vacant like the eyes of those mad people who wandered around the roadside garbage dumps in town, pulling grimy, torn canvas bags with their life fragments inside. "There was an accident, the baby is gone," she said. (Adichie, 2004, p. 34)

These lines indicate the depth of Mama's suffering. The "vacant eyes" highlighted in Kambili's narration can be interpreted as a dissociative response to trauma and "the outward manifestation of a biological freeze reaction" (Van der Kolk, 2014). Thus, it encapsulates the freezing of Mama's mind at the time of the traumatic event. In addition to her mind's fixation on the traumatic event, Mama experiences what Van der Kolk refers to as "speechless terror", that is, "an enormous difficulty telling people what has happened to her" (Van der Kolk, 2014, p. 8), a symptom that is common with traumatised victims.

In addition to all this, Mama is the wife who is deprived of the ability and sense of choice; she is reduced to an ordinary housewife, not even a home-maker, almost enslaved by her husband, in her own legal matrimonial home. This is the height of masculinity and sense of dominance that men exhibit in a patriarchal society like Nigeria. Many women like Mama have suffered from the trauma of repressed emotions. When Eugene asked her to join him in visiting Father Benedict, she decided to remain in the car because she was pregnant and not feeling well. As a result, noticing his facial and gestural reaction, she immediately

changed her mind and reluctantly joined him. Later at home, he beats her for that, for expressing her choice, for feeling sick, for not obeying before complaining. Eugene reveals his inability to tolerate and accommodate her illness because he values religion more than his wife's health and happiness.

In the same way, Mama is deserted by her loving husband when she needed him the most. Women are naturally strong at heart, but tiny things that seem unimportant tend to break them down, and hence, they become vulnerable to psychological trauma. Eugene beats Kambili, their daughter, into fainting; it is only Mama who stays with her in the hospital. She stood alone with the unconscious girl, waiting for her recovery. Until Kambili recovers consciousness, Mama has been waiting alone and idle in the hospital room. At this crucial moment, Eugene's physical presence is more than necessary. However, he abandons her when his presence means a lot to her, since his absence could create a vacuum for depression, fear and internal turmoil, considering the situation.

Similarly, a mother's love for her biological child would forever remain a misery. As mentioned earlier, it exceeds human reasoning and thus should remain impermeable. When a child is hurt, the mother gets affected directly or indirectly and shares the pain with the child. There is an attachment between the two which only God knows how. Mama not only suffers Eugene's direct assault on her but also the pain of his ill-treatment and cruelty that he inflicts upon her children. Eugene beats up the children for making minor mistakes. For instance:

> He poured the hot water on my feet, slowly…The pain of the contact was so pure, so scalding, and I felt nothing for a second. And then I screamed…Mama had come inside the bathroom. Tears were running down

> her face. Her nose was running, too…She mixed salt with cold water and gently plastered the gritty mixture onto my feet. (Adichie, 2004, pp. 194-195)

Eugene used boiled water to scald their feet for going against his rule; their crime is why they did not tell him over the phone that his heathen father was living under the same roof with the Christian them. He kicked and beat the hell out of Kambili until she went unconscious for keeping his heathen father's portrait, he beat and broke Jaja's little finger for not answering two questions correctly in a test, he flung a missal against Jaja for missing communion. All these and a few other incidents culminated and affected the mental state of Mama; they accumulated and formed a permanent scar in her mind, which further triggers her trauma. Alameda County Trauma Informed Care refers to trauma from a psychological perspective to describe experiences that are emotionally painful and distressing and that overwhelm an individual's capacity to cope. Kambili is fifteen years old now. Mama has a dying wish to have another child, but Eugene's violence would not let her nurture the pregnancy till delivery. She had a miscarriage six years back, at the time she tells Kambili of her current pregnancy, which also gets destroyed after a series of beatings from her husband. Also, she lost a six-week-old pregnancy to Eugene's torture as he smashed a table on her tummy. These incidents are more than enough reasons to reduce someone to a mental wreck. Adichie flawlessly describes Mama's plight:

> She cried for a long time, she cried until my hand clasped in hers felt stiff. She cried until Aunty Ifeoma finished cooking the rotting meat in a spicy stew. She cried until she fell asleep, resting her head against the seat of the chair. Jaja lay her on a mattress on the living room floor. (Adichie, 2004, p. 249)

In *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) therefore, Adichie portrays the psychological trauma experienced by female characters like Beatrice (Mama) and her daughter Kambili as deeply rooted in the

colonial domination and traditional patriarchy. Colonialism, particularly through Christian missionary influence, introduced rigid moral codes and authoritarian structures, which became deeply entrenched in postcolonial society (Elkins, 2022). Eugene, the family patriarch, internalises these colonial norms, especially the belief in the superiority of Western religion and order, and enforces them violently. His brutal discipline and emotional control are expressions of a colonised mind, convinced that righteousness demands suppression of dissent and suffering in silence. This results in Beatrice's passivity, her near-constant anxiety, and, eventually, in her constant act of resistance, poisoning Eugene. All these are a tragic culmination of years of suppressed pain and voicelessness that constitute her psychological trauma.

On the other hand, Kambili, as a young girl growing up under Eugene's embodied authoritarian rule, learns from her mother that silence is not only expected but necessary for survival. She rarely speaks above a whisper, constantly second-guesses herself, and experiences intense fear at any sign of conflict. Her inability to express her emotions or dissent from her father's rigid expectations results in her stunted social development and her deep-seated psychological distress. Kambili's trauma is evident in her physical responses-she trembles, shudders, and collapses under pressure. Adichie uses these symptoms to show how silence, when enforced by systems of control, is not peace but a breeding ground for internalised fear and emotional fragmentation. Thus, the characters' silence is not merely a reaction to individual abuse, but a psychological scar left by a culture that punishes dissent and reveres suffering.

3.4.3 **Trauma of a Depressing Home Space**

Castellano (2009) poses a question: “Does the female writer have any particular commitment as a female?” For instance, to challenge the men's domination in society and make people believe in the independent humanity of women. Marriage becomes the subject of discussion, a place of women’s selfhood, dissolved into the men. How do they get new titles to “Mrs.”? What are these positions of power; are they held by men or women? There is a need to demystify the roles and positions of women in homes, challenging the notion that men are the owners of the home. When looking at a home, one would consider the position of power it holds. If it is in politics, who holds the power? All comes to the decision-making in the home and the society: is it a woman’s or a man’s opinion that counts? In *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), for instance, Eugene’s opinion is always correct.

A home is made up of a family. Family life, in this case, has many debacles that oppressively dictate the lives of women in *Purple Hibiscus* (Adichie, 2004). To borrow Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, a home becomes a hegemonic environment that is used to suppress liberty and the development of women’s identity. At the start of *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), we immediately discern that the stressful conditions of being a woman are further complicated by demeaning cultural practices falsely portrayed as natural. Women's subjugation is thus constructed. Ideally, a home is meant to be a haven for the family in terms of love and peace. However, for women in *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), home has become a space of agony, full of stressful encounters, as shown in how Kambili hails from a civilised and wealthy family. However, contrary to the expectations, their home becomes a den of stress and trauma because of their father’s, Papa Eugene’s, tyrannical tendencies. Oge A. Ikediugou and Kola Eke agree that Papa subjects the members of his household to constant

beatings, harassments and inflictions. Therefore, in the text, the family and home as a whole trigger many unpleasant memories for most of the women covered.

Kurtz (2012) states, "Growing up in this well-heeled but terrifying setting, Kambili is a nervous wreck, never knowing when to expect another outburst of physical abuse from her father. There are several horrifying instances of Eugene's violence against the children and their mother, and the family develops a range of coping mechanisms for dealing with this pathological home environment."

Chimamanda Adichie opens her text, *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), with Kambili painting a sorry state of affairs in a wealthy family that is conditioned on the dictatorship and brutality of the head of the family, Papa Eugene (Adichie, 2004). All these encounters rest on the woman of the house, Beatrice, who calmly comes in and starts to pick the pieces with her bare hands. She is not supposed to show any resentment toward the mistreatment of her son by Papa Eugene. Kambili says, "She stared at the figurine pieces on the floor and then knelt and started to pick them up with her bare hands" (Adichie, 2004). This action demonstrates how she is rendered powerless in the home, leaving her in no position to question anything, whether right or wrong. Therefore, there is an urgent need to change such a situation in society, and that is why Adichie uses her writing to bring all these challenges to the fore. Georgia and Mboya Kivai sum up this by saying:

> Adichie's writing is an effort to voice the internal knowledge and needs of women in a way that challenges the status quo. She reworks earlier images of African women projected by patriarchal order and figures female characters as speaking subjects in *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006). (Kivai, 2010)

In *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), a home is associated with considerable tension and fear among the family members. Close to these restrictions is Kivai's feeling that the fundamental pillar of patriarchal power within the African context is the silencing and suppression of women, including the control of their bodies. To empower the African woman, Adichie crafts stories with female subjects pursuing female interests. She also structures her narratives to contest the male power with its violent manifestations. Her exercise is an invention of gender power discourse that serves to inspire the female struggle against male domination (Kivai, 2010).

Papa Eugene's family is under constant fear and anxiety to the extent that no conversation takes place except in a mechanical way. Two bottles of the newest juice are brought for testing, where every member of the family is forced to praise the products except Jaja, who keeps quiet, bringing in more tension. "Have you nothing to say, gbo Jaja?" (Adichie, 2004). This bold move by Jaja instils nervousness and fear, as no one had ever considered defying the law set by Papa Eugene. Kambili and her brother, Jaja, are forced to consume extremely hot foods in the name of love and sharing. Kambili says:

> Have a love sip, he would say, and Jaja would go first. Then I would hold the cup with both hands and raise it to my lips. One sip. The tea was always too hot, it always burned my tongue, and if lunch was something peppery, my raw tongue suffered. But it did not matter, because I knew then that when the tea burned my tongue, it burned Papa's love into me. (Adichie, 2004, p. 8)

Such a home cannot provide anyone with the peace and tranquillity needed to develop self-esteem and a sense of independence. The association with other members of the society is limited, as evidenced by the presence of a driver, Kevin, who is employed to transport both Jaja and Kambili to and from school daily. "Before, our driver, Kevin, would pick me up first at Daughters of the Immaculate Heart, and then we would drive over to get Jaja at St.

Nicholas" (Adichie, 2004), reveals how other classmates like Chinwe feel about Kambili. "Chinwe just wants you to talk to her first," Ezinne whispered. "You know, she started calling you a backward snob because you do not talk to anybody" (Adichie, 2004). Papa Eugene's children, Jaja and Kambili, cannot even hold a conversation with their cousins.

A home with restrictions majorly contributes to low confidence among the members who hail from these families. Kambili and Jaja need to take time away from their busy lives to release their stress. Kambili says, "We always soaked tiny sections of fabric in the foamy water first to check if the colours would run, although we knew they would not, we wanted to spend every minute of the half hour Papa allocated to uniform washing" (Adichie, 2004). Schedules are the order of the day in this home as both Jaja and Kambili have written up schedules, and they wonder if the anticipated baby would also have the same. Kambili says, "I wondered when Papa would draw up a schedule for the baby, my new brother, if he would do it right after the baby was born or wait until he was a toddler" (Adichie, 2004). This kind of environment hampers the psychological growth and development of children, leading to a lack of creative minds, diminished confidence in their abilities, and poor decision-making.

The family's life becomes a cycle of violence. Marriage becomes a mountain that women constantly attempt to climb. This is best put by the statement, "Oppression at the matrimonial level is one of the mountains that keep the African women in subordination." (Rawal, 2024) This creates naivety, and being naive is a fertile ground that propagates these vices as women like Mama Beatrice fail to assert authority in the advent of violence in their homes. She is forced to endure all the challenges of carrying her pregnancy against her will for the sake of her husband's reputation at the church. "Let me stay in the car and wait, biko," Mama said,

leaning against the Mercedes. “I feel vomit in my throat” (Adichie, 2004). When Papa Eugene asks her if she needs to stay in the car, she opts to follow him to the priest’s house. Kivai admits that Papa’s word is final, and he disregards the wife’s feelings; thus, Beatrice hangs at the periphery of Papa’s world. Despite being unwell, she is compelled to go with the rest to the priest’s house (Kivai, 2010).

A lot of violence and inhospitable homes make overly submissive women, like Kambili and her mother, Beatrice, fail to make proper decisions, even in times of pain and suffering. Ezinne tells Kambili, “Maybe after school you should stop running off like that and walk with us to the gate” (Adichie, 2004). All these kinds of mannerisms have been bred by the volatile environment in their home, which is ironic, given that one would expect a civilised home to understand the need for fair treatment and respect for human rights.

Kambili narrates how one time she heard the heavy thuds in their parents’ bedroom. “I imagined the door had got stuck and Papa was trying to open it” (Adichie, 2004). Both Jaja and Kambili saw much blood on the floor, and their mother never came back that evening because she had been admitted to the hospital. Kivai notes that the narrator always captures Mama as having swollen eyes or face in tears, a jagged scar or bleeding from the violent assaults of her husband. The family is always experiencing nervous moments due to paternal brutality. They are silent or talk with suppressed voices (Kivai, 2010). In this case, violence that is perpetuated by chauvinistic elements is aimed at controlling women and rendering them docile, only depending on men’s decisions, whether good or bad.

The woman who was battered then will feel sorry for the man and recommit to him in a fantasised hope that the abuse will not happen again (Albert and Elaine Borchard

Foundation, Dr Ezekiel R. and Edna Watts Dumke Foundation). Therefore, it is ridiculous that later on that evening, the family is made to recite different novenas for their mother's forgiveness. "And on Sunday, the first Sunday of Trinity, we stayed back after mass and started the novenas" (Adichie, 2004). However, this cycle of abuse does not stop as it becomes even worse when Papa Eugene pours hot water on Kambili's feet for staying with their heathen grandfather, Papa Nnukwu. "He lowered the kettle into the tub, tilted it toward my feet. He poured the hot water on my feet, slowly, as if he were conducting an experiment and wanted to see what would happen" (Adichie, 2004).

Society expects women to have multiple children, not just two, as seen in the case of Papa Eugene and Mama Beatrice. The members of Umunna sent people to Papa Eugene to urge him to get another wife who would give birth to children. So many women were ready to give their daughters so that many sons would be born in Papa Eugene's home. This rocks women's lives as they have been socialised to accept this kind of demeaning practice, where their main reason to be in a marriage is to give birth to as many children as they can (Adichie, 2004). A home becomes a suffocated space as women themselves allow themselves to be objectified by men and be made second wives, and so on.

Not all the families and homes presented in the *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) undergo culture and patriarchal-instigated suffering; there are a few that have success stories. As Amaka talks to Kambili, she says, "I listen mostly to indigenous musicians" (Adichie, 2004). Aunty Ifeoma has given her children enough freedom, allowing them to explore their surroundings, as long as it is not harmful. In her family, Aunty Ifeoma supports all her children, including Amaka, Obiora, and Chima, who are all enthusiastic. Ade Coker's family is portrayed as a loving

and understanding family. This is why, when Coker is arrested, his wife gets stressed and asks Papa Eugene to help get her husband from prison. This is a family that exhibits much love as Ade and his wife, Yewande, always move together happily (Adichie, 2004). Mama Beatrice's statement shows this as she calls Jaja and Kambili to pass their greetings to Ade and Yewande on their way to their rural home for the Christmas holiday. Amaka has enough freedom to explore her passion for drawing, unlike Jaja and Kambili, whose scheduled lives hinder their creativity and sense of exploration. This healthy interaction, characterised by respect and meaningful, free-flowing speeches, is the kind of happy family and home that Adichie envisions.

In summary, the Achike household, despite being wealthy and modern, is emotionally barren-a depressing, traumatising space. This contradiction mirrors how colonialism and patriarchy, despite promising "civilisation" and "order," often result in repression and psychological damage. Kambili, Mama, and Jaja's muteness and emotional fragility are symptoms of this environment, a legacy of systems that silence rather than nurture. Their gradual awakening at Aunty Ifeoma's house, full of laughter, intellectual curiosity, and spiritual freedom, symbolises a decolonial and feminist alternative, where traditional values and gender equality coexist.

The depressing home space in *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), therefore, is not just a personal or familial issue. It is a literary metaphor for the colonial and patriarchal systems that continue to shape postcolonial African societies. Through the emotional suffocation in the Achike home, Adichie critiques both imported and indigenous systems of domination, making a case for liberation that is both personal and societal.

3.4.4 **Women's Stoicism in Navigating Trauma**

Women undertake creative measures to alleviate their terrible situations in society. Adichie (2004) takes an initiative through her writings to push for a gender-balanced society. *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) is a social protest against gender corruption in a culturally conservative society. In one of her works, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, she interrogates the situation of women, noting that it prevents them from exploring the world's fundamental problems because men are always considered the default. In contrast, a woman is seen as the 'other' (De Beavoir, 2010). As the undervalued sex, men and the racial masters cruelly treat women, the evils of a patriarchal world and the dark side of male nature are fully presented. Julie Bindel states that women have developed specific skills because of men's tyranny (Binde, 2018). This can be compared to Mears' (2009) analysis of Amaka in *One is Enough,* which emphasises the decision of one woman, Amaka, who decides to take responsibility for her future by leaving her rural village, divorcing her husband, and moving to Lagos. Six years of a childless marriage was enough for her. After arriving in Lagos, Amaka learns the conniving methods of achieving success as a businesswoman. She decides never to marry again, despite having children. She concludes that women can be happy, fulfilled, and successful without being married as long as they have their own money (Mears, 2009).

In *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), Adichie calls on women to be responsible and get the right strategies to uplift themselves in society. Amaka provokes Kambili by the way she articulates herself and understands what she wants. She listens to whatever music she likes, puts on earrings and wears lipstick. She does not allow public opinion; she puts on a pair of shorts, rubbing her hands over the front of her T-shirt. Amaka remarks that she knew Kambili and other teenagers were into American Pop and that they did not listen to culturally

conscious music (Adichie, 2004). Thus, there is increased awareness among women as they grow and try to change the tide that sweeps against them and their endeavours in society. They venture into a variety of careers that fit them against the societal sexism norms that keep some careers for men and some for women.

When we look at the case of Aunty Philipa, she is incredibly sharp, and she specialises in botany, conducting numerous experiments. The same sentiments are echoed by Akoété Amouzou (2006) who believes it is a fact that her female characters accept themselves as women, but new women, different from the stereotypes with negative images that the reader is familiar with in male- authored texts (Amouzou, 2006). This defies all odds, as women have traditionally been confined to the home. Beatrice is a good example of what a woman should be: a homemaker who takes care of her husband. However, Philipa and Ifeoma go beyond this as they lecture at the University of Nsukka, Nigeria.

Aunty Ifeoma works in an office at the Institute of African Studies. “Aunty Ifeoma pointed at a building next to the school, the Institute of African Studies, where her office was and where she taught most of her classes” (Adichie, 2004). Women can no longer be contained in the home setting. They can own property the way Ifeoma does. She owns a car. “The street she turned into was steep, and she switched the ignition off and let the car roll, loose bolts rattling” (Adichie, 2004). Therefore, significant changes have occurred in property ownership, allowing every gender to acquire property without discrimination. Women’s solidarity, in this case, enables them to gain significant ground in terms of their transformation. This is why Kivai feels that Adichie’s novels constitute cases of women

coming together to challenge the effects of patriarchy or to aid one another to overcome male-created misfortunes (Kivai, 2010).

Women's educational achievements have positive ripple effects within the family and across generations (Carmon, 2013). In agreement with the assertion is Kivai, who admits that women's education is a strong socialisation tool used by women in Adichie's novels to fight insubordination and oppression (Kivai, 2010).

The note is that Aunty Ifeoma and Philipa are educated and liberated. Aunty Ifeoma's empowerment through education is an indication of how a society can be modified. Aunty Ifeoma changes Kambili and Jaja's perspective on life. They are included in all the activities that Aunty Ifeoma's children participate in, like washing, fetching water and preparing dishes. Kambili says, "Aunty Ifeoma included Jaja and me in the plate-washing schedule, and after lunch, I washed the garri-encrusted lunch plates" (Adichie, 2004). They discuss hairstyles and other teenage topics that Kambili has never had the chance to explore. She says, "I wanted to talk with them, to laugh with them so much that I would start to jump up and down in one place the way they did, but my lips held stubbornly together. I did not want to stutter, so I started to cough and then ran out and into the toilet" (Adichie, 2004).

Jaja's real name is Chukwuka, but he is nicknamed Jaja as the words he would pronounce at his baby stage were "ja-ja". Aunty Ifeoma and Mama Beatrice find it fitting to name him after Jaja of Opobo, a defiant King who opposed British domination in trade. It is a symbolic name that later lives up to its expectation as his engineered constructive defiance leads to the eventual fall of Papa Eugene, the patriarch. Aunty Ifeoma talks about how important defiance can be at times when all other means seem not to work: "Being defiant can be a

good thing sometimes," Aunty Ifeoma said. "Defiance is like marijuana-it is not a bad thing when it is used right (Adichie, 2004, p. 144). This is an accurate observation as it helps shape the destinies of Philipa, Ifeoma, Mama Beatrice and other like-minded people who defy the order of the day to drive their gender equality gospel.

The voice of a woman and her imitative shapes the society in the desired way. Ogundipe-Leslie, in her Stiwanism, calls on women to take a personal active interest in their society. Women must not sit back and allow or expect men to do social advocacy on their behalf (Nyambura, 2018). This is evident in the efforts of Aunty Ifeoma, which seem to be bearing fruit in society, as her sons and daughters represent a new generation that understands the need for equality and complementarity. This is becoming an inspiration to Jaja and Kambili, who begin to take charge of their destinies.

Women demonstrate their abilities and progressive ideologies by working hard whenever possible. Mama Joe has a salon shed on the Ogige market where she plaits women's hair. This is the same place Aunty Ifeoma did her plaiting. Father Amadi takes Kambili to the same salon. Mama Joe praises and acknowledges Aunty Ifeoma's effort in bringing up her three children: Amaka, Obiora, and Chima. Indeed, Aunty Ifeoma is an epitome of a strong visionary woman who gets things done to better her family's life. Mama Joe doubles as a snail trader and a hairdresser. This is a very encouraging scenario, and it helps to inspire other women who do plaiting here. Kambili remarks, "She was on the last cornrow when a woman walked up to her and asked to see the snails" (Adichie, 2004). Aunty Ifeoma writes about her two jobs that she obtained in America: one at a community college and the other at a pharmacy, or drug store, as they called it. According to Kivai, this movement out of the

University of Nigeria, Nsukka, probably to America, serves to expand the space for women to challenge domination (Kivai, 2010).

"They did an autopsy… They have found the poison in your father's body… I started putting poison in his tea before I came to Nsukka." (Adichie, 2004, p. 290). Mama finally poisoned Papa to death. She resorts to killing her husband to terminate the oppression and cruelty she suffers from him. This is a commonly used strategy adopted by traumatised women to do away with the force behind their trauma. Just like Maya of *Anita Desai's Cry the Peacock*, a neurotic character who murders her husband, Gautama, to make her survival worthy. Mama severely suffered several tortures from her husband, being "Excluded from access to forms of power that will protect herself and her children, Beatrice resorts to violence herself. For Mama, rather than fighting against her greatest fear, she simply takes a flight out of the terrifying situation by murdering the causative agent of her devouring trauma, her beloved husband. Jesse Emery rightly puts it that:

> The neocolonial, patriarchal oppression of Beatrice leads her to revolt, but violence is the only method of revolution she can use… She slowly poisons Eugene as a reaction to the physical and emotional abuse he has caused. (Emery, 2015)

Aunty Ifeoma also escaped the devastating situation. Rather than staying in Nigeria to continue to suffer the hardships caused by the tyrants, she relocates to America to save herself the trouble of patriarchy and tyranny that would continue to emanate into trauma.

The young women in the novel, Kambili and Amaka, also demonstrate their own ways of navigating the traumas that they endure. For instance, Kambili endures a thorough beating from his father for holding onto Papa Nnukus's portrait to explicitly demonstrate the end of

an error of fear and submissiveness. Equally, Amaka refuses to pick an English name for her confirmation in the Catholic Church. This is a reflection on the resistance to cultural subjugation.

3.5 Chapter Summary

The chapter discusses various forms of trauma depicted in the female characters of Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004). These include trauma from dismemberment caused by colonialism, which leads to nervous conditions related to native identity. Consequently, alienation arises when native characters in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) are influenced to adopt 'Englishness', hindering their ability to interact freely with fellow natives. The exertion of colonial power results in trauma and identity crises for the native characters in *Nervous Conditions* (Dangarembga, 1988). Conversely, in *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), trauma stemming from domestic violence, psychological distress, and double subjugation by culture and patriarchy highlights a bleak home environment. According to both texts, the dominant characters—colonisers and men—inflict pain on subordinate characters—native men and women—within the power hierarchy, because of the disturbed mental states brought about by colonial oppression.

The form of trauma derived from domestic violence illuminates, particularly, the plight of women in a patriarchal society, as demonstrated by characters in the selected texts. The female characters experience physical, psychological, and emotional torture at the hands of male characters who happen to be their fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons, which leaves them in trauma. This violence is carried out while disguised as religious and cultural

commitment, where the characters use religion and culture to oppress the female protagonists.

Emotional trauma and oppressive tendencies also emerge when the female characters are physically abused, left lonely by their husbands, and witness their children being beaten mercilessly in their presence.

The chapter also looked at a depressing home space as a source of trauma, which is initiated through marriage. This can be viewed from the perspective of women's dissolution of selfhood to men, which suppresses their liberty and hinders the development of their identity.

Finally, the female characters develop trauma of the psyche that is derived from the events they witness their fellow women going through as they grow. These events are forms of domestic violence. The two authors use their writings to raise awareness about the experiences of women and to advocate for a gender-balanced society.

CHAPTER FOUR

WOMEN, LITERARY TECHNIQUES AND TRAUMA IN THE SELECTED TEXTS.

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter analysed various forms of trauma that appear in the female characters of *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), respectively. This chapter offers further analysis by examining the key literary techniques used by the two authors to highlight the types of postcolonial trauma experienced by female characters in the selected texts. It explores the literary methods and their effects in revealing the postcolonial traumas faced by female characters. By analysing the literary techniques of the two influential African post-colonial writers, Adichie and Dangaremba, we can deepen our understanding of the narratives' emotional and intellectual layers. Studying the styles these authors employ to depict post-colonial trauma provides insight into how literature serves as a powerful means for cultural critique, fostering empathy and encouraging historical reflection. Their techniques shed light on the complexities of colonial legacies and emphasise the resilience and agency of marginalised voices.

4.2 Narration

Narration is the act of recounting events through a narrator, involving the interplay of time, voice, and perspective in structuring a story (Genette, 1980). In *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Dangarembga uses first-person narration, a style which, as posited by Genette (1980), distinguishes between the focaliser (the one who sees) and the narrator (the one who speaks).

The older and mature Tambu is the narrator, while the younger Tambu is the focaliser and protagonist in the story. Berndt (2005) elucidates the distinction between Tambu, the narrator, and Tambu, the protagonist focaliser. Building on the work of Genette, Berndt contributes to the distinction between the narrator and focaliser in narration theory. She asserts that a narrator is the one who tells the story. This can be external (omniscient or limited third-person) or internal first-person. On the other hand, the focaliser is the character or entity through whose perspective a story is experienced. This is the one whose perceptions, thoughts, and emotions filter the narrative. In other words, the narrator delivers the story, while the focaliser provides the viewpoint through which events are seen. Sometimes, the narrator and the focaliser can be the same (as in first-person narration). However, in the third-person narrative, they can be separate, where the narrator tells a story but focuses on particular characters (Berndt, 2005).

In *Nervous Conditions* (1988), for example, Tambudzai occupies a dual role that neatly illustrates the distinction between the narrator and the focaliser; this distinction is what theorists like Berndt elucidate. As a first-person narrator, Tambu recounts her experiences, thoughts, and emotions directly to the reader. In doing so, she controls the overall structure of the narrative. Selecting which events to include and how to present them. This narrative authority allows her to provide context, offer commentary, and guide the reader through her journey. This role as a narrator means that she is not just reporting events but actively constructing her version of reality. Her background, education, and personal emotions colour the way she frames her experiences, making the narrative a deeply subjective account of life in a colonial patriarchal society.

On the other hand, as focaliser, Tambu is the lens through which we experience the novel's

world. Everything, her observations of family dynamics, social customs, and personal ambitions, is filtered through her perception. This means that Tambu's inner life mediates the readers' access to the story and her feelings of hope, despair, and sometimes confusion. However, her focused perspective highlights the limitations of her understanding. For example, when she observes the disparities in gender and class or reflects on Western education's influence, her interpretation of these phenomena shapes our view. This subjectivity is essential as it enriches the narrative with emotional depth and challenges us to consider how individual perception can be both enlightening and constraining. Because Tambu is both the narrator and focaliser, the reader is drawn deeply into her events as intimately as Tambu does, sharing her insights and misapprehensions. This creates a strong emotional connection and invites readers to question how individual bias influences the telling of a story. (Berndt, 2005)

This framing allows for the notable trauma of dismemberment discussed in chapter three of this study to manifest. Tambu's trajectory and the nuances confirm the estranged family ties endured by most black Zimbabweans in the name of postcolonial trauma. The advantage of this technique is that it allows the reader to connect with the author's creation simultaneously. The opening statement of Tambu's story, "I was not sorry when my brother died…" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 1), is an awkward confession brought before the reader by the narrator herself, which startles the reader with an immediate feeling of shared guilt. Regarding Genette's (1980) focaliser/narrator relation, Dangarembga's use of the first-person narrative can also be perceived as a dexterous attempt to interrogate and critique traumatic issues presented in the novel without the reader's prejudice. An example of this is Tambu's confession: "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" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 1). The above quote exonerates her from the audience's accusatory reaction to the appalling declaration in which she shows a shocking lack of sensitivity over her brother's death. However, Tambu's declaration creates a connection of interest and a need to investigate the cause of this awkward attitude. Her lack of concern, in a way, confirms a state of dismemberment, and it can be deduced that the use of first-person narration places the reader in the narrator's (Tambu's) mind, allowing for an intimate portrayal of her emotions and thoughts.

Regarding Tambu's development in the novel, Harris and Rosas (Rosas, 2019) observe that "it is the adult Tambu's first-person recall of what she says are factual events that necessitate and enable both the telling in the first place and her achievement of a private, public, intellectual, and critical voice." This study links the author's creation of a shared world, in which the reader accesses the narrator's mind through first-person narration, with the theme of postcolonial trauma, as presented through the narrator's relation to actual experiences throughout the novel. This narrative technique gradually leads the reader to develop feelings of empathy regarding the ill-treatment Tambu receives from her brother, Nhamo. The narrative reveals that this ill-treatment is based on her gender: "He hesitated, then shrugged. It is the same everywhere. Because you are a girl, it was out. That is what Baba said, remember? I was no longer listening. My concern for my brother died an unobtrusive death" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 21). Tambu's lack of concern over her brother reflects the estranged relationships discussed in *Nervous Conditions* (1988). Through the narrator's eyes, the cruelty of a male-dominated society is exposed by how other female characters are treated.

Observing the extent to which Dangarembga succeeds in involving her readers through the

first-person narration 'I', it can be argued that any other form of narrative could not have equally succeeded in creating a relationship between the text and the reader. Moreover, this assertion comes after considering the degree of emotions and the sensitivity of issues portrayed in *Nervous Conditions* (1988). Currently, the reason why the reader can relate to Tambu's experiences is premised on the first-person narration's ability to make the reader a part of the first-hand experience. The language in this technique points to the 'here and now', making it more relatable and viable for the reader. In the third person, the language is limited to the narrator's ability to tell a story, weakening the relationship between the literary text and the reader.

Tambu's retrospection on such depressing accounts can be seen as another method Dangarembga used to demonstrate how patriarchal structures in the novel symbolise oppressive colonial ideologies. Lack of concern over her brother's death during her childhood and her refusal to apologise as an adult in the opening chapter can both be connected to the trauma of unfair gender practices. For example, Nhamo steals the mealies that Tambu grows to raise money for her fees: "A few weeks later, when the cobs were ripe for eating, they began to disappear" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 22). When confronted about his actions, Nhamo displays a lack of sensitivity and exhibits the notion of traditional African male dominance by replying with, "What did you expect? Did you really think you could send yourself to school?" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 22).

First-person narration illuminates the cultural dismemberment and estranged family relations among the novel's characters. It also aims to express the flow of the character's thoughts and feelings. As the reader gets the impression of being inside the character's mind, the author can present critical views on specific issues in the novel, making it easy for the

reader to relate to the ideas presented. Therefore, the internal view of the character's mind (Tambu's perceptions, for example) seems to critique the quandary of language loss as a form of dismemberment that Babamukuru and his family experience after exposure to Western culture during their stay in England. He is sent to Britain to acquire a Western education, which can also be perceived as social dismemberment; in other words, "the removal of the African from his homeland" (Ngugi, 2009). After spending five years overseas, Babamukuru returns to Africa with his family, facing drastic challenges as his now Westernised family struggles to adapt to their traditional home back in the village.

Through first-person narration, the early chapters of *Nervous Conditions* (1988) portray Tambu's ambivalence towards the change in her cousins' behaviour:

> I remembered speaking to my cousins freely and fluently before they went away, eating wild fruits with them, making clay pots, and swimming in Nyamarira. Now, they had turned into strangers. I stopped being offended and was sad instead. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 42)

The five years of exposure to Western education and culture dismembers Tambu's cousins from their cultural identity as black Zimbabweans and creates hybrids that fail to connect with their own culture and forget their mother language: "They do not understand Shona very well anymore, her mother explained. They have been speaking nothing but English for so long that most of their Shona has gone" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 42). The loss of language emphasises Ngugi's concept of dismemberment, in which Africans are dislocated from the crucial element of their identity (Ngugi, 2009). As evident in Babamukuru's family, the process involves language loss, identity crisis, and cultural degeneration. Steve Biko, an anti-apartheid activist, describes this colonial mental crypt of Africans as "the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor" (Dangarembga, 1988).

Tambu focalises Nyasha and Nhamo in her narration; through her thoughts, we can

experience these characters' predicament with cultural dismemberment. For instance, Nyasha a product of this mental crypt, confesses in Chapter Ten that her contact with Western culture has mentally alienated her from her African self; she battles to identify herself, feeling that she is neither African nor European: "look what they have done to us, I am not one of them but I am not one of you" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 205). Recalling the novel's title, her nervous breakdown in Chapter Ten is a result of internalised colonial ideologies that conflict with the African culture imposed by her parents. She is forced to recognise and conform to the expectations of her new context, a change that fails to integrate with her current state of being. Nyasha fearlessly questions her own treatment and that of other black women to the extent that she physically fights this oppressive force, evidenced by her violent retaliation. She punches back at Babamukuru, her father, who represents both colonial and African patriarchal ideologies. The Western culture to which she and her brother are exposed from a tender age has severe repercussions, as they struggle to adapt to their new African context in Zimbabwe. This type of cultural dismemberment is also exhibited through Nhamo's transformation into a semi-European intellectual. When he returns to his rural home in the village, he no longer fits into the humble context. Moreover, he deliberately creates a communication barrier by using English to prove how superior and different he is from the less-educated family members. Tambu asserts:

> All this was good, but there was one terrible change: he had forgotten how to speak Shona. A few words escaped haltingly, ungrammatically and strangely accented. This restricted our communication to mundane, insignificant matters. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 53)

Through first-person narration, Dangarembga, through Tambu, further highlights other female characters who experience trauma, such as Maiguru, who is Babamukuru's wife. Despite holding a Master's degree in Philosophy from London and having her own job,

Maiguru struggles in life since she has to give away her entire salary to sustain Babamukuru's relatives. Tambu comments, "It was a great shame that Maiguru had been deprived of the opportunity to make the most of herself, even if she had accepted the deprivation" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 103). Maiguru's inability to act independently under oppressive circumstances and keep her salary to herself causes her daughter, Nyasha, to lose respect for her. She finds herself caught between a rock and a hard place, having to comply with the Shona culture concerning the responsibilities of a married woman and fulfil the obligations of a working wife and mother. Because of the situation, Maiguru laments, "I am not happy. I am not happy anymore in this house" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 175). As the only Western-educated woman in her native community, she is not accepted among married women.

Another instance of focalisation is witnessed when Tambu is describing Nyasha's dilemma and eventual rebellion against the Shona cultural expectations. Having experienced trauma from the conflict between the traditional Shona culture of her people and the Western culture that she encounters in England, Nyasha grapples with internal conflict and confusion; it is through the use of the first-person narration technique that the trauma of the psyche, discussed in chapter three of this study, is vividly portrayed.

I sensed the conflict that she was going through of self-versus surrender ...she was growing vague and detaching herself from us. She was retreating into a private world that was beyond our reach. Sometimes when I talked to her, she not only preferred not to answer but also did not hear me. Once, when I passed my hand in front of her eyes, she did not see me either, and I had to shout very loudly to bring her back. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 120)

Gardener's *The Art of Fiction* (1983) indicates the limitations of first-person narration as it

locks out the possibilities of going deeply into various characters' minds. This means the story is limited to the narrator's 'I' perception. An example in the novel is Tambu's cousin, Chido. Apart from his alienated relationships with his family and cousins, little is known about him. He prefers to spend his holidays with the Baker boys and his white friends instead of with his family and cousins in the village. Though Chido's alienation is a form of dismemberment perpetuated by the nature of his cultural hybridity, a dislocation is created by his inability to fit into his own African culture after being exposed to Western culture during his stay in England. However, it would have been fair to hear his independent view, other than the mere perceptions that the narrator projects on his behalf through the first-person narrative. Due to this limitation, using the first person can create biased perceptions toward specific issues.

The general judgment Tambu issues on every black man after Babamukuru calls his daughter a whore is an example of this: "Men took it everywhere with them. Even heroes like Babamukuru did it. And that was the problem" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 118). This audacious stereotyping of all men as 'bullies' (which is based on her experience) can be considered an unfair and generalised view of all men, thereby reducing them to misogynists in support of her biased perception. Through this voice, we can understand that Dangarembga has the freedom to foreground issues that she wants to and obscures others that are not relevant to her writing. Though this disadvantage is a significant drawback in literary works that employ this technique, Dangarembga's use of the first-person narrative imparts an understanding of the narrator's view towards colonial trauma debates presented in the novel. This is achieved through the eyes of Tambu, the character focaliser. The reader can also trace her development and how her perceptions shift as she matures throughout her encounters.

In Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), the first-person narration style is also employed throughout the text. The author uses the protagonist Kambili to narrate the story:

> Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the etagere. We had just returned from church. Mama placed the fresh palm fronds, which were wet with holy water, on the dining table and then went upstairs to change. Later, she would knot the palm fronds into sagging cross shapes and hang them on the wall beside our gold-framed family photo. They would stay there until next Ash Wednesday, when we would take the fronds to church to have them burned for ashes. Papa, wearing a long, grey robe like the rest of the Oblates, helped distribute ashes every year. His line moved the slowest because he pressed hard on each forehead to make a perfect cross with his ash-covered thumb and slowly, meaningfully enunciated every word of "dust and unto dust you shall return (Adichie, 2004, p. 11).

The narrator takes part in events in the story as evidenced in the statement, "Papa started the rosary as we drove onto the expressway" (p. 62), and "We left Abba right after New Year's" (Adichie, 2004, p. 111). These statements depict the fact that the narrator is actively involved in the happenings in the story. At a point, she (the narrator) withdraws from the other characters to give her observations (focalise), but then again comes back to be identified with the rest of the characters.

This narrative style creates suspense not only for the readers but also for the characters within the text, as delving beyond Kambili's identity layer in school reveals a metaphorical palimpsest. The question that may puzzle us is, what point does Adichie intend to make at this juncture? Why allow Kambili to add to her many woes her classmates' accusation? The reason for this intentional character portraiture is within the text's body, which only unfolds with palimpsestic reading. First, at this point, Kambili herself has not realised that she struggles to conform to an ascribed identity; she has not yet found a voice to question the

events that stifle her; she believes her father is right and would rather defend him than implicate him. Thus, her growth at this level does not permit her a sense of cognition that will enable her to question the system that controls and stifles her.

Her acceptance of this ascribed identity, thus, endorses that proper knowledge begets the freedom "to be and to do" (Adichie, 2004, p. 6). At this point, Kambili is not ready to assert herself because true liberation comes from within; the formation of Kambili's identity is not in isolation; her identity structure is influenced by both male and female characters around her. First, her mechanical father, who represents a colonised figure, fails to help her realise her worth, and her mother (Beatrice) is too docile to be her role model. She never stands out firmly enough to protect her children. It becomes glaring that within the confines of the patriarchal scripts of her home, Kambili is entrapped in domestic servitude that constructs her subservient "self" with an inner yearning for freedom. Her confinement to domestic servitude could be compared to the snail that Mama Joe sold:

> She picked up an enterprising snail that was crawling out of the open basket. She threw it back in and muttered, "God take power from the devil." I wondered if the same snail was crawling out again, being thrown back in, and then crawling out again. Determined, I wanted to buy the whole basket and set that one snail free. (Adichie, 2004, p. 238).

The above passage demonstrates Kambili's ability to empathise with the snail struggling to free itself from danger because she, too, was experiencing the same turmoil. She yearned to be let loose from her father's controlling nature, but she had yet to achieve that desire.

Using the tale of King Jaja of Opobo, Aunty Ifeoma lectures them on defiance. "Being defiant can be a good thing sometimes…. When it is used right" (Adichie, 2004, p. 144). Kambili utilises her knowledge to resist her father. We see her revolt when Eugene tries to reprimand her for possessing Papa Nnukwu's painting.

> Papa snatched the painting from Jaja. His hand moved swiftly, working together; the painting was gone. It already represented something lost, something I had. I dashed to the pieces on the floor as if to save them …… I sank to the floor and lay on the pieces of paper. (Even when Papa shouted). Get up! I lay there, did nothing, and I still did not move (Adichie, 2004, p. 6).

The above passage vividly reveals the new beginning of Kambili's self–asserted identity, which Azuike describes as the female "self–discovery." (Adichie, 2004, p. 6)

In both *Nervous Conditions* (1988) by Dangarembga and *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) by Adichie, the use of first-person narration plays a significant role in exploring the portrayal of postcolonial trauma, retrospection, and the growth of characters from naivety to maturity.

In *Nervous Conditions* (1988), the first-person narration through Tambudzai's perspective allows readers to intimately experience her journey as a young girl striving for education and autonomy in colonial Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). Tambudzai's narration unveils the complexities of navigating identity, gender roles, and colonialism's impact on personal aspirations. Her reflections on family dynamics, cultural expectations, and the inequalities she faces provide a poignant critique of colonial oppression and its enduring effects on individual psyche and societal structures. The first-person perspective allows readers to witness Tambudzai's internal struggles, offering insight into the trauma of cultural erasure and the quest for self-definition amidst colonialism's legacy.

Similarly, in *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), Kambili's first-person narrative reveals the aftermath of colonialism in postcolonial Nigeria through her privileged yet oppressive family dynamics. Through Kambili's eyes, we witness her gradual awareness of her father's authoritarianism, the stifling effects of religious fanaticism, and the violence that ensues within her family. Her narration serves as a lens through which readers explore themes of personal and collective trauma as she grapples with the repercussions of colonialism on

Nigerian society. Kambili's introspection and growth throughout the novel illustrate her journey towards independence of thought and liberation from the constraints imposed by colonial and postcolonial influences.

In both novels, first-person narration facilitates a deep exploration of the characters' inner lives, their struggles with identity and agency, and their reflections on the broader societal contexts shaped by colonial histories. It allows readers to empathise with the characters' traumas and growth. It highlights how individual narratives can illuminate more prominent themes of postcolonial trauma, retrospection on cultural heritage, and pursuing personal and cultural autonomy in the face of colonial legacies.

4.3 **Symbolism**

Symbolism involves using words or images to represent abstract things, people, objects, or events other than their literal meaning. Symbolism in prose enhances storytelling by engaging the readers' senses and creating vivid mental pictures. It is a crucial literary device that helps establish the mood, develop themes and deepen character experiences. In the context of this study, we explore how Dangarembga and Adichie have utilised symbolism in their selected texts to foreground the manifestation of post-colonial trauma in the female characters of their literary works. Following H. N. Sharma's emphasis on the role of symbolism in making fiction a "living, breathing thing," this section argues that rich sensory details of postcolonial trauma help immerse readers into the narratives, making characters and settings more lifelike (Sharma, 2023). This is significant in evoking empathy in readers who ultimately appreciate the horrors of postcolonial legacies experienced by the characters. Moreover, symbolism has ensured that the narratives feel immersive and meaningful. The

authors in the two selected texts use different forms of symbols, such as the mission school, the ox, palm fronds, broken figurines and speech, to highlight postcolonial trauma. For instance, in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), several places, people and objects play a symbolic role as discussed below.

4.3.1 Significant Symbols in *Nervous Conditions*

The Mission school is an esteemed institution that offers Tambu an opportunity through a scholarship. The school represents a beacon of hope and ambitions for the students, especially Tambu, given that she had come from a background of poverty and struggles, which foreground her childhood trauma. It offers a perfect escape from her past and an exciting retreat where she is exposed to new ideas. The mission school sets Tambu on a journey to becoming the strong, resolute adult she was destined to become. The mission thus plays two roles. One, it is through the mission that we are exposed to the painful, poverty-stricken, and gender-biased past that Tambu has witnessed at home. Secondly, it contributes to the colonial role in cultural dislocation, the erasure of indigenous knowledge systems, and the disruption of social structures that constitute native trauma.

> When I stepped into Babamukuru's car, I was a peasant. You could see that at a glance in my tight, faded frock that immodestly defined my budding breasts, and in my broad toed feet that had grown thick skinned through daily contact with the ground in all weathers…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 tufts of malnourished hair. This was the person I was leaving behind. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 58)

The above description of Tambu's state at the homestead is evidence of the tough life she and her siblings endured, suffering discrimination due to their gender as females. Therefore,

the mission is her only escape route to emancipate herself from poverty. However, the mission threatens to erase Tambu's identity by moulding her into a completely different person whom her community will not recognise.

> The point was this: I was going to be developed in the way that Babamukuru saw fit, which, in the language I understood at the time, meant well. Having developed well, I did not foresee that I would need to regress upon returning to the homestead. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 59)

The above illustration foresees the trauma of dismemberment that Tambu is bound to experience once in the mission. Her desired future is one full of nothing to do with her roots--her people, her language, her land; her culture. The mission instigates her cultural erasure that ultimately constitutes her nervous condition through fragmented identity.

The garden plot is part of the land that was in Tambu's home. Having been passed on to her parents from her grandparents, the land represents tradition and, therefore, is a direct link to her cultural heritage. Tambu remembers with nostalgia the times she helped her grandmother work in the garden, which points to the knowledge, skills, and wisdom that were passed on to her from her grandmother. This represents the legacy passed down from generation to generation. At the same time, when Tambu fails to go to school due to a lack of school fees, she decides to work on the farm by growing mealies, which she sells on the market. The garden, therefore, represents a means of escape from poverty. By selling the mealies, Tambu hopes to earn enough money to attend school, giving her hope for the future and leaving the past behind. With the newly acquired knowledge and skills in the mission school, she hopes to overcome the pain and struggles of life that she has witnessed in her family. The garden symbolises Tambu's independence. Using traditional methods, she learned growing up on the homestead, Tambu works tirelessly to nurture her crop, thus nurturing her independence at the same time. The garden work creates an interesting juxtaposition, as the education

Tambu hopes to gain will likely mean she will never have to take care of a garden again. The corn she intends to raise will pay her tuition fees, ensuring she no longer depends on Babamukuru's generosity to secure her educational future. This generosity favours males above females.

The Ox is slaughtered in Babamukuru's home during the family's long holiday celebration. The presence of the bull represents the elevated status and opulence that Babamukuru's family has achieved. Given that most families, including Tambu's and the extended family, cannot afford meat, the ox meal is seen as a big treat. Although they welcome the idea of slaughtering the ox, the family secretly resent the display of wealth by Babamukuru, which clearly shows the margin between the rich and the poor. Maiguru is assigned the duty of regulating the distribution and consumption of meat for several days during the family gathering. The meat eventually spoils, leading other women to accuse Maiguru of poor judgment and excessive strictness during distribution. This, therefore, exposes her inefficiency as a shortcoming despite being educated and wealthy.

England is a developed country in the West. It plays a critical role in the text regarding academic development, success, and the achievement of wealth. According to Tambu's family, England is a faraway land that symbolises success and prosperity. Babamukuru and Maiguru received their advanced degrees in England. England also becomes a symbol of the oppressive colonial system in Rhodesia. This is highlighted when Nyasha begins to struggle with eating disorders and ends up asking serious questions about colonialism, "...Tambu feels that Nyasha grows dimmer every time she sees her, and she feels that **England** changed her. One day, Nyasha behaves especially horribly: she refuses sour milk after asking for it

and tucks in vegetables with the rest of us...” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 56). According to Tambu, this is so uncalled for, unlike a well-brought-up Shona child.

England is associated with the sudden change in Nyasha, as she struggles to conform to traditional ways of being. However, because of being black, Nyasha cannot be properly white and Western either. England, therefore, becomes her scapegoat and signifies her oppression, loss of identity, and inability to function in Rhodesia.

In Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), symbolism has been highlighted through people, speech and objects.

4.3.2 **Speech**

Speech is widely used to symbolise tyrannical power that instigates trauma in the text’s women and children. Eugene (Papa), the father of the protagonist, Kambili, is perceived as a tyrant, despite being a fanatically religious person. He is a complex character: on the one hand, he is an aggressive home tyrant who causes mental and physical injuries to his family. On the other hand, he is also officially a ‘good Christian’, a successful businessman, and the fearless owner of a newspaper that criticises the flaws of the military government. He uses religion to oppress his family. The family members lower their voices to avoid disturbing the father, and as a result, they end up speaking in whispers even in his absence. Kambili, Jaja, and their mother have also learned to communicate with their eyes and, as Kambili believes, with their minds. There are many things Kambili feels she would like to say, but never dares to do so. While in the house, members speak “more with their spirits than their lips” (Adichie, 2004, p. 45). Papa holds the monopoly on speech. Thus, he is the only one who dictates what should be done in the house, including praying for twenty minutes before

they eat their lunch during Palm Sunday. When he raises his voice to speak, it is an order on what everybody should do. Nobody, including his wife, can say anything after his decree, and this affects his relationship with the members to the extent that his wife eventually poisons him. Papa's actions are driven by the fear of his family being caught in 'sin'

> "Good afternoon, Papa," Jaja and I said.
>
> "Kevin said you stayed up to twenty-five minutes with your grandfather. Is that what I told you?" Papa's voice was low.
>
> I wasted time; it was my fault," Jaja said.
>
> What did you do there? Did you eat food sacrificed to idols? Did you desecrate your Christian tongues?" (Adichie, 2004, p. 69)

Papa Eugene, the father of the protagonist Kambili, uses his religious speeches and sermons to assert control over his family and community. His public displays of piety and strict adherence to religious doctrine serve as a means of spiritual guidance and a tool to maintain authority and dominance within his household and beyond. This method of maintaining dominance makes the members of his home choose silence to conform to his power.

One characteristic that can be generalised about the Achike family is their attitude of silence. The principle of connection between silence and violence or abuse lies in a figurative loss of voice of victims during the period of abuse. The obvious victims here are Kambili, Jaja and Beatrice. In several, if not all, areas of their lives, Eugene establishes a straightforward rule that regulates the lives and even the interests of his children and wife. Rationality is limited, even dismissed. The only capacity Eugene allows them to think is when they compliment him on any new products from his factories. (Adichie, 2004, p. 13). The Silence in the Achike's house causes a palpable tension sustained by fear of the patriarch. The portrayal of silence in the family signifies some acquiescence to Papa's treatment.

Ironically, the silence that is constantly present in the family is also represented in the church. Kambili describes the dead silence that falls on the congregation during Father Benedict's sermons, a silence so profound that even crying babies stop crying as though they, too, are listening in on the gospel. Father Benedict's new rules for the parish include making the celebration of Mass a quiet one. "Yes" and "amens," as well as hand clapping, are supposed to be pronounced as silently as possible. (Adichie, 2004, p. 29). This mirrors the silence in the family, significantly symbolising the power structures existing in the church and translating into the family.

Beatrice's silence births the continuation of physical and mental oppression and the loss of two unborn children. From the first scene of the narrative, Beatrice is introduced as the mother and wife whose only potency is to clean up after her husband's mess – both cleaning up broken figurines on the etagere and soothing the pain of her children's wounds after every wave of physical violence their father subjects them to. Mama cannot speak her mind; any attempt to save herself from something uncomfortable leads to violence. She only adheres to Eugene's wishes to be on his good side. Every time Mama says something to Papa, it is only to agree with him or lie to feed his ego. For instance, when the family tasted samples of new products from Eugene's factories, Mama would claim that they tasted like white wine, even though they clearly did not.

> Just like white wine," Mama added. She was nervous, I could tell—not just because a fresh cashew tasted nothing like white wine but also because her voice was lower than usual. "White wine," Mama said again, closing her eyes to better savour the taste. "Fruity white wine." (Adichie, 2004, p. 13)

The rationality of Beatrice Achike's silence is, to her, a surefire way to escape punishment. However, in the course of reading the narrative, it may come across as selfish, since her silence and lack of action do not protect her, nor do they provide security for her children,

Jaja and Kambili. This explains why, on her sickbed, Kambili, after waking up from unconsciousness, describes her uncertainty about wanting Mama around her; she felt the urge to push Mama away. Mama refrains from speaking about the violence when Kambili almost dies from Papa's beating, and Mama continues to say Kambili is sick. Eugene's sister, Ifeoma, encourages Beatrice to escape her current lifestyle. Aunty Ifeoma asks Beatrice Achike to spend some time away from Eugene and leave the marriage. However, Mama constantly rejects it, insisting that a woman with two children but no husband is pathetic.

The same silence and acquiescence are portrayed in Kambili. It almost seems irritating how passive Kambili appears to be about Papa's treatment. Kambili finds herself tongue-tied and shy to speak in front of people. Even with her brother Jaja and her mother Beatrice, the only characters she speaks freely with, Kambili always speaks in whispers. The phrase "I opened my mouth, but the words would not come out" (Adichie, 2004, pp. 68,77,139,141) is repeated throughout the novel. When Kambili is asked to begin the recitation of the national pledge at morning assembly, or when she is asked a question by her cousin Amaka or Aunty Ifeoma. When she tried to talk, she stuttered and had heavy breathing. Kambili is afraid to say anything that would make Papa proud. Every time someone says something Eugene seems appeased with, Kambili wishes she had said it because it would make Papa proud of her. For instance, when Papa is morose about the abuse Ade Coker had to go through at the hands of the military government: "They will receive their due, but not on this earth, mba," Mama said. Although Papa did not smile at her, he looked too sad to smile, I wished I had thought to say that before Mama did. I knew Papa liked her, as she had said (Adichie, 2004, p. 30).

The silence in the Achike family and normalised palpable tension issue a series of passive acceptances of the patriarch's toxic nature. Eugene employs silence to reinforce his continued control. Eugene always expects complete compliance, as if he hopes his family will only speak when he speaks to them. He takes on the role of leader at every family event, so when he has to have his siesta after Sunday Mass, the family has to wait for him to wake up for lunch.

However, this study needs to interrogate the instances where characters use speech to subvert this order of patriarchal domination and oppression. Arguably, the most familiar form of challenging masculine control in African literary texts is through force, defiance, and the embodiment of the feisty female archetype. Such characteristics are portrayed in the protagonists of novels like Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975), Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* (1999), and others like them - novels that exhibit the utilisation of verbal protests, among other things, in challenging patriarchy and fleeing from its control.

This familiar dynamic of defiance is also represented in *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), mainly through Aunty Ifeoma. She symbolises a progressive form of Christianity and the Igbo culture. A representation of verbal protestations to Eugene's control over the people around him. Ifeoma rejects a chance at a more comfortable life for herself and her children just so that she does not succumb to Eugene's control. The power dynamic here remains within the confines of religion, as Eugene plays a crucial role in Adichie's portrayal of religion's power. The situation Kambili narrates when she eavesdrops on Mama and Aunty Ifeoma's conversation reveals much about how religion and wealth are used to ensure women's ongoing control. When Eugene offers Ifeoma a brand-new car, he does not ask her to

change anything about her sons or her husband. Eugene's condition is that Ifeoma must stop wearing makeup and take her only daughter, Amaka, to a convent. His condition affects only the two females in Ifeoma's home.

Why would Eugene want Amaka in a convent? Amaka and Kambili are peers, so ideally, if Eugene wanted a nun in his family so badly, he could have easily taken Kambili to a nunnery. However, from the first encounter with the character Amaka, a sketch can be drawn of her as an assertive, sharp-tongued teenager. She freely speaks her mind and even criticises Eugene's factory products. From Kambili's narration, it is clear that Amaka and her sharp comments are not easy to dismiss because she spoke the same way Aunty Ifeoma did, quite confidently and loudly. The connection here is Amaka, and a convent to which Mary Kenny's description of her convent school is considered. According to Kenny, the nuns in her school were not allowed to go as far as the dentist's clinic. They had to seek permission from the local bishop (Adichie, 2004, p. 172). A logical conclusion is that Eugene wants Amaka under some absolute control, which is why he tries to manipulate Ifeoma into taking her to a nunnery. Ifeoma not only rejected this offer, but from her conversation with Beatrice, it is evident that she has no regrets and would reject any form of help from her brother to resist his control.

Purple Hibiscus (2004) exemplifies the use of speech to oppose masculine domination and suggests questioning the African woman's marriage rigidity. Ifeoma is portrayed as strategic and insightful. Ifeoma proclaims to Mama: "Nwunye m, sometimes life begins when marriage ends." (Adichie, 2004, p. 250). This brisk statement reveals Ifeoma's liberal and open-minded nature. Adichie uses her character, contrasting with Beatrice's, to dispel the notion of a passive, weak feminine nature. As a widow, life appears difficult due to the

corruption in the country, which results in a lack of salaries for civil servants. However, Aunty Ifeoma believes that sometimes a good life begins when a marriage ends, and the contagious happiness and laughter surrounding her home lie as evident in this claim.

Aunty Ifeoma's rejection of masculine controlling actions and decisions is manifested through her speech and intonation. She is seen to go as far as scream at Eugene when he restricts the movements of his children. Directly the opposite of Beatrice, Aunty Ifeoma's first form of resistance is rejecting her father's argument that she needs a man to take care of her and her three children. "My spirit will intercede for you, so that *Chukwu* will send a good man to take care of you and the children." To this, Ifeoma replied, "Let your spirit ask *Chukwu* to hasten my promotion to senior lecturer, that is all I ask." (Adichie, 2004, p. 83). Ifeoma uses speech to oppose the influx of masculine control over her life, and through this, she can resist the intimidation of the family of her late husband. The entirety of her description, from her stature to her bodily movements and the way she talks, makes Ifeoma a strong character. She walks with purpose, speaks so many things at a time and loudly too. Ifeoma is seen as fearless and almost feisty.

Amaka takes after her mother. They speak their minds freely, and even though they are Christians, they are seen as respecting and tolerating the Igbo traditional culture. Amaka was not afraid to call out Eugene on his new fruit drink, pointing out how sugary it was, and then suggested to Uncle Eugene that he ask his factory people to reduce the sugar. Something that shocked Kambili was that the Achike family always praises their father for his products; they always tell Eugene what he wanted to hear.

The effects of Ifeoma's employment of speech and Amaka's confident use of words favour a pattern of identifying and exposing the intricacies of patriarchal control in culture and

religion. Also, effectively, the exercise of speech overthrows this domination, as Eugene's control does not seem to infiltrate Ifeoma's home, despite his efforts. Due to this longstanding relationship of control and resistance between Eugene and his sister, Ifeoma, and even Amaka, Adichie reveals different forms of religion through speech and proposes a brighter form of Catholicism for Nigerian society. Recognizing that *Purple Hibiscus* is a resistance novel (Ibeku, 2015), exhibits the premise of the existence of arbitrary masculine control in the plot of the story as from the previous chapter, it is discussed that *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) has been called a feminist novel that challenges and overthrows the very existence of controlling male figure (Ibeku, 2015, p. 426).

4.3.3 **The Hibiscus Flower**

Like palm trees, the hibiscus is found in warm-temperate, subtropical, and tropical regions and is symbolic to many cultures worldwide. In all settings of the novel —Enugu, Abba town, and Nsukka —the presence of hibiscuses is mentioned, though not the purple one. For example, Kambili tells at the beginning of the novel about their house in Enugu:

> Vibrant bushes of hibiscus reached out and touched one another as if they were exchanging their petals. The purple plants had started to push out sleepy buds, but most of the flowers were still on the red ones. They seemed to bloom so fast, those red hibiscuses, considering how often Mama cut them to decorate the church altar and how often visitors plucked them as they walked past to their parked cars. It was mainly Mama's prayer group members who plucked flowers; a woman tucked one behind her ear once, and I saw her clearly from my window. But even the government agents, two men in black jackets who came some time ago, yanked at the hibiscus as they left. (Adichie, 2004, p. 9)

Many people are thus interested in the hibiscus. It is used for makeup or for decoration. In the Pacific Islands, it is said that women wear the hibiscus symbolically behind their ears. "Behind the left ear, a hibiscus represents the woman as a desirous lover; behind the right

ear, the woman is taken; behind both ears, the woman is taken but prefers another lover" (Adichie, 2004, p. 7).

The colour of the hibiscus is usually red, but can be white, pink, yellow, reddish-orange, or purple. Such colourful flowers formed "a circular burst of bright colours" in the garden in front of Aunty Ifeoma's house in Nsukka as "Roses and hibiscuses and lilies and ixora and croton grew side by side like a hand-painted wreath" (Adichie, 2004, p. 112). It is in this garden that Jaja and Kambili saw a purple hibiscus for the first time:

> That is a hibiscus, isn't it, Aunty?' Jaja asked, staring at a plant close to the barbed wire fencing. 'I did not know there were purple hibiscuses.' Aunty Ifeoma laughed and touched the flower, which was coloured a deep shade of purple that was almost blue. 'Everybody has that reaction the first time. My good friend Phillipa is a lecturer in botany. She conducted extensive experimental work during her time here. Look, here is white ixora, but it does not bloom as fully as the red.' Jaja joined Aunty Ifeoma while we stood watching them. 'O maka, so beautiful,' Jaja said. He was running a finger over a flower petal. Aunty Ifeoma's laughter lengthened to a few more syllables. 'Yes, it is. I had to fence my garden because the neighbourhood children kept coming in and plucking many of the more unusual flowers. Now I only let in the altar girls from our church or the Protestant church.' (Adichie, 2004, pp. 128-129)

Already, we see Jaja showing interest in the purple hibiscus developed by Pilllipa. It is one of the unusual flowers. It generally "means 'delicate beauty,' relating to the sunny and delicate conditions under which it will bloom and to the fragility and beauty of its flower" (Adichie, 2004, p. 7). Part of the delicate conditions, as Aunty Ifeoma explains, is that "Hibiscuses do not like too much water, but they do not like to be too dry, either" (Adichie, 2004, p. 197). They are to be handled with caution, like Mama's figurines on the delicate glass étagère.

Jaja likes the purple hibiscus so much that he wraps stalks of purple hibiscus in black cellophane paper for their gardener in Enugu (Adichie, 2004, p. 197). When he had a

chance to talk to Aunty Ifeoma, he was prompt at telling her that "the gardener had planted the hibiscus stalks, but that it was still too early to tell if they would live" (Adichie, 2004, p. 202). Again, when they started blooming, he was the first to point it out to his sister Kambili:

> See, the purple hibiscuses are about to bloom," Jaja said, as we got out of the car. He was pointing, even though I did not need him to. I could see the sleepy, oval-shaped buds in the front yard as they swayed in the evening breeze. The next day was Palm Sunday, the day Jaja did not go to communion, the day Papa threw his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines. (Adichie, 2004, p. 254)

The narrator brings together the one who shows interest in hibiscuses and the one who irritates Papa on Palm Sunday. This helps us see the hibiscus as a symbol of courage to effect change. We can see this in Jaja's defiance of his father. Jaja started to build up his courage when he and Kambili went to see their aunt in Nsukka. It is in Nsukka that Jaja's and Kambili's eyes opened toward thinking of freeing themselves from their father's command as they noticed that their cousins enjoyed more freedom than they did. Hence, Kambili could trace Jaja's defiance back to Aunty Ifeoma's little garden in Nsukka:

> Nsukka started it all; Aunty Ifeoma's little garden next to the verandah of her flat in Nsukka began to lift the silence. Jaja's defiance seemed to me now like Aunty Ifeoma's experimental purple hibiscus: rare, fragrant with the undertones of freedom, a different kind of freedom from the one the crowds waving green leaves chanted at Government Square after the coup. A freedom to be, to do. But my memories did not start at Nsukka. They started before, when all the hibiscuses in our front yard were a startling red. (Adichie, 2004, pp. 15-16)

The hibiscus is a symbol of sought freedom. The time they spent in Nsukka changed their lives indeed. The narrator confesses that they "all changed after Nsukka, even Papa, and things were destined not to be the same, to not be in their original order" (Adichie, 2004, p. 209). They gained the stamina in Nsukka to fight for freedom, a rare occurrence in their daily lives. The purple hibiscus represents this long-sought freedom. Jaja's defiance is

described by Kambili as “fragrant with the undertones of freedom” (Adichie, 2004, p. 160), like her aunt’s unusual purple hibiscus.

Jaja builds up his courage slowly in the same rhythm as the purple hibiscus he planted takes its time to grow. In fact, the day he started to defy Papa by refusing to go to Communion is the day preceding his remark to Kambili that “the purple hibiscuses are about to bloom” (Adichie, 2004, p. 254) because he himself was “blooming”, that is, changing. The changing colour of the hibiscus reflects the changes happening in Jaja and their family. Kambili says that before Palm Sunday, their hibiscuses were still “a startling red” (Adichie, 2004, p. 16) because nothing had yet changed in their household. It is when the purple hibiscus started blooming that changes started to occur.

We see Jaja gradually “blooming” as he moves from refusing to go to Communion on Palm Sunday to closing his door to Papa by pushing his study desk against it the day the day after Palm Sunday and refusing to answer Papa’s invitation to come to dinner (Adichie, 2004, p. 258), and finally to planning not to receive communion the coming Easter Sunday as Kambili can read his mind. “I dreaded Easter Sunday. I dreaded what would happen when Jaja did not go to communion again. Moreover, I knew that he would not go; I saw it in his long silences, in the set of his lips, in his eyes that seemed focused on invisible objects for a long time.” (Adichie, 2004, p. 260).

Fully ‘bloomed’, he no longer asks permission from his tyrannical father but informs him of what he wants to do. After talking to Aunty Ifeoma on the phone, he informs his father that he and Kambili would be going to Nsukka right away: “We are going to Nsukka. Kambiliu and I, “I heard him say. I did not hear what Papa said, then I heard Jaja say, “We are going to Nsukka today, not tomorrow. If Kevin will not take us, we will still go. We

will walk if we have to" (Adichie, 2004, p. 261). And his father agreed. He is now fully himself, mature, as 'bloomed' as his purple hibiscus.

The purple hibiscus is the personification of Jaja and is used as a symbol of freedom, which Jaja won from his father. He got it from Nsukka; "Nsukka started it all" (Adichie, 2004, p. 15) - and has brought it now to Enugu. Kambili wants him to spread it to Abba as she speaks with her mother on their way to visit Jaja in prison: "we will plant new orange trees in Abba when we come back, and Jaja will plant Purple Hibiscus too, and I will plant Ixora so we can suck the juice of the flowers (Adichie, 2004, pp. 306-307).

4.3.4 **Palm fronds**

Palm symbolises victory or triumph. It is in this sense that in ancient Roman culture, a lawyer who won his case in the forum would decorate his front door with palm leaves. Tree branches are actually used in a similar way in Adichie's novel after the coup: "the first week after the coup, Kelvin plucked green tree branches every morning and stuck them to the car, lodged above the number plate, so that the demonstrators at government square would let them drive past. The green branches meant solidarity". Let us observe that there is no precision as to the type of the branches. It can be a palm or tree branches. Kelvin and the people in his car show their solidarity with the military, which is celebrating their victory over the government they have overthrown by displaying tree branches. They use tree branches in this way, like toga palmate. Which is a toga ornamented with a palm motif and worn to celebrate a military triumph.

In Christianity, the palm is associated particularly with Palm Sunday. The first part of the novel is entitled "Palm Sunday" and describes Father Benedict's speaking of Jesus Christ's

"triumphant entry" into their lives. Jesus is triumphant over sin and death by dying on the wood of a tree and rising again. (Adichie, 2004, p. 5). As a symbol of victory in *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), the palm refers to the victory of Beatrice and her children, Jaja and Kambili, over Eugene, her husband and her children's father. Eugene used to beat them over their failure to observe Church laws. Mama (Beatrice) is named after the palms at the opening of the novel.

> Mama placed the fresh palm fronds, which were wet with holy water, on the dining table and then went upstairs to change. Later, she would knot the palm fronds into sagging cross shapes and hang them on the wall beside our gold-framed family photo. They would stay there until next Ash Wednesday, when we would take the fronds to church, to have them burn for ash. Papa, wearing a long, gray robe like the rest of the oblates, helped in distribution of ash every year. (Adichie, 2004, p. 11)

Mama's holding the palms and Papa holding the ashes foreshadow the end of the narrative where Papa becomes ashes by being poisoned by Mama, who, by so doing, gains victory over him; victory is symbolised by her handing of the palm fronds. Thus, the person who helps distribute ashes becomes ashes, and Mama contributes to this transformation by waiting until the next Ash Wednesday to return the palms to the church. In other words, she waits for this victory by being one with Mama. This unity is expressed in Jaja's willingness to go to prison instead of Mama.

Kambili narrates how, when they were young, her father used to send them for the sticks to discipline them. She states how they usually picked on palm:

> When Jaja and I were younger, from elementary two until about elementary five, he asked us to get the sticks ourselves. We always chose whistling pine because its branches were malleable, making them less painful to work with than the stiffer branches from gmelina or the avocado. (Adichie, 2004, p. 193)

The tree becomes here an object of scourging and chastising the flesh so that the spirit may triumph over it. It is like the cross Jesus used to redeem sinners without being a sinner

himself. It is the cup that must be drunk to win against sin. Eugene can be seen in this way as a martyr whose death leads the guilty to undergo a period of repentance, either in prison or in life. Mama and Jaja suffer because of what Mama did. All this happens after Palm Sunday. The head of the family dies, and his body and the other members of the family suffer. The victors become the losers. They do not savour their victory to the end. Jaja suffers in prison, and Mama is troubled by what she did. They all regret the deed somehow. The regret turns the victory into its opposite. Papa becomes, after the fact, a victorious martyr. It is a victory of good against evil. It is in this way that early Christians used the palm branch to symbolise the victory of the faithful over enemies of the soul, representing the victory of the spirit over flesh. It was widely believed that a picture of a palm on a tomb meant that a martyr was buried there. The palm branch is thus an ambivalent symbol offering different ways of reading the novel (Kaboré, 2013).

The palm is also associated with Papa-Nnukwu. It symbolises his word or his paradise because, as it is said, it is appropriate to speak of a "tropical paradise of a small island or a stretch of white sand beach with overhanging coconut palms, since palm reach their greatest proliferation in the tropics and are widely distributed in warmer zones of the world". The palm is then a symbol of a tropical island paradise. Papa-Nnukwu is linked to his palms, as the narrator notes:

> We were all set and had breakfast with Papa-Nnukwu. I listened to him talk about the men who tapped palm wine in the village, how they left at dawn to climb up the palm trees because the trees gave sour wine after the sun rose. I could tell that he missed the village, that he missed seeing those palm trees the men climbed, with a raffia belt encircling them and the tree trunk (Adichie, 2004, p. 33)

Reading the novel from the perspective of the palm as a paradisiacal symbol, one can say that Papa-Nnukwu dies because he is deprived of the palm, being taken out of his traditional

milieu, or biotope, where palms were used for sleeping mats, door or gate mats, and house roofing. Papa-Nnukwu's bathroom was an "outhouse, a closet-size building of unpainted cement blocks with a mat of entwined palm fronds pulled across the gaping entrance," and his "shrine was a low, open shed, its mud roof and walls covered with dried palm fronds." He is also living in a village where women use red palm oil in cooking, where people sit on benches beneath trees, drinking palm wine from cow horns, and where a man bringing palm wine to a girl's parent is synonymous with asking her hand in marriage (Adichie, 2004, pp. 63-67). These examples show the place and impact of palm in Papa-Nnukwu's existence. To move him from there was akin to dismembering him from his community and culture, which was tantamount to killing him. In death, however, he returns to this paradise to join his ancestors.

The narrative moves from "speaking with our spirits/before Palm Sunday, to Breaking Gods/Palm Sunday." This is the logical succession of events, but the author starts with the climax before explaining and ending it. Logically, the narrative moves from 'speaking' to 'silence' as the action of breaking the Gods to having pieces of Gods. The breaking of the figurines is symbolic in this sense because once they are broken, things fall apart.

4.3.5 **Broken Figurine**

There are beige finger-sized ceramic figurines of ballet dancers in various contorted postures in Eugene's house. As long as Kambili can remember, her mom has polished these figurines and cherished them. She spends time and energy polishing them to keep them clean. The figurines that Mama Beatrice takes time off her busy schedule to polish symbolise the family she does everything to protect. The figurines have been in the house for the longest time

until the day Papa breaks them. This happens when “Papa tells Jaja that he cannot stop receiving the body of the lord because it is death unto whoever does so, Jaja, for the first time in his life, replies that he would prefer to die than receive the communion” (Adichie, 2004, pp. 13-15). This infuriates the father so much that he throws a missal, which is a religious (Catholic) liturgical book, at Jaja. The book, fortunately, misses him but hits the glass étagère, cracks the top shelf, and sweeps the figurines to the floor. Mama later clears the broken pieces with Jaja’s help.

After this incident, things suddenly turned around in the family. The children no longer taste the tea before Papa in what he fondly referred to as a ‘love sip’; at lunchtime, both Kambili and Mama share their thoughts about the drink, but Jaja remains silent with the excuse that there are no words in his mouth. Additionally, Jaja leaves the dining table without waiting for Papa to say the prayer after meals (Adichie, 2004, p. 22). Kambili later in the day develops a severe headache and stays in bed without joining the rest of the family for dinner. She is later informed that Jaja, too, did not come to the dinner table with them. She inquires if the broken figurines will be replaced, but Mama says no. This, to Kambili, signifies that their family is broken forever (Adichie, 2004, p. 23). The breaking of the figurines marks the traumatic estrangement of the Achike family. Mama's decision not to replace the broken figurines, something she cherishes, signifies the total disintegration of the family, culminating in Eugene's poisoning.

In *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) therefore, Adichie employs palm fronds, the purple hibiscus flower, and speech as layered symbols to portray the deep trauma of violence, dismemberment, and psychological suffering within a repressive household. The palm fronds, which Kambili associates with her father’s beatings, become a stark symbol of

dismemberment, not just physical, but emotional and spiritual. What should be a natural and nurturing element is turned into an instrument of punishment, showing how violence twists even the most innocent parts of life into sources of pain.

The purple hibiscus, a rare and delicate flower grown by Aunty Ifeoma, symbolises freedom and the possibility of healing amidst trauma. Unlike the rigid red hibiscus at Kambili's home, the purple variant represents a new kind of life, uncertain but liberating. It marks the beginning of Kambili and Jaja's psychological awakening as they begin to question their father's authoritarian rule—similarly, speech functions as a measure of trauma and resistance. In Papa Eugene's home, silence is a survival mechanism, where fear stifles expression. However, in Nsukka, voices are freer, opinions are welcomed, and laughter is not feared, highlighting the contrast between suppression and healing. Through these symbols, Adichie powerfully maps how trauma is both imposed and resisted within personal and political spaces in postcolonial Nigeria.

4.4 **Vivid Description**

The authors use vivid descriptions of specific events and elements of nature in their texts to illustrate the manifestation of their characters' traumatic experiences. In Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), the author vividly describes the geographical setting in which the characters live. These physical spaces are central to Tambu's tensions between life at the mission and life on the homestead. Initially, Tambu feels isolated, confined to working in the fields and catering to her brother's whims during his infrequent visits. When she attends the local school, she must walk a long distance daily, but she willingly makes the journey to gain an education. When her family is unable to pay her school fees, Mr. Matimba takes

Tambu to the first city she has ever seen, where she sells green corn. Tambu's growing awareness and understanding of the world coincide with her increasing physical separation from the homestead, which later results in trauma through dismemberment. The mission school is a significant location in the novel, a stronghold of possibility that becomes the core of Tambu's world and the source of many of her transformations. By the end of *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Tambu's life has taken her even further away from the homestead, to the convent school, where she finds herself without family or friends and must depend solely on herself.

Another illustration of description is shown in chapter two, page 16; Ma'Shingayi, Tambu's mother, underscores the harsh reality faced by many Africans, particularly African women. Ma'Shingayi argues that being Black and female is a double burden and that the two obstacles are too considerable to surmount. "…And these days, it is worse, with the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other. Aiwa! What will help you, my child, is to learn to carry your burdens with strength." (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 16). However, how she qualifies this statement sets her apart from Tambu. Rather than urging her daughter to stand firm and resist the prevailing conditions that hold her back, Tambu's mother advises her to accept the forces she feels are beyond her control. This passage highlights the differences between the two women, juxtaposing the older, more traditional beliefs with the new attitudes emerging in a contemporary Africa.

Tambu vividly describes the physical condition manifested by her cousin Nyasha. The kind of emotional trauma that Nyasha goes through as a result of her father's overbearing control, which leaves her emaciated as she withdraws to a world of her own,

> She had grown skeletal. She was pathetic to see...Nyasha grew weaker by the day...she sat on her bed and looked at me out of her sunken eyes, her bony knees pressed together so that her nightdress fell through the space where her thighs had been, agitated and nervous and picking her skin. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 33)

The description above shows the severe effects of trauma to an individual that can go beyond the emotional and psychological damage to physical instability. Nyasha develops anorexia as a result of the overwhelming effect of trauma, which affects her overall well-being.

The author also uses descriptive language when highlighting the trauma that Mainini, Tambu's mother, goes through after the loss of her only son, Nhamo. Having borne three daughters and one son, Mainini experiences profound grief when she loses him; she becomes mentally disconnected from the present,

> My mother's anxiety was real...she ate hardly anything, not for lack of trying, and when she was able to swallow something, it lay heavy in her stomach...she was so haggard and gaunt she could hardly walk in the fields, let alone work in them. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 57)

Tambu keenly but helplessly observes her mother as she grapples with her traumatic experiences. Her struggle with psychological trauma is portrayed in the imagery of the weight of food in her stomach, becoming a metaphor for mirroring the weight of Mainini's grief.

Through descriptive language, Dangarembga exposes hallucinations that manifest a disturbed state of mind; fear and anxiety of following in Nhamo's footsteps of being completely dismembered from her roots, her people and culture are deeply ingrained in Tambu. We see this when she narrates her first day at the mission house:

> A huge hairy hound appeared in front of me from nowhere. It leapt out of thin air and scared me to death. Its black lips wrinkled up to show piercing incisors spiking out of gums that were even blacker than its lips…I was in a bad state, or else I would have noticed the chains that bound them in their kennel and the fence that enclosed them in their pen. To me, they were loose, ferocious

> guardians of the gates to this kingdom, this kingdom that I should not have been entering. Their lust for my blood was justified. They know I did not belong. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 66).

The above passage vividly describes the emotional turmoil that disturbed Tambu. Although she was relieved to leave behind her dilapidated homestead, she could not shake off the feeling of what if she ended up distorted like her brother Nahmo. She had watched his brother waste away in Western culture and deeply feared for her life at the mission. For instance, after inspecting everything meticulously and deciding that at least there was dust in Babamukuru's home, meaning to her standard that they were not fully transformed to whiteness, Tambu became confident that he would not end up like his brother Nhamo. However, immediately after that self-assurance, she experiences yet another hallucination:

> A shrill, shuddering wail pulled me abruptly out of my thoughts, made my armpit prickle and my mouth turn bitter. It wailed and trembled for ten long seconds, during which images of witches on hyenas' backs, both laughing hellishly, flitted through my mind (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 71).

The description of Tambu's episodes of hallucinations calls readers to be immersed in her struggle with fear and anxiety and thus appreciate her ingrained trauma that constitutes colonial legacies. When reminded by Nyasha of not having put her bedclothes on, Tambu feels inferior, inadequate of being in such an environment; "I then reprimanded myself for this self-indulgence by thinking of my mother who suffered from being female and poor and uneducated and black so stoically that I was ashamed of my weakness in succumbing so flabbily to the strangeness of my new circumstances." (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 70). Tambu fell asleep while still grappling with this mixture of emotions: fear and anxiety. In so doing, she had a dream which can be interpreted as the advancement of the hallucinations that she had during the day:

> He was dribbling a ball gracefully through maize plants that had sprung up in the football field of our old school. He paused from time to time to pick a

> fat, juicy cob and stuff it into his mouth. The cobs were full of white gravy. From my desk in class at the mission, which happened to be the top of the maize field, I saw him eat and became alarmed that he would make himself ill with the strange mealies. In one graceful leap, I bounded to his side to beg him to stop, but he laughed in my face and told me that no one would take me seriously because I was smoking a cigarette. The dream turned into a nightmare when I realised that my fountain pen was, in fact, a long smoking cigarette. Nhamo howled with a vicious glee, telling me that I would come to a bad end, that I deserved it for deserting my husband, my children, my garden, and my chickens. He spoke with such authority that I felt ashamed for abandoning a family I never had. So when my husband appeared at the bottom of the field, I was not surprised, only terrified, to see that it was Babamukuru and his ferocious two dogs tracking me down to return me to my spouse. Then I remembered that I was in school and began to explain this to Babamukuru, but Maiguru interrupted to say I should wash first (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 91).

This dream reveals the pervasive fear and anxiety that surrounds the mission home, where Tambu is now a member. Her desire for education for emancipation from male dominance and poverty surely came with a price to pay.

Dangerembga (1988) employs vivid description when highlighting the painful experiences of characters as a result of colonialism. The essential action of the novel involves Tambu's experiences in a Western-style educational setting, and the mission school both provides and represents privileged opportunity and enlightenment. Despite Ma'Shingayi's strong objections, Tambu knows the only hope she has of lifting her family out of poverty lies in education. However, the mission school poses threats, as well: Western institutions and systems of thought may cruelly and irreversibly distort Africans who are subjected to them. Nyasha, who has seen firsthand the effect of being immersed in a foreign culture, grows suspicious of an unquestioning acceptance of colonialism's benefits. She fears that the dominating culture may eventually stifle, limit, or eliminate the long-established native culture of Rhodesia; in other words, she fears that colonialism may force assimilation. The

characters' lives are already estranged in a national identity that combines African and colonialist elements.

Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) describes varieties of flowers and trees in detail. From the beginning of the narrative to the end, the author assigns plant names to titles of chapters such as Palm Sunday, Before Palm Sunday, and After Palm Sunday. Kambili, the narrator, draws the reader's attention to the presence of trees through vivid descriptions. Like, when she comes back home after attending Palm Sunday Mass, Kambili describes her bedroom and their whole compound:

> I sat at my bedroom window and changed; the cashew tree was so close I could reach out and pluck a leaf if it were not for the silver-colored crisscross of mosquito netting. The bell-shaped yellow fruits hung hazily, drawing buzzing bees that bumped against my window's netting […]. It was early rainy season, and the frangipani trees planted next to the walls already filled the yard with the sickly-sweet scent of their flowers. A row of purple bougainvillaea, cut smooth and straight as a buffet table, separated the gnarled trees from the driveway. Closer to the house, vibrant bushes of hibiscus reached out and touched one another as if they were exchanging their petals. The purple plants had started to push out sleepy buds, but most of the flowers were still on the red ones. They seem to bloom so fast, those red hibiscuses, considering how often Mama cut them to decorate the church altar and how often visitors plucked them as they walked past to their parked cars." (Adichie, 2004, pp. 8-9).

In the above excerpt, the narrator gives a vivid description of how human beings interact with the environment. People are in constant touch with the environment of trees, using their shade, flowers, leaves, oil or fruits whenever they want. Sometimes, as put by (Kaboré, 2013), it is as if the trees are not happy being outside and do their best to make their presence felt indoors. For instance, the narrator observes that it is "as if the high walls locked in the scent of the ripening cashews and mangoes and avocados" (Adichie, 2004, p. 252) because any time the door is opened, the scent of fruits fills the rooms.

The author further gives a vivid description through the eyes of Kambili when explaining the acts of domestic violence that Mama experiences from her 'loving' husband"

> I heard the sounds. Swift, heavy thuds on my parents' hand-carved bedroom door…I sat down, closed my eyes and started to count… I stepped out of my room just as Jaja came out of his. We stood at the landing and watched Papa descend. Mama was slung over his shoulder… There is blood on the floor, Jaja said. I will get the brush from the bathroom. We cleaned up the trickle of blood. (Adichie, 2004, p. 33).

Kambili describes the pathetic situation in the house when her father beats up her mother to the point of causing her to miscarry. With blood spreading all over the floor, the children have no option but to wipe it; it is such a traumatising experience. The author goes ahead and uses the narrator to describe the mother's trauma after the miscarriage, "Her eyes were vacant like the eyes of those mad people who wandered around the roadside garbage dumps in town, pulling grimy, torn canvas bags with their life fragments inside. "There was an accident; the baby is gone," she said (Adichie, 2004, p. 34). Kambili's narration describes the impact of traumatic experiences on a woman.

Mama goes through yet another beating from the husband for allowing her sick daughter to eat during the day of the Eucharistic fast. This occurrence is witnessed by Kambili, who was unwell and could not fast, as she needed to have some food before taking drugs. Her mother, therefore, gives her cornflakes to enable her to take the drugs. This Eugene, who has no time to take any explanation, but instead gets a belt and goes ahead to beat them thoroughly for breaking God's rule, "It was a heavy belt made of layers of brown leather with a sedate leather-covered buckle. It landed on Jaja first, across his shoulder. Then Mama raised her hands as it landed on her upper arm…he swung the belt on Mama, Jaja and me" (Adichie, 2004, p. 102). This violent act by Eugene is so dehumanising, humiliating and traumatising to both the children and their mother. Moreover, he does not stop it, but instead causes Mama

to lose another pregnancy by smashing a table on her belly. Here it is, Mama who describes in detail the traumatic incident to her daughter, Kambili:

> You know that small table we keep the Bible, nne? Your father broke it on my belly…My blood finished on that floor even before he took me to St. Agnes. My doctor said there was nothing he could do to save it. (Adichie, 2004, p. 28).

Adichie (2004) uses description to emphasise the seriousness of the issue of domestic violence in Nigeria and, by extension, Africa. Having been exposed to this heinous act, the children helplessly watch or sometimes experience the pain of violence. Therefore, through close observation, they can clearly describe every detail of the act. Moreover, there are also instances of hallucinations vividly described in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) to depict the emotional turmoil that Kambili endures as she grapples with the pain of witnessing her mother being battered.

> I went upstairs and then sat staring at my textbook. The black type blurred, the letters swimming into one another, and then changed to a bright red, the red of fresh blood. The blood was watery, flowing from Mama, flowing from my eyes (Adichie, 2004, p. 35).

The disturbing image of her mother's blood became permanently printed on Kambili's head. She cannot simply forget the harrowing scene. This constitutes her psychological trauma.

4.5 **Foreshadowing**

Foreshadowing is a literary device that alludes to a future occurrence in the story. For instance, if a character innocently mentions that bad things always happen to them during a particular month or season, a keen reader will be alert when the season begins to approach in the story.

In Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Nyasha and Chido, returning from England, having lost most or all of their native tongue, Shona, foreshadow the same linguistic

dislocation that occurs to Nhamo and then to Tambu. Another example of foreshadowing in the novel is that Nhamo's growing dislike of returning home for vacations foreshadows the growing gulf that develops in Tambu between life at the mission school and life at the homestead.

In Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), Eugene carries ashes while his wife Beatrice has the palms during Ash Wednesday, "They would stay there until next Ash Wednesday, when we would take the fronds to church, to have them burn for ash. Papa, wearing a long, grey robe like the rest of the oblates, helped distribute ashes every year" (Adichie, 2004, p. 3). Mama holds the palms and Papa the ashes, foreshadowing what is to happen at the end of the narrative, where Papa becomes ashes by being poisoned by Mama, who thus gains victory over him, a victory hinted earlier by her handling of the palm fronds. Therefore, the person who helps distribute ashes becomes ashes, and Mama contributes to making him become ashes by waiting until next Ash Wednesday to offer the palms back to the church; in other words, she waits for the appropriate time to turn Papa into ashes by poisoning him.

Secondly, the pain of hot tea being associated with love (the 'love sip') foreshadows Papa's abusive behaviour and how closely connected violence is with their love and worship for him. "I waited for him to ask Jaja and me to take a sip... A love sip...But it did not matter, because I knew that when the tea burned my tongue, it burned Papa's love into me" (Adichie, 2004, p. 54). It appears Eugene uses tea as a ritual to teach his children that he beats/hurts them out of love.

The imagery of love burning in Papa's house is continued in Chapter 10, when he pours boiling water on Kambili's feet as punishment for her 'walking into sin' by visiting the grandfather, Papa Nnukwu. Papa seems to take no pleasure in his abuse, and as he cries, it is apparent he

believes he is acting from a place of care. He calls Kambili 'precious' with 'tears streaming down his face' as he pours the water on her feet. "He lowered the kettle into the tub, tilted it toward my feet. He poured the hot water on my feet, slowly, as if he were conducting an experiment and wanted to see what would happen" (Adichie, 2004). In contrast, Aunt Ifeoma's familial love is expressed in freedom and acceptance. She has raised her children to be independent, and Kambili is in awe of this as she eats lunch with them. Another instance of foreshadowing is the recurring motif of the purple hibiscus flower. The flower symbolises beauty and freedom, but it is also associated with violence and bloodshed. Its presence throughout the novel hints at the impending violence that will disrupt the family's seemingly perfect facade.

> Vibrant bushes of hibiscus reached out and touched one another as if they were exchanging their petals. The purple plants had started to push out sleepy buds, but most of the flowers were still on the red ones. They seemed to bloom so fast, those red hibiscuses, considering how often Mama cut them to decorate the church altar and how often visitors plucked them as they walked past to their parked cars. It was mainly Mama's prayer group members who plucked flowers; a woman tucked one behind her ear once—I saw her clearly from my window. But even the government agents, two men in black jackets who came some time ago, yanked at the hibiscus as they left (Adichie, 2004, p. 9).

People show a great deal of interest in the hibiscus flower, including Jaja and Mama. This interest may indicate a looming danger later in the story. Jaja likes the purple hibiscus so much that he wraps stalks of purple hibiscus in black cellophane paper for their gardener in Enugu (Adichie, 2004, p. 197). When he had a chance to talk to Aunty Ifeoma, he was prompt at telling her that "the gardener had planted the hibiscus stalks, but that it was still too early to tell if they would live" (Adichie, 2004, p. 202). Again, when flowers started blooming, he was the first to point it out to his sister Kambili:

> See, the purple hibiscuses are about to bloom," Jaja said, as we got out of the car. He was pointing, even though I did not need him to. I could see the sleepy, oval-shaped buds in the front yard as they swayed in the evening breeze. The next day was Palm Sunday, the day Jaja did not go to communion, the day Papa threw his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines (Adichie, 2004, p. 254).

The dominance of *Purple Hibiscus* thus subtly but effectively foreshadows the deep-seated problems within Achike's family, setting the stage for the emotional and psychological journeys of its members throughout the narrative.

4.6 **Conclusion**

The chapter examined the literary techniques employed by the two authors in their texts to communicate with the reader. These styles include narration, which is conveyed through a first-person subjective narrative voice where the narrator functions as a character in the story. In this case, the narrators, who are teenage girls, are the main characters and the narrative centres on their family. The discussion has shown that while Dangarembga's use of first-person narrative highlights the dismemberment of characters, Adichie's first-person narrative reveals Kambili's coming of age.

The second style is symbolism, which involves the use of events, objects, and places as symbols to represent reality. The authors have employed words or images to depict abstract ideas, concepts, people, objects, or events beyond their literal meaning. Symbolism also illustrates the interaction between nature and human beings, such as the presence of trees surrounding places where people live. These symbols used in the texts are ambivalent, revealing the complexity of characters filled with strange contrasts and contradictions that form their trauma.

Another element of style is vivid description, where the narrator, speaking in the first person, subjectively interprets and filters the events and developments that occur around her through her own thoughts, opinions, and biases. Vivid description is then followed by foreshadowing, which refers to suggestions or warnings about events to come. The two authors use foreshadowing through events that take place in the texts to predict what will happen in the future.

The two authors applied the above techniques in order to create a realistic experience of postcolonial trauma for the readers by using their sensory details to see, hear, and feel the environment, actions and the mood of the story as if they were part of it.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ROLE OF POSTCOLONIAL TRAUMA IN IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF THE FEMALE CHARACTERS IN THE SELECTED TEXTS.

5.1 Introduction

Colonialism was not merely a conquest of territories but a systematic restructuring of indigenous identities. Through hegemonic strategies, the colonisers imposed discourses that altered native notions of self and social belonging. Identity, in this context, is relational, linking individuals to societal structures and shaping their awareness of social positioning (Burke, 2009; Stryker, 1980). Edward Said (1978) highlights how the West defined itself against the colonised "other," constructing the Orient as a mirror of its own values and justifying domination. Achebe (as cited in (Visser, 2015)) observes that such "knowledge of the native" served both to simplify and control them, reinforcing the binary oppositions of coloniser/colonised, self/other, and Occident/Orient.

Fanon (1952) further demonstrates that colonialism produced psychological dislocation, instilling feelings of inferiority in the native mind, while Ngũgĩ (1986) underscores the role of language in alienating individuals from their culture, creating a condition of "colonial alienation." Spivak (as cited in (Visser, 2015)) terms this process "epistemic violence," reflecting the pervasive suppression of indigenous identities.

Colonial subjugation disrupted not only personal identity but also gender relations. Loomba (2002) notes that disempowered men, excluded from public spheres, often reinforced patriarchal control within the home, while Killam (2004) highlights how colonial structures

subjected women to "double colonisation" through intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and class. In the selected texts, the neuroses of colonised male characters manifest in their domination of female figures, prompting women to negotiate, resist, and redefine their identities, often acquiring forms of hybridity in the process.

This chapter, therefore, examines how colonial discourses produced fractured male identities, how these fractures intensified patriarchal oppression, and how female characters asserted themselves, navigating both colonisation and gendered subjugation.

5.2 Colonial Discourse of power and identity formation in *Nervous Conditions*

Dangarembga (1988) shows the consequences of colonial suppression, which resulted in violence among native subjects. Each character inflicts pain on other inferior to him in the power hierarchy because of the disturbed state of mind caused by colonial oppression. *Nervous Conditions* (1988) narrates the history from marginal perspectives, thus providing an alternative history with the amalgamation of fictive characters. Positioned in Rhodesia on the edge of Independence, the novel focalises the complexities of colonialism and the educational strategies through which the colonisers controlled the native hegemonically. Dangarembga narrates the historical facts of the colonial history through fictional characters and breaks the frame of reality as a fictional construct too. Tambu, the protagonist of the novel, narrates the Southern Rhodesian history of colonialism through her life experiences. Her idea about the colonisers comes from the knowledge passed to her by her grandmother and brother Nhamo, and according to her:

> The Whites on the mission were a special kind of white person, special in the way that my grandmother had explained to me, for they were holy. They had

> come not to take but to give. They were about God's business here in darkest Africa. They had given up the comforts and security of their own homes to come and lighten our darkness. It was a big sacrifice that the missionaries made. It was a sacrifice that made us grateful to them, a sacrifice that made them superior not only to us but to those other Whites as well who were here for adventure and to help themselves to our emeralds. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 105)

Tambu's assumption about the holy white man ironically sheds light on the colonial strategies through which they hegemonically subjugated the native subjects. Tambu's understanding of the missionaries comes from her life in Rhodesia, where natives craved a chance to be educated in white ways.

The missionary school system in Africa began in 1890, following the European occupation led by Cecil John Rhodes. According to him, mission "work as one of the best means for opening up and civilising a country" (as cited in (Schmidt, 1992, p. 123)). The mission schools were not only for academic purposes, but they also taught natives "cleanliness and orderliness" as the main idea, which was rooted in the colonial mind, was that the dirty and savage, retarded native needed to be civilised by the white man; thus, it was considered a white man's burden. Tambu's assumption of the white person as a "holy" and "superior" person illustrates the system of social and power relationships at the highest, societal level. The native was given the inferior position as the dirty savage, as Goldberg asserts, "racial rule is accordingly taken to be legitimated in virtue of the assumption that non-Europeans are inherently inferior to Europeans, indeed, so inferior as to be incapable of the most of self-governance" (Goldberg, 2002, p. 82). Through Tambu's fictive character, Dangarembga illustrates the historical events in colonial Rhodesia, thus breaking the frame of fiction by blurring the status of both fact and fiction.

The quoted text illustrates the historical "intertexts" of colonial Rhodesia and challenges the

readers' assumptions about the dominant colonial discourse. Tambu's words, which concern God's work here in darkest Africa, serve as the "intertexts" of history that illuminate the colonial objective of rule in Rhodesia. The colonial perception of black natives as inferior reinforced the idea of educating and civilising the 'barbaric savage' in colonised areas. To instill Christian manners in the uncivilised black native, mission schools were established across various colonies to spread the word of God and the supposedly superior religion to the supposedly inferior people of different faiths. "Darkest Africa" is used metaphorically to highlight the dominant discourses that created power relations based on a binary of superior 'us' versus inferior 'them', thus subjugating the native subject. Through the power of discourse, whiteness was symbolised as superior and blackness as inferior within the colonial dominant ideology. Dangaremba's words, "darkest Africa", ironically deconstruct the dominant discourse, thereby writing back to the empire to challenge and normalise the perspectives of the consumers of the text.

The quoted text illuminates the larger-scale texts embedded within the main text, which are the colonial schemes of rule and the native's strategies of resistance. The construction of reality is shaped by the historical narrative that highlights events in Rhodesia. The educational strategies of the colonisers are described as driven by a seemingly sacred mission to spread the word of God in the darkest Africa, which elevates them as "superior" to all races for their service to God and humanity. The native is pressured to believe, through the power of hegemony, that the 'good' and 'superior' ways are the white ways, embodying civilisation and culture. Those who teach these lessons are portrayed as the superior, special, and holy people. Dangarembga challenges the historical framing of reality through Tambu's

fictional characters and questions the "greedy" nature of white people in the subsequent statement. She defies the dominant colonial discourse by portraying colonial assumptions through Tambu's voice, yet resists by revealing the indirect nature of colonial tactics, as she states:

> It was a big sacrifice that the missionaries made. It was a sacrifice that made us grateful to them, a sacrifice that made them superior not only to us but to those other Whites as well who were here for adventure and to help themselves to our emeralds (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 105).

She narrates the history through various mini narratives that focus on different aspects of colonial rule. On one hand, she presents missionaries who serve in the name of God but are injecting their culture, language, and religion into native subjects. On the other hand, she depicts white colonisers enjoying the natives' wealth by economically subjugating them. By highlighting colonial strategies, Dangarembga uncovers history and amplifies the voices of subaltern subjects, thereby guiding the behaviour of readers as consumers of the text.

Nervous Conditions (1988) portrays colonial rule and its cultural practices. The British colonisers imposed their norms on native subjects, leading them to forget, both willingly and unwillingly, their own culture, native language Shona, and belief systems. English manners, language, and culture were positioned as symbols of supremacy and social prestige. The hegemony of the colonisers disturbed native identity and compelled them to adopt new cultural ways and identities to be seen as superior within the social hierarchy. The colonisers regarded natives as inferior and barbaric, believing their identities should be refined and reshaped according to European standards. They legitimised their presence in the colonised regions by these justifications, thereby subjugating the natives under the pretext of bringing

civilisation. Dangarembga challenges the traditional history narrated by power structures, thereby giving voice to the oppressed native subjects. She reveals subaltern history through her narrative techniques, telling stories within stories to deconstruct traditional accounts of history. Mbuya recounts different stories of the past to Tambu in a Chinese box pattern, as Tambu recounts:

> She gave me history lessons as well. History that could not be found in the textbooks; a stint in the field and a rest, the beginning of the story, a pause. "What happened after, Mbuya, what happened?" More work, my child, before you hear more of the story. "Slowly, methodically, throughout the day the field would be cultivated, the episodes of my grandmother's own portion of history strung together from beginning to end . . . the wizards, well-versed in treachery and black magic, came from the south and forced the people from the land." (Dangarembga, 1988, pp. 17-18)

Mbuya, Tambu's grandmother, narrates stories about the wizards who invaded the native land and displaced its people. Mbuya does not hold positive feelings towards white people; she uses negative words to describe them. However, she still helps Tambu in the field to cultivate, so Tambu can earn money to pay her school fees and learn the white way of life. White education and culture are seen as symbols of superiority and prosperity. The quoted excerpt illustrates the "intertextual contexts" of the text and further highlights the "presuppositions" based on the colonial dominant discourse. Dangarembga reveals colonial history through Mbuya's narration to her granddaughter, Tambu. Mbuya's version of history cannot be found in textbooks because those are written from the perspective of power, as Tambu states: "She gave me history lessons as well. History that could not be found in the textbooks." The intertexts of history, narrated by the subjugated subalterns, challenge the assumptions of the dominant discourse and deconstruct traditional historical

accounts. The colonisers, who are depicted as the most cultured and civilised, are labelled wizards who, through their black magic and treachery, displaced the natives. The heroic presupposition of the coloniser is subverted through the historical intertext from a marginal perspective in the quoted text.

In the postcolonial context, the concept of identity centres on an individual's self-definition within a rapidly changing society. How does a person define himself? How do the environment, language, history, and politics of foreign cultures influence him? Traditionally, the notion of self is derived from one's past, culture, and education, shaping how an individual positions themselves in society. The sense of individual and collective identity among colonised subjects was disrupted due to the disrespectful colonial culture and force. The education system was replaced by the colonisers, who infused their traditions and culture, thereby replacing the glory of the native past with the perceived superiority of coloniser culture and traditions. The dominant culture made it difficult for the native sense of self to find a place in the marginalised society.

Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) provides a first-hand account of colonial experiences during the encounter with the British Empire. It portrays the turbulent experiences of colonisation and the consequences of life under changing historical and cultural conditions. Dangarembga responds to the dominant discourse by revealing the hidden suffering of colonised subjects. She depicts the harsh realities of colonialism—oppression, discrimination, and domination—and their effects on the native population. Through her narration, she exposes facts often neglected in traditional historical accounts,

thereby challenging the prevailing narrative. *Nervous Condition*s (1988) explores themes of native identity, resistance, and trauma within the colonial context, illustrating how subjugated identities are shaped and constructed through discourses of power. Through various characters, Dangarembga illustrates the formation of silenced, subjugated identities during the colonial era. The novel begins by illustrating the colonial influence on a native character, Nhamo, who suffers from a nervous condition stemming from the conflict between local and foreign cultures, leading him to feel irritation and humiliation toward his own culture. He attempts to adopt the superior foreign culture of the coloniser fully and begins to look down upon his people, language, and way of life, as Tambu narrates about him.

> This was the walk that my brother detested! Truly . . . However resentful he was, he managed to avoid it most of the time by staying at the mission after the end of term. . . My uncle insisted that Nhamo be home for it because no examinations were pending to justify his staying at the mission. Thus Nhamo was forced once a year to return to his squalid homestead, where he washed in cold water in an enamel basin or flowing river, not in a bathtub with taps gushing hot water and cold; ate sadza regularly with his fingers and meat hardly at all, never with a knife and fork; where there was no light beyond the flickering yellow of candles and homemade paraffin lamps to escape into his books when the rest of us had gone to bed. All this poverty began to offend him, or at the very least embarrass him after he went to the mission, in a way that it had not done before. Before he went to the mission, we had been able to agree that although our squalor was brutal, it was uncompromisingly ours; that the burden of dispelling it was, as a result, ours too." (Dangarembga, 1988, pp. 4,6,7)

The quoted excerpt explains how the idea of self becomes fragmented through the adoption of colonial culture. Colonial culture drives individuals in various directions, shaping an identity that causes chaos within their character. Nhamo's character highlights the experiential aspects of the text as his identity is shaped discursively within the context of

colonialism. Tambu's comments on Nhamo's detesting behaviour towards his culture and people reveal the colonial rulers' classification methods, through which the native was subjugated and alienated from his own local culture. Colonial strategies created chaos in the native's mind by colonising his thoughts, leaving him in a state of "nervous conditions". Tambu's remarks about Nhamo's hatred and shame for his local culture reflect the dominant discourse of the coloniser; when he gained admission to the mission school, he felt estranged from his own cultural roots. As Tambu states, "This was the walk that my brother detested! Truly . . . Yet resentful he was, and most of the time he managed to avoid it by staying at the mission after the end of term".

The words resentful and detested shed light on the aspect of native hybridity and the reality of a chaotic situation which is built on the ideologies of the coloniser. The resentful and detested feelings were built in the native subject (Nhamo) through the dominant discourse of mission education. The structure of the words detested and resentful is ideologically based, as the colonial climate is responsible for constructing native identities in this way, where they feel mortified of their very own culture, they have been born in and living in for many years. Through stereotype assumptions, the native identity is naturalised and universalised as inferior by the colonial dominant discourses and discursive strategies. According to Tambu's comments, Nhamo was so resentful of home that "most of the time he managed to avoid it by staying at the mission after the end of term". The concept of home is traditionally associated with comfort. However, in Nhamo's case, it is different because he tries to adopt the colonial ways of life, thus feels detested and resentful of home, culture, and all native ways.

Tambu’s comments on Nhamo’s behaviour highlight the use of euphemistic language, which reveals the colonial discursive strategies that constructed Nhamo’s identity as a subaltern, oppressed subject. Through formal word choices, Tambu exposes her brother Nhamo's troubled identity caused by colonial education. Nhamo disliked visiting home, where everything made him feel inferior, and he felt more comfortable adopting white ways of living. As Tambu states, “Thus Nhamo was forced once a year to return to his squalid homestead, where he washed in cold water in an enamel basin or flowing river, not in a bathtub with taps gushing hot water and cold.” The word forced here illustrates the euphemistic expression of colonial ideology, which distorted native self-image to such an extent that they felt compelled to visit home only once a year, experiencing feelings of detestation and humiliation within their own culture.

Squalid homesteads are the words that illuminate native feelings of dejection for home, as home is now associated with discomfort in Nhamo’s case, because his identity is transformed. He prefers to associate himself with the superior coloniser group by adopting their culture. In the web of this quoted text, the struggle of the powerful and powerless is highlighted as the native is imprisoned in the strong snare of a foreign-dominated culture, which has affected his identity in a very devastating way. The colonial discourse linked the self with superior behaviours, which intensified the position of the other as an inferior subject, as seen in Nhamo’s character. The assumption that colonial culture is superior is so deeply ingrained in the native mind that eating sadza with one's hand is considered nearly sinful by Nhamo (a colonised subject). The culture of using a fork and knife is

preferred over the native practice of eating sadza with fingers. Through these metaphorical expressions, Dangarembga highlights the construction of native identity as an inferior other within the colonial context.

The quoted excerpt highlights the larger-scale structures present in the text, which concern the coloniser and the colonised. The reality of the colonised subject is constructed through various discursive strategies employed by the coloniser. Nhamo's perception of social reality as an inferior subject is shaped discursively. The construction of colonial culture as superior justifies and reinforces colonial authority over the native subject. As Tambu comments, "All this poverty began to offend him, or at the very least embarrass him after he went to the mission, in a way that it had not done before. Before he went to the mission, we had been able to agree that although our squalor was brutal, it was uncompromisingly ours; that the burden of dispelling it was, as a result, ours too." Nhamo's belongings at home become a source of embarrassment after he joins the mission; his sense of self undergoes a complete transformation when he encounters foreign culture and education (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 52). Before the colonisers' arrival, the natives strongly identified with their own culture rather than its shortcomings, but the encounter with a foreign dominant culture disrupted the native subjects' sense of self. Colonial ideologies are employed as tools of power to construct unequal relations, which strategically lead native peoples to perceive themselves as inferior others compared to the dominant colonial culture.

Nervous Conditions (1988) narrates the story of struggle, trauma, identity crisis, resistance,

submission, assimilation, and domination in colonised Rhodesia. The colonial imaginary representations were transmitted to native subjects through various colonial discursive strategies that served the interests of the dominant power, motivating natives to accept themselves as shaped and portrayed by colonial ideologies. According to Althusser, these ideological practices are "ideological state apparatuses" (quoted in (Asmat, 2012, p. 44)) that serve to create subjects who willingly accept the privileged system of the hegemonic power. To reinforce control over the native population, the colonisers selected the most prominent and intellectual individuals to entice them into the coloniser's culture, aiming to turn them into "good munts" who accept the system voluntarily and work to entrench it. Babamukuru's character clearly exemplifies the role of a compliant colonised subject who serves the interests of the colonisers by instilling and reinforcing European ideologies within his clan. He prefers Christian traditions over native beliefs and insists on a Christian marriage between Jeremiah and Ma'Shingayi, thereby reinforcing the 'us and them' ideology. Babamukuru is portrayed ironically in *Nervous Conditions* (1988), as he appears to be a perfect man, but in reality, he suffers greatly from the "nervous conditions" of colonialism, as Tambu comments:

> For from my grandmother's history lessons, I knew that my father and brother suffered painfully under the evil wizard's spell. Babamukuru, I knew was different. He had not cringed under the weight of his poverty. Boldly, Babamukuru had defied it. Through hard work and determination, he had broken the evil wizard's spell. Babamukuru was now a person to be reckoned with his own right. He did not need to bully anybody any more. Especially not Maiguru, who was so fragile and small she looked as though a breath of wind could carry her away. Nor could I see him bullying Nyasha. My cousin was pretty and bold and sharp. You never thought about Babamukuru as being handsome or ugly, but he was completely dignified. He did not need to be bold anymore because he had made himself plenty of power. Plenty of power, much education, plenty of everything. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 50)

Tambu's over-wording of the evil wizard illuminates the experiential values of the text, as through the choice of vocabulary, she highlights two different kinds of identities constructed under colonial rule. The spell of the evil wizard causes Jeremiah and Nhamo to suffer the pangs of colonialism and to view their social identity as inferior natives. In contrast, Babamukuru appears different because he fully adopts the colonial ways and breaks the evil spell, as Tambu states, through hard work and determination. The use of synonymous words like 'hard work' and 'determination' highlights the experiential values of the text and underscores the coloniser's ideology, which employed various strategies to construct inferior and subjugated identities. Babamukuru's character is silenced, as he lacks agency as a native individual; instead, he speaks in the voice of the coloniser. His mimicry of the dominant culture is described as driven by hard work and determination, which are seen as key virtues for gaining prosperity. The coloniser's culture was portrayed as a symbol of prosperity and happiness for native subjects, and complete assimilation was believed to lead to a prosperous life, as seen in Babamukuru's case. In this process of cultural assimilation, the native loses his original identity and becomes someone he is not. Babamukuru's identity is constructed discursively, yet this does not truly lead to success, as he faces many problems within his family. He is depicted as a superficial character: outwardly dignified, but internally shallow, treating his wife and daughter poorly under the guise of civilisation.

Through Babamukuru's character, Dangarembga highlights the superficiality of white culture, which appears dignified on the surface but is hollow and shallow internally. The rephrasing in Tambu's description of Babamukuru's abundance of everything is ironic

when she states he had made himself plenty of power. Plenty of power, education, and wealth refer to the abundance of whiteness that destroyed native culture and created fractured identities like Nyasha's and Babamukuru's.

The quoted excerpt emphasises the relational values of the text as it euphemistically depicts Babamukuru's character. Through the use of formal language and euphemistic expressions, Babamukuru's (a colonised subject) negativity is softened. Babamukuru's identity as a colonised subject is suppressed, and everything he says is framed as the voice of the coloniser, thus reinforcing the colonial agenda among native subjects by aligning himself with the coloniser's culture. Babamukuru's identity is described using formal language which ironically exposes the colonial strategies of constructing subjects, as Tambu states, 'a person to be reckoned with his own right.' The formal language in this statement about Babamukuru is euphemistic, implying that he lacks true individuality and agency, speaking instead in the voice of the adopted dominant culture. The formal diction Tambu uses to describe Babamukuru's identity again functions euphemistically, as she claims he was "completely dignified". In reality, he was merely artificially dignified, rather than genuinely possessing dignity.

Babamukuru's identity represents the educated native elite who neither fully belongs to the local culture nor to the foreign dominant culture. The evaluative words used by Tambu to describe Babamukuru's identity highlight the expressive values of the discourse, as she states he no longer needs to bully anyone. This is because he has adopted the white ways of life, leading to the presupposed notion that he symbolises whiteness and thus should not

bully to alleviate his depression caused by feeling inferior as a native. However, he metaphorically behaves in the opposite way, bullying Nyasha, Maiguru, and the entire native community under his authority. The subordinate characters to Babamukuru are Nyasha and Maiguru, both described using evaluative words. Maiguru is depicted as fragile and small, while Nyasha is bold, sharp, and pretty, and should never be bullied by the fully dignified Babamukuru.

Through metaphorical evaluative words, Tambu describes the construction of Babamukuru's identity under colonial rule. His identity is shaped as a civilised man through colonial education, yet he exploits his bold, sharp, and attractive daughter Nyasha and fragile, small wife Maiguru. The quoted passage highlights broader structures within the discourse. Colonial mental representations are emphasised through the history narrated by Tambu's grandmother, who says, "For from my grandmother's history lessons, I knew that my father and brother suffered painfully under the evil wizard's spell". The history lessons recount the suffering of the colonised subjects under this evil wizard's spell. Through this spell, the native identity is constructed as the other of the dominant European coloniser. According to the history lessons, Babamukuru was sent to the white people to adopt their ways in order to break the spell of the evil wizards. The notion of self is disturbed by this encounter with the wizards, who disrupted the harmony of native life and subjugated native subjects to maintain their power over them.

It is clear from the above analysis that the colonial discourse of power imposed the notion of 'inferior' on the native male, who in turn projects these very notions but now within

patriarchal discourse onto women in their society. The hegemonic narratives originate in local patriarchal traditions, which marginalise the female subaltern by downplaying her role in the fictional depiction or by conflating her with a status of gender inferiority, assigning her a role that aligns with her image in the patriarchal taxonomy of oriental women (Istifadah, 2022). Due to hegemonic narrative strategies, first employed by the coloniser and then by patriarchy, some female characters in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) are compelled to conform to domestic patriarchal femininity. Nonetheless, some women dare to challenge these discourses by exploring their own possibilities of freedom. These women attempt to assimilate to "Englishness" as a way of rescuing themselves from patriarchal dominance. Although they do not conform to the patriarchal notion of femininity, they ultimately suffer from anxiety caused by fragmented identities and thus experience trauma. Many women fail to define themselves clearly as they end up acquiring a hybrid identity. Therefore, the following sections of this study will examine female characters who conform to the patriarchal discourse of power, reinforcing their "inferior/subordinate" identities, as well as those who challenge this discourse and seek emancipation through English culture, which leaves them with fragmented hybrid identities.

5.3 **Patriarchal discourse of 'femininity'**

Nhamo holds an exaggerated view of male supremacy, evident in his constant display of his exaggerated beliefs about male superiority to Tambu and his other sisters. The conflict that characterises the relationship between him, Tambu, and his other sisters during their childhood is primarily rooted in dominant patriarchal discourses passed down to Nhamo by his father. When Tambu chooses to align with her brother Nhamo over her decision not to attend school, Nhamo reflects his father's patriarchal ideology.

> Why do you bother?" He asked Tambu. "Don't you know I am the one who has to go to school?" Tambu asked why she should not go to school. Nhamo shrugged and answered, "It is the same everywhere. "Because you are a girl." (Dangarembga, 1988, pp. 20-21)

Although Tambu chose not to listen to her father and brother, Netsai, though young, quickly accepts this patriarchal discourse of femininity; Nhamo sends his sisters merely to demonstrate his power over them. On the first occasion when he sent Netsai on an errand, Tambu intervened, and Nhamo agreed to go for the luggage himself, only to give Netsai a sound beating, making her run all the way to the shops to fetch it. Tambu says she realised Netsai did not mind carrying Nhamo's luggage. She did not even understand why Tambu did not let her go in the first place. This indicates that Netsai was comfortable with the norm of patriarchy into which she was born and raised. Tambu remarks, "I realised she did not mind carrying Nhamo's luggage if there was not too much of it. She was a sweet child, the one that would make a sweet, sad wife" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 10). Elsewhere in the text, it is noted that Netsai used to mind all kinds of chores that, according to patriarchal femininity, were women's responsibilities. These included caring for her young sister, Rambanai, fetching water from the river, washing pots, and gardening, among other tasks. The patriarchal discourse about a woman's place resonated deeply with Netsai at a very tender age—a message she learned to accept consciously, and she quickly responded to its demands.

Jeremiah, on the other hand, who feels inferior to the colonised, idolised Babamukuru, does not hesitate to use patriarchal discourse to subjugate the women in his home. Jeremiah does everything in his power to prevent Tambu's ambitions of pursuing education. He repeatedly reminds her that she belongs in the kitchen. Tambu, who was labelled as willful

and headstrong by her mother, navigates her way out of this patriarchal trap of subjugation, as will be explored in the final part of this section. However, Ma'shingayi, Tambu's mother, has been socialised to accept the patriarchal discourse of women in her society. Tambu approaches her mother, Ma'shingayi, for advice after her efforts to get help from her father prove futile. To her disappointment, even her mother shares her father's views. She tells Tambu that her father is right because even Maiguru, Babamukuru's educated wife, knows how to cook, clean, and grow vegetables. Ma'shingayi also tells Tambu that the burden of womanhood is heavy and adds that things are not easy, and she must start learning them from a very early age. She warns Tambu, "and these days it is worse, with poverty and blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 16). Ma'shingayi's views show that she has been socialised in her dominant colonial/patriarchal setting to accept societal stereotypes of women. She is not even supportive when Tambu decides to grow maize to raise money for school fees. She tells her to accept her lot and enjoy what she can of it, as there is nothing else to be done (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 20).

Ma'shingayi's attitude towards Tambu reveals how patriarchal discourses aimed to create subordinate identities for Rhodesian women in the text. Women like Ma'shingayi, who accepted the constructed patriarchal view of femininity, unfortunately, collaborated with men in oppressing and subordinating other women, including their own children.

Tambu's trauma arises from early life experiences where she learns that women's rights are ignored when she is victimised on gender grounds, forcing her to halt her primary education.

She remarks:

> The needs and sensibilities of women in my family were not considered a priority, or even legitimate. That was why I was in Standard Three in the year Nhamo died instead of Standard Five, as I should have been by my age. In those days, I felt the injustice of my situation every time I thought about it, which I could not help but do often, since children are always thinking about their age. Thinking about it, feeling the injustice of it, this is how I came to dislike my brother, not only my brother, my father, my mother, in fact, everybody. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 12)

The gross injustice Tambu endures when she drops out of school due to her father's decisions because she is a girl, and when Babamukuru chooses Nhamo over her to attend the mission school because he is male, forms the basis of her declarative statement at the beginning of her narrative: “I was not sorry when my brother died. Nor am I apologising for my callousness, as you may define it, my lack of feeling” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 1). This statement highlights a womanist discourse in the novel. It is only through Nhamo's tragic death that Tambu finally gains an opportunity for education. However, Babamukuru takes her only because there is no male child available to carry the responsibility of emancipating Jeremiah’s family (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 56).

The patriarchal oppression of girls is a dominant theme in Zimbabwean literature and African literature in general. Murray (2008, p. 141) observes that the patriarchal oppression of girls is explored in many Zimbabwean writers, including Tsitsi Dangaremba, the late Yvonne Vera, and Chenjerai Hove. These writers demonstrate in their works that girls in traditional African societies were denied access to education because the available funds were allocated to boys. In some cases, girls were forced into arranged marriages so that the money paid for their lobola could pay school fees for their brothers. Evidently, thus, it is

this stereotyped patriarchal discourse that constructs the subordinate identities of uneducated African women.

Nevertheless, these constructed patriarchal discourses did not fail to affect the educated lot of women as well. Maiguru, although highly educated, does not escape patriarchal oppression either. Sadly, she succumbs to her husband's patriarchal dominance and chooses to contend with being inferior to him. Babamukuru is totally entrenched in his belief that women should occupy traditional social subordinate positions while men continue to hold dominant positions, and he will not change. He is intolerant, has an overbearing attitude and is prejudiced towards them. He imposes his will on women, including his wife, Maiguru, whom he does not allow to have a say in the running of the family. He denies her virtually all her rights, including having her salary, which he takes and uses to finance his family projects without her approval. She plays second fiddle to him in all family matters, despite being equally educated and working just as hard as he does. Moreover, Maiguru faces prejudice in her society because Babamukuru's relatives believe she went to England to care for her husband and children, rather than to pursue her studies. Tambu remarks, "how could I have known? No one has ever mentioned to me" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 102).

Maiguru is embarrassed to express any unhappiness about what people say regarding her trip to England. She reflects on the opportunities she could have seized in England, had no patriarchal demands been beckoning her to be an ideal African woman. Eventually, Maiguru chose to accept the constructed patriarchal identity bestowed on her in matters of

her femininity. She says, “and when you have a good man and lovely children, it makes it all worthwhile” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 103). This way, Maiguru accepts being deprived to make the most of herself on the grounds of being a woman. Maiguru had to efface herself - make herself insignificant in order to preserve Babamukuru’s identity and value of the superior and her, the insignificant other.

Netsai, Ma’shingayi and Maiguru are examples of female characters in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) who, in their relationship with the patriarchal figures in their lives, have been affected by the patriarchal discourse regarding their femininity. This has constructed their inferior/ subordinate identities of the insignificant ‘other’. However, this is not all, as there is another group of female characters in the exact text that aspire to counter this hegemonic patriarchal discourse by pursuing their own freedom. This group of female characters, in their quest to counter patriarchy, are forced to adapt to “Englishness”, which in this study refers to the dominant colonial culture. This helps to emancipate them from patriarchal oppression, but at the same time, leaves them distressed as they acquire a fragmented hybrid identity.

5.4 Female Agency and Identity Negotiation in *Nervous Conditions*

Hutnyk (2005) explains that 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 (Hutnyk, 2005, p. 80). Therefore, cultural hybridity will be considered to analyse the effect of the struggle against patriarchal oppression on the emergence of Nyasha, Tambudzai, and Lucia’s hybrid identities. To explain, cultural hybridity results from the different cultural settings

people spend their lives in, where their identities are shaped. 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,' Sakamoto as cited in (Oladi, 2020).

Education is seen as one of the defining factors on the pathway towards freedom and success in *Nervous Conditions* (1988). Tambu sees education as her escape from 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 because of his educational success, whereas Tambu would not because of 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" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 30).

Tambu might succeed through her education and acquire a favourable economic situation, but this is not considered because it will favour her future husband and his family instead. 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" (2004, p. 80), as evidenced in the distinct ways her father, Jeremiah, views his son and daughters. His son is obligated to educate himself; meanwhile, the daughters should prepare themselves for marriage instead. 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" (Uwakweh, 2023, p. 83). This implies that her subordinate position has been present from an early age and plays a crucial role in the decisions made.

Furthermore, Tambu's effort at self-emancipation is something her father and brother are hesitant to recognise. Several instances in the novel show that her pursuit of independence is not only driven by her poverty but also by a strong desire to escape the isolated environment 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" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 34). Jeremiah is aware of Tambu's ability to enhance her intellectual virtue through reading and expanding her personal knowledge. The power to recognise the rights of women and men, which would change her perception of the world, is something that Jeremiah wishes to avoid.

Nhamo follows in his father's footsteps by being responsible for the disappearance of Tambu's cobs in the maize field, which she was going to sell to earn the money to pay for her own school fee, and discourages her from attempting to do so: "What did you expect? ... Did you really think you could send yourself to school?" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 22). Nhamo's attitude and patriarchal authority towards Tambu, alongside her efforts to succeed as a woman, make their relationship even more painful. In her study, Uwakweh describes Tambu's maize field "as an attempt to define herself in a male world" (Uwakweh, 2023). The maize field signifies her desire to emancipate herself and break free from male influence, but also highlights the difficulty of doing so. The death of Tambu's brother can

be seen as the primary and most significant factor motivating Tambu's desire to challenge patriarchy, since his death initially provides her with the opportunity to pursue an education and leave her community. The patriarchal context is established early in the novel, where Tambu introduces the tone by justifying her harsh attitude towards her brother's death. Consequently, she begins the story by expressing her feelings and thoughts:

> I was not sorry when my brother died. Nor am I apologising 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, far minded and isolated, my uncle's daughter, whose rebellion may not in the end have been successful. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 1)

Before losing her brother, Tambu's life was marked by constant victimisation and discouraging criticism from the male figures in her family, especially Nhamo and her father, Jeremiah, simply because she was a woman. As the eldest and only son, Nhamo enjoyed privileges that Tambu and her sisters were denied due to their gender. This led Nhamo to develop a mindset in which he saw himself as superior and separate from his younger sisters, which changed his behaviour and attitude towards Tambu. As Okereke and Egbung note, this mindset mainly results from "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" (Okereke, 2014, p. 204).

Clearly, this sense of inequality motivates her to challenge patriarchy through an education funded by herself, rather than her father.

While living on the homestead, Tambu constantly questions her father and brother about their attitude towards women and seeks to prove them wrong through 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" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 83). Tambu now finds it troubling to contradict Babamukuru, given the opportunities he has provided her, including a place to live in his mission home and 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 tufts of malnourished hair. This was the person I was leaving behind" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 58). She is eager to leave and prepare for a new life where gender differences will not prevent her from succeeding, thanks to Babamukuru's education and wealth.

In addition, Tambu undergoes several adjustments that affect her identity. Her observation of Nyasha's struggle with her father, Babamukuru, leaves Tambu uncertain about whose side to take, given her respect for 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" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 85). Nevertheless, this uncertainty changes when facing Babamukuru's treatment of Nyasha and her choices.

Tambu's earlier perceptions of the patriarchy and its connections to Shona culture changed 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" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 116) and blames Chido for letting his "sister behave like a whore without saying anything" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 116). This indicates that Nyasha is subordinate to her father and brother. The incident makes Tambu see the reality of things. 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 did not depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 118). She realises that the male desire to control 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 it exists in both settings, and "men take it everywhere with them" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 118).

The oppressive colonial system is what affects the male figures in Tambu's family to approach women oppressively. To explain further, Bubenechik (2018) suggests that Dangarembga reveals "the system of double oppression", where "the British colonial authority oppresses the male indigenous population" (2018, p. 14) and leads to "the

indigenous men themselves oppressing their women" (Bubenechik, 2018, p. 14). The colonial setting has affected Babamukuru; although he still holds onto his cultural traditions when they are beneficial to him.

Tambu's attempt to escape patriarchy turns out to be a miscalculation on her part, as her intellectual growth leads to a fragmentation of her identity and leaves her feeling divided within herself. This is something she was not prepared for. Therefore, one could argue that her relationship with her cousin Nyasha plays a significant role in her process of self-development. Aegerter (1996) suggests that this is mainly because of Nyasha's ability to raise awareness about patriarchal and colonial issues within 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" (Aegerter, 1996, p. 234). She discusses the hybridity that comes with living in another culture and implies that her parents, Babamukuru and Maiguru, should have considered leaving them at the homestead to avoid having hybrids as their children. Besides this, Tambu's desire to become part of English society persists and is demonstrated 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" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 59). This decision is driven by her need and sense of responsibility to support her family now that her brother has passed away.

The realisation 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 realisation, 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" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 118). The opportunity to advance intellectually enables her to compare and acknowledge her individual choices when observing the relationships between male and female family members.

Subsequently, her perception of the world has evolved, primarily due to her experiences at the Christian mission. It can be argued that colonisation and its effects are among the factors driving the development of the hybridity experienced by the younger generation. This study has explored the impact of colonisation and examines "the formation of the characters' colonial and postcolonial identities, the nature and impact of colonial trauma, and the possibility of resistance on the part of the colonised," where Tambu's and Nyasha's trauma and resistance are analysed. Tambu's resistance is demonstrated by her refusal to attend her parents' wedding and "signals her rootedness in the Shona culture" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 35), indicating "that she has maintained her cultural traditions and has not entirely succumbed to assimilation" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 35). While Tambu remains conscious of her Shona culture, facing patriarchy in two different environments influences her perceptions of patriarchal and colonial issues. Similarly, the study describes these distinct environments as Dangarembga's attempt to depict "both the oppressions and values enforced by the British colonial regime and the obstacles posed by Shona culture for women in their pursuit of self-realisation and fulfilment" (Bubenechik, 2018, p. 56).

These environments create a conflict within Tambu, her family, and the community, as she strives to balance the traditions of her Shona culture with the incorporation of English culture. 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 did not 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 I had taken a wrong turning somewhere. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 118)

The formation of her hybrid identity is shaped by her willingness to confront patriarchy. If Tambu had instead accepted societal conventions and adapted to cultural norms like the older generation of women, she would have remained at the homestead with her previous mindset, preventing her from understanding issues related to her identity. The Anglicised behaviour that Nyasha and Chido exhibited and were criticised for when visiting the homestead at the beginning of the novel becomes clear to Tambu through her intellectual growth. She no longer fits into the homestead because her cognitive abilities have expanded. Her new life at Sacred Heart represents a fresh start, where she will face even more challenges that could influence her. Nonetheless, she remains steadfast in her resolve "to question things and refuse to be brainwashed" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 208) during this process.

The community of Shona, where the patriarchy is reinforced 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 Shona culture as "Shona males being socialised to view themselves as breadwinners and heads of households whilst females are taught to be obedient and submissive housekeepers" (Kambarami, 2006, p. 2). The patriarchal figure of the family is Babamukuru, who has principles that his daughter, along with the other female family members, should follow to become a "good woman". These principles are similar to 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" (Kambarami, 2006, p. 2).

The perplexity of fitting into two different communities and their 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" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 246). For the most part, Babamukuru uses Tambu as a model to demonstrate "the sort of young woman a daughter ought to be" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 157), which Nyasha finds distressing and challenging to live up to. Unlike Tambu, who has not yet faced the calamities that alter a person's identity and the consequences they bring, Nyasha can be seen as the product of two worlds assembled into one.

The desire to unify the English and Shona cultures leads to a disagreement between her and Babamukuru, who sees her actions as shameful and damaging to her character. As Amanda Waugh argues, "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" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 87), making it difficult for her to establish her identity. Additionally, Babamukuru focuses on preparing them for their future marriage, where these negative traits could influence how potential husbands perceive them. As shown in the novel, Babamukuru expresses his concerns about Nyasha's behaviour when reminding Tambu of the opportunities they have provided her and how these will benefit her growth compared to Nyasha: "I have observed from my own daughter's behaviour that it is not a good thing for a young girl to associate too much with these white people, to have too much freedom. I have seen that girls who do that do not develop into decent women" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 183). Throughout the story, Nyasha constantly advocates for her freedom and her life, hoping her father will see the differences in how he treats her and her brother Chido. The suffering she endures regarding her identity and understanding of life, mainly caused by Babamukuru's misogynistic mindset and patriarchal authority, drives her to oppose him and his views on women and culture. Meanwhile, Chido does not face similar issues for his actions. This pushes Nyasha to rebel and fight for her right to live freely, far from her father's rules and expectations.

Her rebellion against Babamukuru's authority is shown through her attempt to voice her opinions, which results in her being freed from his grip—a move he resents and criticises. This is evident in the following quotation where Babamukuru addresses the issue: "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" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 133). Here, Nyasha is labelled an outcast for refusing to conform to Shona culture and its norms, thus being seen as an unacceptable woman whom

Shona men do not favour. Accordingly, Rabello de Castro (2008) explains that Nyasha, "incarnated by her refusal to accept, ipso facto, that her father possesses an absolute authority over her" (Rabello de Castro, 2008, p. 201), seeks to challenge patriarchy using her intellect and reasoning as weapons.

As a consequence of her defiant behaviour towards her father, Nyasha "has to face debasement (being called a whore), physical punishment (she is severely beaten) and expelled from home" (Rabello de Castro, 2008, p. 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" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 117). When facing the harsh reality where family members appeal to the cultural and patriarchal spirits, the awareness brought forward 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 "it is 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 he has not the right" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 121).

The actions of Babamukuru, despite their severity, are justified by her brother Chido, who emphasises that Nyasha "is the daughter" and that "there are some things you must never do" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 109). Chido feels "obliged to carry on the tradition in the normal, unanalytical male fashion" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 111) and finds maintaining a good relationship with Babamukuru and Nyasha problematic. Nyasha's eagerness to read

books and gain knowledge about the distinctive cultures and the purpose of colonisation is essential to the confrontation with patriarchy. Like Tambu, her intellectual capacity inspires her to question matters such as colonisation, religion, cultural, and societal issues. Nyasha's aspirations for freedom are evident throughout the novel, as her knowledge and experience guide her to confront the patriarchal and authorial figures in her family.

However, there are differences in how Nyasha and Tambu consider and review their journey for freedom, because they have grown up in two separate settings and do not have the same life experience. 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 is more than that, really, more than just food. That is how it comes out, but it is all the things about boys and men and being decent and indecent and good and evil. He goes on and on with the accusations and the threats, and I am 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, 1988, p. 194)

Babamukuru has an effect on Nyasha and her well-being when she is pressured to live up to his obligations, leaving her with a feeling of entrapment. She begins to realize that there is no possibility to "fulfill the requirements of goodness" (Waugh, 2011, p. 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." (Waugh, 2011, p. 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, this study suggests that her eating disorder is what keeps her from having to face Babamukuru's rules. Nyasha is aware of the effect that the predicaments she has encountered and still faces have on her, which also leads her to develop an eating disorder that ultimately controls her life and its outcome. It can be argued that Nyasha's eating disorders are her way of escaping from her patriarchal father and his misogynistic behaviour. Evidently, Muzna Rahman examines Nyasha and her eating disorder from a postcolonial context by removing her from the Western discourse and situating her in the history of Zimbabwe. This is done because Western discourses often see 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 enacts at 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" (Rahman, 2022), which signifies the cultural norms that persist around the male members of the Shona community and that Babamukuru demonstrates through his food choices.

Nyasha realises that she cannot 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 inner turmoil, 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

remains, due to the eating disorder's perplexity, under her father's roof and can receive his continuing patriarchal remarks.

In conclusion, Nyasha's "dissociative identity disorder is the result of her trauma" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 285) where her response is through her mental and physical illness. Similarly, Bubenechik (2018) 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* (1988) is an example of the result of "colonial oppression and discrimination" (2018, p. 5), and that the other female characters can be seen suffering from this with their "signs of mental illness and resistance" (Bubenechik, 2018, p. 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 (2018, p. 42), which suggests that Dangarembga is, like Tambudzai, reclaiming her past and "what has been stolen by colonialism" (Bubenechik, 2018, p. 39). The bitterness towards the colonisers and their impact on the Shona community becomes apparent to Nyasha as she gains a deeper understanding of their intentions in coming to Zimbabwe.

Nyasha's determination to move forward stems from observing her mother's entrapment, which prevents her from using her full capacity in life (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 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. However, her mother and father were worried about her development" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 98).

The struggle Nyasha faces in fitting into the cultural norms of both societies, as the English believe 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 (2018) 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" (2018, p. 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, Bigelow (2016) 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" (Bigelow, 2016, p. 32). As can be seen in the novel, when visiting the homestead, Nyasha faces prejudiced thoughts and opinions from her fellow family members regarding her attitude, dress choices, and her lack of involvement in the Shona culture. Their prejudice stems largely from not having perceived cultures other than their own, which leads them to find the behaviour of Nyasha and Chido inadmissible. In the following quotation, her cousin Tambu, not yet having faced the complexity of hybridity, is disgruntled by the view of Nyasha's behaviour 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 never returned. However, each time she came, I could see that she had grown a little duller and dimmer, the expression in her eyes 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, 1988, p. 38)

The aftermath of Nyasha having lived in England during her childhood is the cultural hybridity that accompanies this experience, along with the shifting identities that become significant to her and the identity crisis she is experiencing. With this in mind, Maiguru explains that both Nyasha and Chido have become "Anglicised" to Tambu, who, due to her strong connection to African culture, cannot understand how this could happen. As a result of adopting Englishness, Nyasha's "African notion of identity becomes fragmented and polluted by the appropriation of Western modes of individual autonomy" (Bubenechik, 2018, p. 17). Consequently, the relationship Nyasha develops with Tambu offers her a chance to reconnect with her African heritage and rejoin the Shona culture. She sees Tambu as someone who could help her find herself amidst her current state of nervousness. Likewise, Nyasha's ability to articulate her thoughts improves, and her main aim is to help Tambu understand the complex conditions that arise from living abroad. This is evident in the following quotation, where Nyasha reflects on her situation: "It is not England anymore and I ought to adjust. But when you have seen different things you want to be sure you are adjusting to the right thing" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 119).

The hybridity Nyasha experiences is acknowledged several times throughout the novel and remains a key aspect of her character. She has developed a new, hybrid culture blending both English and Shona influences, leaving her feeling alienated and dysfunctional in both settings: "I am not one of them, but I am not one of you" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 205). She does not feel part of the English world, nor does she feel fully connected to the African community.

Nyasha's position being in-between the two cultures remolds her into a "third culture kid", which Pollock and Van Reken (2009) 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" (Pollock, 2009, p. 19). There is no possible way for her to be entirely accepted in either 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" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 95).

On the other hand, Tambu observes that the same dismissive attitude exists among their Shona friends, who resent Nyasha for her language abilities, as she describes in her letter to Tambu: "They do not like my language, my English, because it is authentic and my Shona, because it is not!" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 200). There is no place for her in any of the cultures, leaving her feeling frustrated and sad about her identity and her position in her own third space. The challenging events Nyasha faces are key factors that contribute to her hybridity and her strained relationship with her father. Baharvand and Zarrinjooee (2012) suggest that Babamukuru's authoritative and aggressive behaviour is largely influenced by his past experience of feeling inferior to the English during his time in England and his ongoing sense of inferiority at the mission in Rhodesia (Baharvand, 2012, p. 32). He attempts to compensate for his feelings of inadequacy by exhibiting an overbearing attitude towards his family. Tambu reflects on this and argues that his Englishness has distanced him ever since the English took him under their wing (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 104),

reminiscing about a time when he appeared more connected with the children.

By way of contrast, Babamukuru has an expectance of "a questioning obedience from his family" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 32) which he tries to assert by "threatening his dependents to stop providing for them if they challenge him" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 32). Nyasha is one of the victims who 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 maltreatment from her father is something that is not difficult for her to do. One could further argue that her awareness of Babamukuru's empty threats emboldens her to stand up for herself. However, her desire to oppose her father leads her towards the road of eating disorders and mental problems affecting her well-being and future. Accordingly, Counihan (2007) describes Nyasha's nervous condition as a consequence of "being black, being a woman, being enmeshed in a colonial system" (2007, p. 172) where the "complicated interaction of all those" (2007, p. 175) denies Nyasha "any subjectivity at all" (2007, p. 175). Nyasha is not able to have a taste of freedom because of the patriarchy that dwells upon her family. She attempts to escape her predicament by immersing herself in books, seeking to gain knowledge about Africa's history and the English missionaries' purpose through literature written from both perspectives. Nyasha's intellectual level leads her to struggle with and expound her hybridity, which ultimately controls her state of mind.

Conclusively, the colonial discourses of power have impacted the male characters in *Nervous Conditions* (1988). We see Nhamo struggling with anxiety as he distances himself from his culture and adopts Englishness. It is evident that the illness that leads to his death stems from the nervousness he develops, which deprives him of his identity and sense of belonging. Conversely, another male character, like Jeremiah, who must submit to colonisation as imposed by Babamukuru, also endures shame and humiliation by embracing Englishness. He does this by abandoning his traditional Igbo practices, such as consulting his gods and ancestors; he is also compelled to have a church wedding. As a result, Jeremiah vents his anger and frustration on his wife, Ma'shingayi, and his daughter, Tambu. He governs them with a patriarchal hand, subjecting his wife to hard labour and disrespect, and attempting to deny his daughter the right to education. Consequently, colonial patriarchal oppression creates two types of identities among these female characters: those who conform to this order by being submissive, like Maiguru, Ma'shingayi, and Netsai, and others who challenge this colonial patriarchal discourse, ending up with a troubled hybrid identity, like Nyasha and Tambu.

5.5 **Identity construction in *Purple Hibiscus***

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) explores the experiences of women mainly in modern settings with some references to traditional societies. Like some third-generation writers, Adichie examines her protagonist's growth distinctly. As Kambili, the protagonist, matures, she moves from ignorance to understanding, grasping the true nature of her socio-cultural environment in which she must survive as an individual and developing a way of coping with her circumstances. Kambili's development is both physical and psychological; each stage reflects her environment in the novel. *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) begins in a state of high

tension, and this tension permeates the entire text, making it striking and hauntingly compelling. The novel unfolds through a series of flashbacks, tracing the growth and development of the narrative voice, Kambili, and her brother Jaja. It depicts their struggle to forge identities beyond the stiff and stifling world created by their Calvinistic father. The entire narrative is told through Kambili Achike, a fifteen-year-old schoolgirl. The novel is not linear; it is divided into four parts and shifts back and forth around 'Palm Sunday', although the story begins before that event. The narrative weaves together themes of religion, politics, and the destructive effects of phallocentrism. It functions as both a feminist critique and a critical examination of political oddity in Nigeria.

The characters of Kambili and Beatrice embody the traumatic, destructive effects of patriarchy and reflect on the imposed identity construct of phallocentrism. Through this, Adichie (2004) stresses that violence against Nigerian women starts from the home front. The text not only brings to light the impact the process of missionary education has had on men who oppress their family and others who do not obey their dictates, but it also presents male literal figures who mistreat the female characters out of misogyny and out of the impulse to bully others because they are themselves bullied.

The novel is set in post-independent Nigeria. Adichie (2004) describes her setting dexterously. Kambili's home is very typical of an affluent family, yet the children are psychologically empty. Kambili narrates the ordeal they had to go through in the hands of their religious Maverick father, who controls and dictates their every move: study schedules, prayer, mass, sleep, laundry and to the point that his dominance extends to

barring his children from spending time with their grandfather (his own father), whom he despises based on his being a heathen. Eugene's overzealous attitude and rigid religious views dwarf his family. Ironically, he works hard to ensure that his family lacks nothing. His houses are spacious and roomy, yet stifling and suffocating. The entire household feels the pangs of Eugene's abuse and brutality. Although Eugene is feared at home, he is venerated in the community for his successful businesses, philanthropic nature, and upright belief in truth.

The newspaper he owns dares to publish the truth about the country's chaotic political situation. He urges his editor, Ade Coker, to ensure that *The Standard* speaks out, yet his wife and children's voices are atrophying by the day because of the traumatic air of chauvinism around the house. In the midst of this chaos, Kambili and Jaja go to stay with their aunt in Nsukka, and they experience a different world. Despite the family's hardships, their aunt's world is full of life, vibrancy, and laughter. It is a place where children are at liberty to speak and the cultural traditions of the people are happily respected and observed, where the family Catholicism is not suffocating and despicable. Kambili, Jaja and their mother thus realise that they can no longer tolerate the violent secrets of their lives under Eugene's dictatorship.

5.5.1 **The construction of Kambili's Identities**

The novel, *Purple Hibiscus* (Adichie, 2004), comments on the complex issue of female identity in African fiction. The title also denotes a similar complexity of multiple layers of meaning. Kambili, the novel's protagonist, reveals a pattern of multiple layers of identity. At the surface, we see a passive female Character conditioned to an imposed cultural identity

where she is made to believe that "women are not supposed to know anything at all" (Adichie, 2004, p. 6). Throughout the segment of the narrative, Kambili is a blank slate, seemingly devoid of personal opinion on the events unfolding in her home. Unlike her parallel character Amaka, her paternal cousin of almost the same age, who can argue constructively about her opinion on issues, an example is the case of choosing a Eurocentric name for her confirmation. Kambili is engrossed in a world of "because he has said it and his word is true" (Adichie, 2004, p. 6), she narrates, "I would sit with my knees pressed together next to Jaja, trying to keep my face blank, to keep the pride from showing because papa said modesty was essential" (Adichie, 2004, p. 6). Initially, the main passion of Kambili's life is to please her father, whom she idolises to the point of senselessness. Eugene's religious indoctrination stifles every sense of rationality in her. For instance, when Eugene breaks Beatrice's (her mother) figurines, a symbol of comfort to Beatrice's many woes, Kambili retorts:

> I meant to say I'm sorry Papa broke your figurines but the words that came out were; I'm sorry your figurines broke Mama. (Adichie, 2004, p. 10)

Of course, referring to the former meant discrediting the god-like Eugene, whose action she views as immaculate. Due to the absence of any strong sense of personality, Kambili goes through a series of traumatic experiences that lead to her developing an identity based on imitation and docility. Her identity here reminds us of Okonkwo's wives in Achebe's Things Fall Apart (Longdet, 2020, p. 7). She narrates:

> Papa poured the yellow juice for everyone. I reached out quickly for my glass and took a sip. It tasted watery; I wanted to seem eager. "It is perfect, Papa,"

> I said. “Yes, yes” it tastes like fresh cashew”, mama said “Just like white wine” mama added, (despite that) fresh cashew tasted nothing like white wine (as observed by Kambili, however, Kambili imitates her mother, “yes” (Adichie, 2004, p. 12) (emphasis added).

Everything offered by Eugene, her father, is to be accepted hook, line, and sinker. She lacks Amaka’s spirit of constructive criticism, which she demonstrates by handling similar situations differently. Amaka asks Eugene, “Does your factory make this?” It is overly sweet. It would be nice if you could reduce the sugar in it. Amaka’s tone was polite and normal as in everyday conversation with an older person” (Adichie, 2004, p. 6). Unlike Amaka, Kambili’s constructed identity finds no fault in anything sanctioned by Eugene, her father; her reaction to Amaka’s boldness and spirited personality reveals more about Kambili’s timidity. She narrates:

> I was unsure whether Papa nodded or if his head just moved as he chewed. Another knot formed in my throat, and I could not get a mouthful of rice down. I knocked my glass over as I reached for it. (Adichie, 2004, p. 98)

The underlying reality here suggests that in an oppressive system, not only is the oppressed a victim, but the oppressor also suffers losses. Eugene suppresses all rationality in Kambili and other family members. As a result, they fail to provide him with constructive criticism that could have helped him improve his various factory products. Kambili’s identity develops in a fragmented manner; her relationship at home involves not only acting and imitation but also social isolation. Eugene’s harsh disciplinary measures restrain Kambili’s ability to speak normally. Okuyade observes that “she struggles within herself to hold a normal conversation, a struggle which usually terminates in a stutter, making her classmate observe her with familiarity laced with contempt” (Okuyade, 2009, p. 9). Due to her inability to form friendships with classmates at school, she becomes isolated and is labelled a

“backyard snob” (2009, p. 6), thus symbolising a conquered victim. Dube opines that Eugene represents a colonially conquered mind (Dube, 2018, p. 10). However, this research also suggests that beyond the remnants of colonial conquest, Eugene is also a symbol of African patriarchy, which believes that women and children should be controlled.

The backyard snob identity Kambili adopts at school presents a multi-layered pattern. On the surface, she appears as a schoolgirl who rushes to her father’s waiting car without the patience to exchange pleasantries with her classmates, an attitude they perceive as blue-blooded arrogance. Beneath this surface and Kambili's snobbish persona lies a hidden pattern of a controlled life, a kind of robotic existence dictated by the phallocentric dictator Eugene. Even in his absence, his malevolent presence still dominates. Kambili’s life is governed and constrained by his strict schedule. Any violation of his rules results in Papa’s slap, as she recounts, “Once Kelvin told Papa I took a few minutes longer, and Papa slapped my left and right cheeks at the same time, so his huge palms left parallel marks on my face and ringing in my ears” (Adichie, 2004, p. 51). A ringing that remains like a relic and leaves her dazed. Kambili’s experiences at home and school resemble a prison, where one is stripped of every sense of freedom.

The narrative style creates suspense not only for readers but also for the characters within the text, as reading beyond Kambili’s identity layer at school reveals a metaphorical palimpsest. The question that may puzzle us is, what point does Adichie intend to make at this juncture? Why allow Kambili to add to her many woes, her classmates’ accusations? The reason for this intentional character portraiture is within the body of the text, which only

palimpsestic reading unveils. At this point, Kambili herself has not realised that she struggles to conform to an ascribed identity; she has not yet found a voice to question the events that oppress her. She believes her father is right and would rather defend him than implicate him. Therefore, her growth at this level does not equip her with the cognitive capacity to question the system that controls and suppresses her. Her acceptance of this ascribed identity thus endorses the idea that actual knowledge leads to the freedom "to be and to do" (Adichie, 2004). At this stage, Kambili is not ready to assert herself, because true liberation comes from within: her identity formation is not isolated; it is influenced by both male and female characters around her. Her mechanical father, who represents a colonised figure, fails to help her realise her worth, and her mother (Beatrice) is too meek to serve as a role model. She never stands out firmly enough to protect her children. It becomes evident that within the patriarchal scripts of her home, Kambili is trapped in domestic servitude, which constructs her subservient "self" with an inner yearning for freedom.

For the different layers of Kambili's identity to emerge, there is a need to erase the current form of her personality, which Amaka observes as abnormal, like the old writing on a piece of parchment that is no longer considered valuable and, thus, erased to accommodate new writing. Kambili's identity needs a similar restructuring and rewriting. Nsukka thus becomes the place of erasure and rewriting. At Nsukka, Aunty Ifeoma, Amaka, and Father Amadi all influenced Kambili's next layer of identity. They, together, deconstruct her conscripted phallocentric identity in order to rewrite a new form, not by imposing, but by enabling her to see beyond it and offering her new, negotiable possibilities. Thus, Kambili's next layer of identity formation centres on the re-education of the mind.

Aunty Ifeoma, as Okuyade (2009) rightly observes, serves as a symbol of the "Iconoclastic identity and demystifier of patriarchal and despotic establishments" (Okuyade, 2009). She offers Kambili a platform to distinguish between right and wrong through her religious beliefs. For instance, her brief prayers during meals bewilder Kambili, and she explains. "Nne, we have finished praying. We do not say mass in the name of the grace like your father does" (Adichie, 2004, p. 119).

Using the tale of King Jaja of Opobo, Aunty Ifeoma lectures Kambili and Jaja on defiance. "Being defiant can be a good thing sometimes…. When it is used right" (Adichie, 2004, p. 144). Kambili utilises her knowledge to resist her father. We see her revolt when Eugene tries to reprimand her for possessing Papa Nnukwu's painting. Papa snatched the painting from Jaja. His hand moved swiftly, working together, the painting was gone, it already represented something lost, something I had ….. I dashed to the pieces on the floor as if to save them …… I sank to the floor, lay on the pieces of paper. (Even when Papa shouted). Get up! I lay there, did nothing, and I still did not move (Adichie, 2004, p. 210).

The above passage reveals vividly the new beginning of Kambili's self–asserted identity, which Azuike describes as the female "self–discovery" (Longdet, 2020). Kambili, realising that she must play a part to assert herself, is no longer passive. She defies her father's beating to cling to the relics of her grandfather, which the painting symbolises. Her unwillingness to let go implies that she is willing to resist any attempt to lose what she has come to discover, not even the god like Eugene will come between her and her fragile freedom. Anthony Oha

(2007), concludes that Kambili is not a contributor character. “She never acted to change either her situation or things around her” (Oha, 2007, p. 13). To have clung to the torn painting of her grandfather amidst the stinging of her father’s kicks is a potent statement of her assertion of her new identity and an indication that she has transcended her limitation. At this point, Kambili moved from the passive victim to an actor.

Secondly, Kambili views Aunty Ifeoma as a woman who is self-reliant in a male-dominated world. As a widow, she is able to handle difficult situations. Later, when Eugene dies and Jaja is imprisoned, we observe Kambili’s confident effort to seek freedom from the male figure, giving the text its African feminist outlook, which advocates for challenging an oppressive system to free both genders. Thirdly, Aunty Ifeoma introduces Kambili to creativity. It is in her house that Kambili learns the basics of domestic chores like cooking. Similar to Enitan in Sefi Attah’s *Everything Good Will Come,* Kambili had never accessed the kitchen before. This aspect of her growth is crucial, as she is searching for role models to move from being a passive female to a confident, independent woman.

The emergence of Kambili’s new identity is also influenced by Father Aamadi. Through Father Aamadi, Kambili develops a sense of discernment. She perceives Father Aamadi’s Catholicism as accommodating rather than compartmentalised. His frequent visits and closeness help her develop psychologically. Commenting on Father Aamadi's influence on Kambili’s identity formation, Okuyade (2009) states that “she commits a cardinal sin through fraudian slip” (2009, p. 14) as she falls in love with Father Aamadi. A surface reading of this scene might justify this conclusion. However, the meaning of this affair

further emphasises Kambili's identity as palimpsestic, which, according to Whalen, conveys a less socially acceptable meaning. Kambili not only falls in love with Father Aamadi but also transcends her imposed silence to express this emotion. Her ability to voice her feelings signifies her complete liberation and freedom. It indicates that Kambili has shed her old, docile, and passive nature to become active and capable of independent thought and existence beyond what society prescribes.

In *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), this study argues that Kambili's identity is deeply influenced by postcolonial trauma, mainly embodied in her phallocentric father, Eugene, whose authoritarian nature reflects the strict, colonial structures of control and religious dogmatism. His dominance silences Kambili, shaping her into a submissive, fearful girl who associates love with pain and silence with obedience. However, her transformation begins when she experiences the more open, liberal environment of Aunty Ifeoma's home, where laughter, debate, and emotional expression are welcomed. Aunty Ifeoma challenges patriarchal norms and offers Kambili a model of womanhood based on independence and intellectual freedom. Father Amadi further nurtures Kambili's voice and self-esteem through gentle encouragement and spiritual openness, enabling her to feel affection without fear. Through these contrasting influences, Kambili gradually resists her father's control, forging a stronger, more autonomous identity through her navigation of postcolonial and familial trauma.

5.5.2 **The Character of Beatrice**

The character of Beatrice is multi-layered, possessing two levels of meaning: the apparent surface meaning, which most critics have rightly identified, and a deeper, submerged

meaning beyond the surface interpretation of her identity. On the surface, we see a docile, passive, and unthinking woman who is content to follow her husband sheepishly. She condones every form of violence directed at her and her children. She only plays the role of nursing herself and her children back to health in preparation for another brutal episode from the Calvinistic Eugene. For example, we see how she responds to Eugene's hot water disciplinary therapy on Kambili: "She mixed salt with cold water and gently plastered the gritty mixture onto my feet (Adichie, 2004, p. 195)."

In another instance, Eugene's irrational bouts of violence manifest in how he beats Beatrice, leaving behind relics such as several miscarriages and the purple colour of the skin around her eyes. Examining Beatrice's character reveals the ongoing gender-based violence women are subjected to. Nutsukpo (2017) opines that what is replete in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) is a manifestation of "gender-based violence in the form of domestic violence" (Nutsukpo, 2017). She further reiterates that, in African society, "the domination of men is the most fundamental form of female subjugation" (Nutsukpo, 2017). In some African regions, battery by wives (both physical and emotional) tends to be regarded as usual. This is primarily influenced by culture, as the patriarchal nature of African society fosters prejudices against women and accepts the battering of wives and children by husbands as a way of enforcing discipline. Therefore, domestic violence becomes a common feature in many African homes, as vividly depicted in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004). Despite the various forms of domestic violence, Beatrice responds to Eugene's brutality with stoicism. Tifanny Astrick (2020) states that, "oppressions draw their strength from the submissiveness of its victims who accept their image and get paralysed by the sense of helplessness."

(Astrick, 2020, p. 21).

In the face of violence, Beatrice remains the selfless, enduring woman. She believes that tradition and culture expect this disposition, which will in turn preserve her marriage and a home for her children, as her rhetorical questions to her sister-in-law, Aunty Ifeoma, reveal:

> Where do I go if I leave Eugene's house? Tell me, where will I go? Do you know how many mothers pushed their daughters at him? How many of them asked him to impregnate them, even, and not to bother paying a bride price? (Adichie, 2004, p. 250).

For the sake of her marriage and children, Beatrice bears Eugene's ruthlessness. Adichie's depiction of Beatrice at the surface level of meaning accentuates the argument that the worst form of oppression is that which is self-abnegated and self-induced. Beatrice hardly speaks; when she does at all, it is with timidity which culminates in whispering and monosyllables. Uwakweh writes that:

> Silencing comprises an imposed restriction on women's social being, thinking and expression that are religiously or culturally sanctioned. As a patriarchal weapon of control, it is used by the dominant male structure on the subordinate or mutual female structure (Uwakweh, 2023).

Examining Beatrice's magnified silence, a reader is tempted to see her as an illustration of "old wives in new tales", that is, she embodies an identity synonymous with the timid, passive, and docile female character in male-authored texts. However, of course, as previously mentioned, such identity resemblance only depicts a palimpsest pattern, which can interfere with a writer's intention. A reader might dismiss such characters as repetitive, thereby blurring the underlying significance of this identity.

Beyond the surface passivity of Beatrice Achike's identity, we encounter a female character who lingers in our imagination long after reading the text. Therefore, the interpretation of her identity layer sparks this effect. First, we ask, what is Adichie's purpose in creating such a female character, who tolerates, endures, and accommodates Eugene's excesses? Beatrice perceives her husband as a product of colonialism, which embodies all forms of perversion and distortion in African society. A character whose growing-up experiences, as he shares with his daughter Kambili, turn him into a psychopath. Rather than reacting harshly towards him, Beatrice devises a way to endure—an essential quality of the African woman. She remains unfazed by Aunty Ifeoma's remarks that "Sometimes life begins when marriage ends" (Adichie, 2004, p. 150).

However, events take a different turn and eventually plant the seed of rebellion in Beatrice. Adichie does not expect us to dismiss the character of Beatrice as merely a passive, murderous wife who tolerates Eugene's brutality as a traditional and religious duty. She employs language to define her identity, creating a layered pattern that, like a palimpsest, reveals that only through these layers can textual meaning be produced. Beatrice initially believes that, despite the domestic turmoil, her marriage provides social security for her and her children. Therefore, like the womanly figure, she endures and tolerates the oppression she faces for her children's sake. Beatrice's character embodies the traditional African woman, who is sophisticated and satisfied with the economic security her husband provides. However, this portrayal does not endure when she nearly loses the very reason that keeps her within Eugene's suffocating world—her children, as "things started to fall apart"

(Adichie, 2004, p. 207). Kambili narrates:

> He started to kick me …. Kicking, kicking. Kicking. Perhaps it was a belt now because the metal buckle seemed too heavy. Because I could hear a swoosh in the air. A low voice was saying "please, biko, please" ……. I closed my eyes and slipped away into quiet (Adichie, 2004, p. 210).

Eugene's violent attack on his daughter leaves Kambili with a "broken rib" and "internal bleeding'. This becomes the "final blow that broke the camel's back". In the frenzy that ensues when Eugene embarks on his brutal act upon his daughter, Beatrice, for the first time, finds her voice. Initially, it was timid, low, and pleading, "please, biko, please" (Adichie, 2004, p. 211). Aunty Ifeoma's proverbial statement that "when a house is on fire, you run out before the roof collapses on your head" (Adichie, 2004, p. 213), becomes a springboard that pushes Beatrice outside her entrapment to seek a solution. Thus, for the first time, she does not argue with Aunty Ifeoma. After this incident, Beatrice realises, like someone emerging from an illusory world, that she needs to free herself and her children from the inferno ignited by her husband's sinking philosophy. Beatrice, like Kambili, reveals a palimpsestic pattern, where several layers of her personality develop gradually and intriguingly. She steps out of her passive state, breaks the patriarchal social structure, and demystifies traditional images of the African woman.

We observe a female character whose outward appearance suggests innocence, harmlessness, and compassion, but she gradually degrades into a murderer. She cunningly plots to poison her husband with Sisi, her maid, reminiscent of the secular songwriter's words; "you make a good girl go crazy, if you don't treat her like a lady". Eugene's violence

against Kambili prompts Beatrice to break free from her passive role as a housewife. Already conditioned to violence, she perceives it as the only way to assert her identity and create space for her children. This aspect gives the novel its radical feminist perspective. The question arises: must murder be the only option for the oppressed female victim? Must she assert herself by killing the oppressor? Regardless of her suffering at Eugene's hands, resorting to murder is not justifiable, and this is the problematic stance of the novel, often leading to a misinterpretation of feminist aims. The poisoning of Eugene, which results in his death, might be viewed as an attempt by the oppressed to dismantle an oppressive system; however, this study strongly contends that there were alternative options available to Beatrice—ways to negotiate her identity without committing a crime.

A surface reading of the above event may lead to a misinterpretation of the female quest for an asserted identity and could label the author an advocate of men's annihilation. Therefore, this study looked beyond the surface writing to resolve this dilemma. Beatrice's psychological condition deteriorates after she kills her husband; her situation further entraps her, leading her into madness. Additionally, her desire to liberate her children and grant them freedom fails, as Jaja, her son, is imprisoned. Thus, like the aftermath of a volcanic eruption, where molten magma seeks to break free from confinement, Beatrice's efforts only worsen her problems. The consequences of her actions include, ironically, the imprisonment of her son and her own descent into insanity. These outcomes strongly indicate that the author does not advocate for a matriarchal order replacing patriarchy. Nor does this study endorse radical feminism that calls for a segregated environment for men and women. Instead, punishing Beatrice for her extreme actions highlights the possibility that both can coexist in unity, as

Ogunyemi's womanist theory suggests. Thilagavathi (2019) states that "the linguistic acumen displayed by the author in the novel, looks into how women are underestimated, downgraded, second-classed and rather looked down upon by their men counterparts and how women are rising to the occasion to take on men's challenge on this (Thilagavathi, 2019)." To this end, Adichie exemplifies this on a number of occasions in *Purple Hibiscus* (Adichie, 2004).

With the sanity she needs to fully enjoy the benefits of her quest. Ironically, she remains trapped and must endure insanity as a form of purgatory until her son gains his freedom. Only after Jaja's freedom does Kambili say, "the new rains will come down soon" (Adichie, 2004, p. 307). This suggests that true liberation within the African context is the emancipation of all genders from any form of oppression.

In *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), Beatrice's identity is shaped by postcolonial trauma that reinforces patriarchal expectations of female silence, endurance, and loyalty. As a wife in a deeply religious and male-dominated household, Beatrice internalises societal beliefs that a woman's role is to submit, suffer quietly, and preserve the image of a perfect family. Her repeated miscarriages and quiet endurance of her husband Eugene's violence reflect how colonial legacies and religious patriarchy merge to erase women's voices. However, when the abuse turns toward her children, particularly Kambili and Jaja, Beatrice reaches a breaking point. The same patriarchal structures that conditioned her compliance ultimately push her to reclaim power in the only way she sees possible, through poisoning her husband. However, her act of resistance leads not to liberation but to mental breakdown, showing the

cost of challenging an oppressive system alone. This outcome aligns with Ogunyemi's (2018) womanist theory, which discourages separatism and calls for healing within inclusive, supportive communities. Beatrice's descent into insanity serves as a tragic reminder that without collective empowerment and communal healing, isolated resistance can destroy rather than restore.

5.6 **Chapter Summarry**

In the chapter, the construction of identities in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) is examined through the lens of colonial influence and its intersection with gender. The text reveals how colonialism first imposed an inferior identity on African men, stripping them of power and autonomy. In response, these men sought to reclaim authority by exerting control over women, designing and enforcing rigid, subservient female identities that mirrored the subjugation they themselves experienced. Characters like Ma'Shingayi, Maiguru, and Netsai are shaped by this system, conforming to traditional roles of obedience, domesticity, and silence—roles meant to uphold a patriarchal structure disguised as cultural preservation. However, the narrative also highlights characters who resist this imposed concept of femininity. Tambu, Lucia, and Nyasha challenge the expectations placed upon them, each pushing back against the idea that their worth lies solely in submission. Tambu seeks education as a pathway to independence; Lucia asserts herself through her sexuality and refusal to be shamed; and Nyasha, having been exposed to Western ideals, openly questions the oppressive dynamics within her family. Yet, their resistance does not come without consequence. Each woman grapples with a fractured sense of identity, caught between traditional values and Western influences—a state of hybridity that reflects the psychological toll of navigating postcolonial and patriarchal pressures. Through this, the

chapter demonstrates how identity in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) is not only constructed but also contested and destabilised by the forces of colonial and gendered trauma.

Finally, through the various characters in the novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), the chapter explored how Adichie advocates for a society where individuals are not restricted due to their gender. Kambili, for instance, is influenced to develop several identity layers. Azuike (2020) opines that most African feminist texts are "couched in deep ironies which allow the readers to engage in manifold interpretations of such texts" (Azuike, 2020). Moreover, the above analysis reveals that multiplicity of interpretation is possible in the text. The split personality of Beatrice leads to her multi-layered identity, a kind of palimpsest. Firstly, at the surface, she is a docile and passive wife of Eugene Achike, who offers no plausible model to her daughter; second, she is portrayed as the negative outcome of a prolonged oppressive system as she turns into a social deviant and takes a radical stand. Adichie allows Beatrice's insanity as proof that, as an African feminist, the fight for the rights of women need not diminish the rights of men because the planet is large enough for everybody, according to an Igbo proverb ("Egbe bere ugo bere, nkesi ibe ya bellie, nku kwaa ya". Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch, but the one that hinders the other from perching loses its wings. There is no need to sidetrack the argument for women's self-assertion by implying that it takes away the rights of men. This stance the study advocates for, through the palimpsestic reading of the characters of Kambili (the narrator) and Beatrice in *Purple Hibiscus* (2004).

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTED AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

6.1 Introduction

This study was set to interrogate the representation of postcolonial trauma in African women's writing as demonstrated in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004). This was done by examining the forms of trauma manifested in the female characters in the selected texts. It further interrogated the essential literary techniques employed by both Adichie and Dangarembga in their selected texts to portray the manifestation of these forms of trauma in their female characters. Finally, the study examined how experiences of postcolonial trauma have shaped the identities of female characters in the two selected texts.

The selected works, which were based on thematic concerns, characterisation, and period of production, were written by contemporary African women authors. The two authors highlighted the experiences of individual women and communities affected by trauma that resulted from colonialism and its aftermath in Africa.

The preceding chapters have examined how the authors problematise trauma among female characters in the selected postcolonial texts to determine whether they portray specific aspects of trauma related to the individual self or the wider community, and if it can be linked to the colonial past. They have also analysed the key literary techniques used by the two authors to emphasise postcolonial trauma in the female characters of the chosen texts. Finally, the chapters have investigated how postcolonial trauma influences the development of female characters' identities in these texts.

6.2 Summary of Findings

This section highlights the significant findings upon which the conclusions are drawn.

6.2.1 **Aspects of Trauma within the Postcolonial Discourse**

The study's first objective was to investigate the forms of trauma manifested in the female characters of Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004). The study established that the female characters in the two texts experienced different forms of trauma in the course of their coming of age, which shaped their identity later in life. The characters first go through colonial trauma as a result of colonialism. Colonial culture created a power hierarchy within the native context, which resulted in violence among native subjects. Each character inflicts pain on others inferior to him in the power hierarchy because of the disturbed state of mind caused by colonial oppression. The colonial masters deprived native men of their masculinity and created tension in the relationship between African men and their women. African men, in turn, oppressed their women and thus participated in the double oppression and colonisation of the women nearest them.

The female characters also go through the trauma of domestic violence and oppression as propagated by patriarchy. They are subjected to domestic slavery and frequent battering by the males, which makes them feel like a normal phenomenon. The other form of trauma is associated with the societal structure and beliefs. Social forces tend to interfere with family matters and, in most cases, oppress the female, for instance, during the bereavement of a spouse, where the females are always labelled as responsible for their husband's death.

The female characters experience the trauma of a depressing home space where they are not allowed to challenge the men's domination in society, and make people believe in the independent humanity of women. The characters live in homes with restrictions, which contributes to low confidence among family members. This environment hampers children's psychological growth and development, leading to a lack of creative thinking, low confidence in their abilities, and poor decision-making.

Finally, the young female characters develop trauma of the psyche that is derived from the horrific events they witness their mothers going through as they grow. Similarly, the adult women suffer disturbed psyches from carrying the weight of womanhood.

6.2.2 **Literary Representation of Postcolonial Trauma**

The study found that the authors use several key techniques to highlight the historical traumas inflicted on African women by colonialism, as portrayed in the selected texts.

The first is first-person narration, where the authors tell the story in the first person. The authors use young girls to tell stories concerning their childhood experiences. In Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), for instance, Kambili narrates about her oppressive life at home under the tyrannical hand of her father, Eugene, whose strict, colonial-influenced Catholicism dictates his abusive behaviour. Her internalised fear and gradual awakening mirror the historical oppression of African women, showing how colonial ideologies infiltrated family structures and reinforced patriarchy.

In Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Tambu, through narration, reflects on her journey as a young girl struggling to receive an education in a society that prioritises male advancement. The novel's opening line, "I was not sorry when my brother died," immediately signals a complex narrative of gendered trauma and resistance. Tambu's perspective exposes how colonial education and Western ideals shape and marginalise African women, leading to their subjugation.

The use of first-person narration personalises the historical trauma of colonialism, making the oppression of women more immediate and critical for the reader. The use of protagonists as narrators makes them the story's internal voice, thereby rendering them an authentic and reliable source of information.

Symbolism is another technique the authors applied in the two texts. In both novels, symbolism illustrates the violence and control exerted over female characters, reinforcing the theme of historical trauma. For instance, in *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), the recurring symbol of silence and suffocation reflects Kambili's lack of agency. Her mother, Beatrice, suffers repeated physical abuse, symbolised by shattered figurines, a motif that conveys the fragility of women under patriarchal rule. These images reflect the destruction of African women's voices under colonial and religious oppression.

In *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Dangarembga uses symbolism to highlight the contrast between rural poverty and Westernised affluence. The stark differences between these environments emphasise the ways colonialism has created divisions within African families, reinforcing hierarchies where women are often the most disadvantaged. The symbol of Tambu's mother working tirelessly while her father remains idle exemplifies the gendered burdens imposed by tradition and colonial legacies. Through symbols, both authors underscore how colonial influence promoted gender inequalities, trapping African women in cycles of silence and suffering.

There is also the technique of vivid description, which involves detailed, sensory descriptions in both novels and brings the psychological and physical effects of historical trauma to life. In *Purple Hibiscus* (2004),Adichie's description of Kambili's physical reactions, stuttering, trembling, and stomach pain, reflects the deep-rooted fear instilled by her father's oppressive rule. These vivid depictions illustrate the long-term psychological impact of colonial and religious dogma on women's bodies.

Dangarembga in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) employs detailed descriptions of Nyasha's eating disorder and mental breakdown to highlight the devastating effects of colonial alienation. Nyasha, educated in England and then returning to Zimbabwe, struggles to reconcile her dual identities. The graphic portrayal of her rebellion, starvation, and eventual breakdown serves as a powerful metaphor for the internalised trauma caused by colonialism, especially concerning African women forced to navigate conflicting cultural expectations. By using vivid descriptions, both novels emphasise the physical and emotional costs of colonialism and patriarchy, reinforcing the pervasive impact of historical trauma on African women.

Foreshadowing is a literary style in both novels that builds tension and hints at the eventual breaking points of female characters. In *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), early descriptions of Papa's rigid control and the family's fearful silence foreshadow the eventual climax - his violent outbursts and his eventual death. The tension built through foreshadowing prepares the reader for Beatrice's drastic act of poisoning Eugene, which symbolises the collapse of

colonial and patriarchal dominance within the household. In *Nervous Conditions* (1988), foreshadowing is applied to signal Nyasha's tragic fate. Early on, her defiance against her father's authority suggests an impending conflict. Her warning to Tambu - "They have done it to me… You are next" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 204) - foreshadows her eventual psychological breakdown and underscores how colonial and patriarchal oppression continues to haunt women.

Through foreshadowing, both Adichie and Dangarembga suggest that the trauma inflicted by colonialism and patriarchy will inevitably lead to either destruction or resistance, illustrating the precarious position of African women within these systems.

6.2.3 **Construction of Fragile Identities as the Inferior Other**

The study further examined how postcolonial trauma shapes the fragile identities of the female characters in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004).

The chapter, therefore, began by examining the colonial discourses that constructed an "inferior" identity in the colonised male. Then, it scrutinises how this inferior identity construction led to the male characters coming up with their patriarchal discourses to subjugate the female characters in their lives. It offered guidance on how these discourses impacted the identity of African women as represented by the female characters in the selected texts.

There is cultural alienation and conflicted identities within native Africans as a result of colonial education and Western ideals. Like Nyasha in *Nervous Conditions* (1988), characters struggle with their dual identity as Western-educated girls in a traditional African home. Having been raised in England, Nyasha struggles to conform to the patriarchal expectations imposed by her father, Babamukuru. Her sense of alienation, exacerbated by postcolonial tensions, results in a psychological breakdown, symbolising the identity crisis many African women face under colonial influence.

At the same time, Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) experiences an identity crisis under her father's rigid, colonial-influenced Catholicism. She is forcefully conditioned to be submissive and fearful, suppressing her voice and self-esteem. Exposure to Aunty Ifeoma's

more liberal household challenges these constraints, forcing her to question her imposed identity.

Further, postcolonial trauma intensifies gender oppression towards women, making them more prone to fragile identities. A good example is Beatrice (Mama) in *Purple Hibiscus* (2004). She embodies the submissive woman trapped in a cycle of domestic abuse, reflecting the ways colonial and patriarchal structures reinforce female suffering. Her silence and the eventual act of poisoning her husband symbolise the internalised trauma and delayed resistance of many oppressed African women.

In *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Tambu is shaped by the expectation that women should be subservient. While initially embracing education as an escape from traditional roles, she later realises that success under colonial structures does not equate to freedom. This realisation forces her to navigate her fragile identity between ambition and societal expectations.

Both novels depict how postcolonial trauma manifests in psychological distress, further destabilising female identities. Nyasha's eating disorder is a direct result of her struggle to reconcile colonial and African expectations, illustrating how historical oppression translates into personal suffering. Kambili's silence and fear reflect the ways colonial and religious doctrines suppress female agency. Her journey towards self-expression is gradual and painful, highlighting the fragile nature of an identity shaped by oppression.

It is evident from the above analysis that the colonial discourse of power imposed the notion of 'inferior' on the native male, who, in turn, projects these very notions, but now in the form of patriarchal discourse, to the females in their society. The hegemonic narratives originated in local patriarchal traditions that marginalise the female subaltern, downsizing her role in the fictional canvas or conflating her with a status of gender inferiority by assigning her a role that conforms to her image in the patriarchal taxonomy of women (Thilagavathi, 2019).

6.3 Conclusion

First, the study concludes that the ongoing suffering, struggle, and pain experienced by the female characters in the two selected texts are linked to various forms of trauma stemming from the colonial past. Colonialism greatly contributed to this trauma in several ways. It dismantled traditional social structures, imposed foreign patriarchal values, restricted

economic opportunities, and exposed women to violence. These historical injustices continue to influence contemporary struggles for gender equality and social justice in Africa. Recognising and addressing this colonial legacy is crucial for healing and empowerment among African women.

Secondly, through the key literary techniques discussed earlier, the study concluded that the two authors effectively highlighted the historical traumas caused by colonialism and its lasting impact on African women. These literary techniques, which include narration, symbolism, vivid description, and foreshadowing, not only enhance the emotional depth of the narratives but also serve as tools for critiquing the structures that have long oppressed African women. By giving voice to their female protagonists, Adichie and Dangarembga challenge the legacy of silence imposed by colonial rule, ultimately advocating for resistance, agency, and transformation.

Finally, the study concludes that the postcolonial trauma in the two selected texts shapes female identities by imposing conflicting cultural expectations, reinforcing patriarchal control, and causing deep psychological struggles. In *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), the fragile identities of Nyasha, Kambili, Beatrice, and Tambu underscore the lingering impact of colonial histories on African women, emphasising the need for resistance and self-redefinition.

Thus, this study argues that African women's writing reconceptualises postcolonial trauma through a feminist lens by transforming the female body and voice from sites of colonial and patriarchal violation into instruments of remembrance, resistance, and redefinition—thereby expanding trauma theory to include gendered modes of survival and narrative self-reclamation.

6.4 Recommendations

In light of the findings of this study on Postcolonial Trauma in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), the following recommendations are proposed for professionals in psychology, history, and education policy:

Psychologists should consider using literary fictional texts by African women in understanding and handling cases of emotional abuse and trauma among women in Africa.

Psychologists are encouraged to utilise literary texts authored by African women as supplementary tools in understanding and addressing emotional abuse and trauma among women in African societies. These texts provide rich psychological insights, portraying lived experiences of pain, resilience, and identity reconstruction in postcolonial contexts. Through narratives grounded in cultural and emotional authenticity, such works offer therapists and counsellors a deeper appreciation of the sociocultural factors contributing to trauma. Consequently, literature can serve as a diagnostic aid and a culturally relevant therapeutic resource in trauma-informed psychological care.

Historians should consider literary works by African women to be valid and valuable sources of historical knowledge. These narratives often capture nuanced experiences of colonial rule, resistance, nation-building, and gendered social transformations that are frequently overlooked in conventional archival records. By analysing fiction, memoirs, and poetry, historians can access a broader spectrum of voices, particularly those of women, and reconstruct more inclusive, localised, and emotionally resonant histories. Literary accounts thus complement traditional historical methods by preserving memory and offering interpretive depth to Africa's postcolonial narrative.

Curriculum developers should consider including more books by African women, such as set texts and course books, to promote national integration. Curriculum developers and education policymakers should prioritise the inclusion of literary works by African women as part of set texts and course materials across all educational levels. These texts provide vital insights into postcolonial identity, gender dynamics, cultural heritage, and national cohesion. By exposing students to diverse and relatable voices, such literature fosters empathy, critical awareness, and appreciation of the complexities within African societies. Furthermore, integrating these works into national curricula boosts cultural pride and supports the broader goal of national integration through inclusive education.

6.5 Suggestions for Further Research

As a result of the above findings, this study proposes the following avenues for further research:

6.5.1 **Broader Exploration of Identity Influencers**

While this study primarily concentrated on psychological dimensions, particularly trauma, as key factors in shaping the identity of African women, it is essential to recognise that identity is a multifaceted construct. Future research should examine how additional dimensions — such as culture, religion, politics, and economic status — interact with psychological experiences to shape women's sense of self in postcolonial Africa. These domains often intersect with personal and collective histories, potentially reinforcing or challenging existing identities. A comprehensive analysis of these factors will provide a more nuanced and holistic understanding of African women's identities in both historical and contemporary contexts.

6.5.2 **Comparative Study of Multiple Literary Genres**

This study limited its scope to the prose genre when examining the psychological experiences of African women. However, African women writers have also effectively utilised other literary forms—such as poetry, drama, and autobiography — to express themes of trauma, resilience, resistance, and empowerment. Further research should explore how these alternative genres contribute to discussions on gender and postcolonial identity. For example, poetry often offers condensed, symbolic representations of pain and healing, while drama enables performative engagement with societal issues. Conversely, autobiography provides deeply personal narratives that blur the boundaries between lived experience and literary reflection. Broadening the range of genres can thus reveal wider stylistic and thematic patterns in African women's literature.

6.5.3 **Examination of Additional Literary Techniques**

This study focused on four primary literary techniques—narration, symbolism, vivid description, and foreshadowing—in its analysis of postcolonial trauma. However, African women writers utilise many other narrative tools that merit further scholarly attention. Techniques such as dialogue, flashback, stream-of-consciousness, irony, and shifts in narrative perspective play vital roles in conveying trauma's emotional and historical complexities. For instance, flashbacks often reveal repressed memories, while dialogue can illustrate power dynamics and psychological tension. A detailed analysis of these techniques

could deepen our understanding of how stylistic choices contribute to the representation of trauma and identity in African literature.

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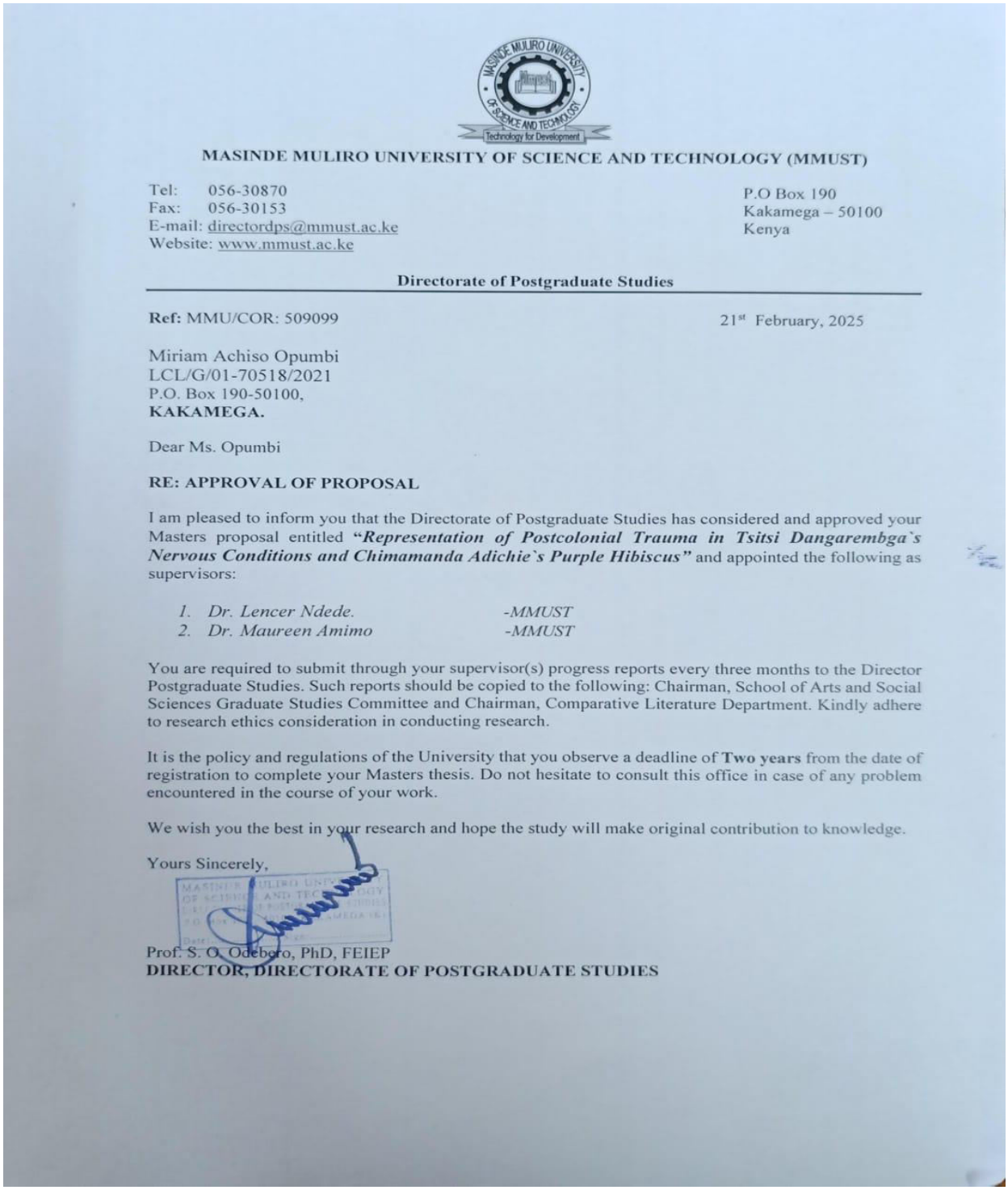
APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: Research Approval



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Ref: MMU/COR: 509099

21st February, 2025

Miriam Achiso Opumbi
LCL/G/01-70518/2021
P.O. Box 190-50100,
KAKAMEGA.

Dear Ms. Opumbi

RE: APPROVAL OF PROPOSAL

I am pleased to inform you that the Directorate of Postgraduate Studies has considered and approved your Masters proposal entitled ***"Representation of Postcolonial Trauma in Tsitsi Dangarembga`s Nervous Conditions and Chimamanda Adichie`s Purple Hibiscus"*** and appointed the following as supervisors:

1. *Dr. Lencer Ndede.* -*MMUST*
2. *Dr. Maureen Amimo* -*MMUST*

You are required to submit through your supervisor(s) progress reports every three months to the Director Postgraduate Studies. Such reports should be copied to the following: Chairman, School of Arts and Social Sciences Graduate Studies Committee and Chairman, Comparative Literature Department. Kindly adhere to research ethics consideration in conducting research.

It is the policy and regulations of the University that you observe a deadline of **Two years** from the date of registration to complete your Masters thesis. Do not hesitate to consult this office in case of any problem encountered in the course of your work.

We wish you the best in your research and hope the study will make original contribution to knowledge.

Yours Sincerely,

Prof. S. O. Odebero, PhD, FEIEP
DIRECTOR, DIRECTORATE OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

APPENDIX II: Research license

REPUBLIC OF KENYA

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE,TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

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Date of Issue: **26/March/2025**

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This is to Certify that Miss.. Achiso Miriam of Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Kakamega on the topic: REPRESENTATION OF POSTCOLONIAL TRAUMA IN TSITSI DANGAREMBA'S NERVOUS CONDITIONS AND CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE'S PURPLE HIBISCUS for the period ending : 26/March/2026.

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