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Victim or Villain: Female Resilience and Agency in the Face of Trauma in Chimamanda Adichie's, Purple Hibiscus (2003) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's, Nervous Conditions (1988)

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by

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ABSTRACT

Victim or Villain: Female Resilience and Agency in the Face of Trauma in Chimamanda

Adichie's, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's, *Nervous Conditions* (1988)

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As disparities persist in the way women are treated as compared to their male counterparts, the issue of gender will continue to call forth literary productions. For this reason, female writers are trying to dismantle the stereotypes that keep women confined to societal roles. Grounded in a feminist framework, this study focuses on the gender disparity theme in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. The aim is to examine how these writers represent the trauma of women living in a patriarchal system. The traumatic experiences of the female characters in both texts for this study are analyzed using Herman's Psychological trauma and Van der Kolk's trauma theory to explain women's struggles and their responses to traumatic experiences. A content analysis of the novels shows that resilience and agency are achievable and that one way to achieve agency is through interdependence, a crucial dimension often overlooked in existing scholarly engagements.

DEDICATION

To every woman who is unapologetically the villain.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In Alexandra D' Amour's, "The Patriarchy's Damage To Mother/Daughter Relationships," she posits that "every mother and daughter is a victim of the patriarchy," an assertion that encapsulates the idea that societal systems shape the experiences of women across generations. In this light, I was faced with the challenge of expressing my femininity in a male-dominated family. With three brothers, surprisingly, it was my mother who reinforced the gender bias in our little African home—because she was what the feminist writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in *Dear Ijeawele or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* calls the 'traditional' mother (7). That is, mothers who adhere closely to cultural norms, including those that uphold patriarchal values.

I began questioning various aspects of our household dynamics, from why I was assigned early morning chores while my brothers enjoyed extra sleep, to the unequal educational opportunities between my immediate brother and me, despite both being accepted to the university simultaneously. I pondered why domestic responsibilities were designated solely to me and not shared equally among my brothers. Hence, these inquiries played a crucial role in shaping my identity.

The change in our household dynamics created a crack in my relationship with my mother. Yet, I was unable to "see beyond her...the forces acting upon her" (qtd. in D' Amour). This formidable force as articulated by Alexandra D' Amour, was patriarchy. According to D' Amour,

> The patriarchy impacted the way our mothers moved in this world, and it controlled their
> perception of what their role as a woman could be. Inevitably, the patriarchy influenced

the way they (sub)consciously raised their daughters and even dictated their beliefs in

what their daughters could be in a patriarchal society. ("The Patriarchy's Damage to

Mother/Daughter Relationships")

In essence, every mother was once a daughter whose worldview was influenced by a societal

structure that dictated her understanding of femininity and motherhood, and this trickles down to

the way she guided her daughters. Thus, the realization of the external force of patriarchy

answered the heart-rending question of why my mother, inadvertently influenced by patriarchy,

played a significant role in perpetuating gender biases within our family.

Moreover, the influence of patriarchy is not unique to my experience but extends to many

African homes and it is for this reason that most post-colonial African female writers, including

Tsitsi Dangarembga and Chimamanda Adichie, gather raw materials for literature from society.

These writers do this in a bid to foreground the multifaceted experiences of individuals,

especially women in diverse narratives. Like other scholars, Remy Oriaku in "Private Voices,

Public Concerns," posits that a "work of literature mirrors society, especially the author's

society" (97), thus, underscoring the idea that writers are not detached from the social

environment, but they capture the nuances and characteristics of their contemporary social

milieu.

The social environment mirrored by these female writers includes a focus on colonialism

that involved control and exploitation of African nations leaving behind colonial legacies such as

patriarchy and gender disparity as a result of indirect rule. However, despite their significant

contributions, they are often labeled by critics as "feministic, sexist, [and] one-sided" (Lewis I).

Hence, projecting the notion that the literature of postcolonial female writers excludes alternative

perspectives, and is seemingly driven by inherent biases.

While these dismissive remarks have not discouraged the female voice from emerging, it is imperative to recognize that these writers are not merely expressing personal biases but are responding to and grappling with the societal structures that marginalize and relegate women to the background. To support this stance, Damion Lewis in his dissertation, "Canonization, Colonization, Decolonization: A Comparative Study of Political and Critical Works by Minority Writers", posits that female writers, particularly in postcolonial contexts, find themselves with "no alternative but to discover and define themselves through their writings in order to liberate themselves" (19), encapsulating the idea that literature is a powerful tool for self-discovery, empowerment, and resistance against the constraints imposed by societal norms and expectations.

Objective of the Study

This study delves into the nuanced exploration of the gender disparity theme depicted in two seminal African novels, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988). Within the pages of these postcolonial narratives, the vibrant stories unfold with the struggles of women who defy societal expectations, rejecting the metaphorical confinement of the role of the "Angel in the House," a term coined by Coventry Patmore. The metaphor encapsulates the submissive archetype of women, confined to passive domestic roles that revolve around "child-rearing", "household management", and unquestioning "submission" to their husbands (Heck 23) which are roles society imposed on the woman.

Although set in different parts of Africa, Tsitsi Dangarembga's, *Nervous Conditions* (Rhodesia, present-day Zimbabwe in South Africa), and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's, *Purple Hibiscus* (Nigeria, West Africa) represent the diverse voices in African literature by highlighting females whose resiliency in the face of tragedy questions the very nature of victimization. Their

focus is not just on the female characters, but rather on the journey of profound struggles and the triumphs of women in postcolonial Africa.

Therefore, through content analysis, this study seeks to delve into female experiences in both literary texts and how they are portrayed—as victims or villains. That is, how Adichie and Dangarembga portray the responses of their female characters in the face of trauma and patriarchal control. The study also seeks to explore the importance of a community in achieving agency in both texts under discourse.

Significance of the Study

This study holds paramount significance in the context of the ongoing debates surrounding feminism in Africa. The discourse on feminism in the African context has been multifaceted, with divergent views characterizing it as 'un-African' or 'anti-African' due to its perceived challenge to cultural norms and masculinity. This resistance to feminism in Africa is often tied to it being viewed as a threat to identity, which is a unique facet of culture. However, what critics of feminism fail to realize is that the discourse on feminism in Africa is not monolithic. That is, there are unique challenges and perspectives due to the vastness of African culture, that shape, and influence feminism and feminists fight for an inclusive and equitable society.

In a similar vein, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's perspective, as exemplified in her famous Ted Talk "We Should All Be Feminists," serves as a concrete illustration of an important viewpoint within the African feminist discourse. She defines feminism as an acknowledgment of the gender problem and a commitment to addressing it. She further asserts that a feminist is "a man or a woman who says 'Yes, there is a problem with gender'...and we must fix it" (Adichie 29:25/30:15).

Accordingly, authors like Chimamanda Adichie and Tsitsi Dangarembga are excellent voices representing the diverse experiences of African women profoundly impacted by patriarchy. Adichie and Dangarembga, through their works *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) and *Nervous Conditions* (1988), contribute to the feminist discourse by portraying resilience in the face of adversity. However, existing scholarly engagements have often focused on the feminist aspects of these texts and the resilience displayed by the characters, overlooking a crucial dimension— the concept of female agency as a state of interdependence.

Interdependence in this context, suggests that the empowerment of the female characters in both literary texts is not solely on individual agency and voice which are crucial elements of feminist struggles, but can be achieved through a web of relationship with others, whether it be with other women, family members, or the broader community. Thus, interdependence recognizes the importance of collective efforts and mutual support in addressing the challenges posed by patriarchy rather than individual autonomy.

This study is beneficial to all and sundry because it goes beyond the literary analysis to offer insights into the psychological, cultural, and social impact of patriarchy— prompting cognitive shifts, individual empowerment, and change in societal expectations of women.

Theoretical Frameworks

The importance of grounding literary works in theoretical principles cannot be overemphasized as it gives readers a view or perspective from which to understand writers and works of literature. To better understand the need for literary theories in works of literature, Krieger Murray in "Words about Words: Theory, Criticism, and the Literary Text," posits that theories of literature are the answers, implicit or explicit, that form the set of assumptions behind any critical act" (19). That is, literary theories are not merely abstract concepts but practical tools

that help shape one's approach and interpretation of a text. Thereby influencing our understanding of a text's meaning, themes, and artistic elements. For this reason, this study will adopt the feminism theory, Judith Herman's idea of psychological trauma, and Bassel Van der Kolk's trauma theory.

<p style="text-align:center;">*The Feminism Theory*</p>

The Feminist theory is a crucial literary framework that centers on the examination of gender dynamics. Its roots can be traced to the seminal Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, a historic gathering spearheaded by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott. The trajectory of feminist thought has since evolved through subsequent waves, reaching the contemporary fourth wave. Throughout this progression, the overarching goal of the feminist movement remains steadfast — to confront and dismantle patriarchy and all forms of oppression and discrimination. Thus, in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, bell hooks contribute a significant perspective to this discourse. Hooks posits that the war between the male and female genders is fundamentally driven by sexist discrimination, exploitation, and oppression. In a similar vein, she asserts that feminism is a dedicated struggle aimed at dismantling sexist oppression and eradicating the pervasive ideology of domination (24-34), an endeavor that is not only crucial for addressing gender-based oppression but is also a pivotal step toward eliminating various other forms of oppression (36). This places feminism in a position of power—one that has a transformative force in addressing broader social injustices.

Beyond dismantling sexist oppression and domination, the feminist movement strives to "create spaces for diverse voices to speak for themselves" (Egbert and Sanden 8). That is, to challenge societal structures that have historically silenced or marginalized them. Accordingly, hooks emphasize the power of voice by adding that rather than women remaining and accepting

the role of "a silent majority" and the status quo of victimization (1), it is important for them to question and challenge societal roles that want them to "accept their lot in life without visible questions, without organized protest, without collective anger or rage" (1). This advocacy cultivates a culture of collectivity in rejecting passivity and encourages women to take up agency to shape their destinies, as well as to ensure an equitable and inclusive society.

Therefore, this research is anchored in feminist theory as its foundational framework because it is an intersectional approach to understanding gender inequality and the pervasive theme of patriarchy in both texts under discourse. Through the lens of this theory, the study will concentrate on exploring how Adichie and Dangarembga depict women's experiences, the obstacles they confront in a patriarchal society, and their evolution toward attaining agency within the context of the texts under discussion.

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 et al.'s 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 (4). This means that trauma can change our moods and cognition through nightmares, flashback, 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 psychological trauma, Judith Herman, in *Trauma and Recovery*, provides further insight by describing it as "an affliction of the powerless" (24). Herman explains that understanding psychological trauma entails recognizing it as a condition where

individuals bear witness to horrible events (4) which leaves them deeply scathed. 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* and Dangarembga in *Nervous Conditions* 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 Van der Kolk et al.

Using Van der Kolk's trauma theory and Judith Herman's psychological trauma theory which focuses on three stages—the impact of trauma, the establishment of defenses, and the process of healing and recovery—this study seeks to explore how trauma is portrayed in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, its effects on the characters, the character's experiences, their inner struggles, their journey to resilience, and their capacity for agency in the face of trauma and patriarchal control.

Chapters Overview

Chapter One introduces the topic. It gives an overview of the theoretical frameworks that are used in this research.

Chapter Two focuses on key terms important for this study and the theoretical frameworks. Also, the chapter highlights the relationship between the key terms and what several scholars have written about Chimamanda Adichie *Purple Hibiscus* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*.

Chapter three focuses on an analysis of Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions.* Through a content analysis, the research focuses on how Dangarembga portrays gendered trauma in the text and how patriarchal norms impact the female characters. It further looks at Dangarembga's portrayal of the female characters as victims or villains.

Chapter four focuses on an analysis of Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. The analysis foregrounds the pervasive theme of patriarchy, how Adichie portrays trauma in the narrative, and how she portrays her female characters as either victims or villains.

Chapter five concludes the research, focusing on the differences and similarities in both texts under discourse.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter focuses on key subtopics such as African feminist writers and their literary canon,

the concept of patriarchy in Africa, and how trauma is portrayed in African Women's literature.

Using these key subtopics as a guide, this chapter explores a few works of literature by several

scholars to show their relationship with the primary texts for this study.

African Feminist Writers and their Literary Canon

The African woman writer's role is instrumental in literature because it provides readers

with a nuanced understanding of what Francoise Lionnet refers to as "the mediated process of

reading and decoding" the intricate societal fabric into which she is born (qtd. in Katrak 1).

Within this intricate tapestry of most African societies, women are second-class citizens; and

ingrained with the expectation to conform to predefined roles, primarily as wives or embody

wifely virtues— a social construction marked by partiality.

For the girl child, her role is marked by domestic responsibilities, a role she was molded

into. In addition to that, she is expected to teach her daughters to adhere to traditional norms or

be blamed for negligence. In addressing this intricate web of societal expectations, Catherine

Acholonu, in her seminal work, *Motherism: The Afro-centric Alternative to Feminism* sheds light

on the prevailing cultural perspective. According to Acholonu, "For many African people,

gender is not necessarily a biological concept but rather a social construct which reveals itself or

is created in the course of a person's life within his or her particular community" (22). Thereby

encapsulating the idea that a woman's role in Africa is socially construed within the fabric of her

community and not determined by biology. Acholonu's assertion is reminiscent of Western

feminist writer, Simone de Beauvoir's assertion in *The Second Sex* that "one is not born, but

rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir 1211). However, she applies this in her view of the place of women in African society.

African women writers recognizing these social constructs, have taken to literature to serve as a vital agent of change to unravel these societal norms and challenge the stereotypical roles assigned to women. While the African woman writer employs her narratives as a powerful tool to disrupt traditional societal narratives, the perspective of Nigerian male-authored scholar Chinweizu critiques this movement. In his work *Anatomy of Female Power: A Masculinist Dissection of Matriarchy*, Chinweizu characterizes the feminist movement as a collective of 'bored matriarchists,' 'frustrated tomboys,' and 'natural termagants' (118). Thereby shedding light on the contrasting viewpoints within the discourse on gender.

He further asserts that feminism is a "revolt in paradise," and that the:

> feminist propaganda has sought to persuade the world that women are powerless in society and that men are natural oppressors of women, it claims that wives are subordinates to their husbands in the home; and that, outside the home, men have excluded women from political, economic and cultural power…. And for proof they point to the public structures of political, economic and cultural power, and show that these are almost exclusively occupied by men. (9)

This assertion suggests a disruption of established norms and power dynamics. According to his analysis, feminist rebels are seen as jeopardizing the ancient matriarchal privileges enjoyed by women (122); Such as "women's control of the womb; women's control of the kitchen; [and] women's control of the cradle" (14). By employing the term "rebels," Chinweizu implies a divergence from the traditional societal roles historically assigned to women. From his perspective as a man, he perceives these roles as privileges, and he posits that feminists seek to

upset what he regards as a utopian existence for women. However, this interpretation contrasts with the reality experienced by women who often face societal constraints rather than enjoying genuine autonomy, hence, Chinweizu's perspective exposes the internal dissent within the discourse of gender politics.

In a similar vein, Nwosu Onyebuchi in "Victims and Villains of Feminist War: A Masculinist Reading of Chinweizu's *Anatomy of Female Power*" applauds Chinweizu for his dissenting masculinist view of feminism. Nwosu argues that feminists suggest, through their actions, that men conspired in the past to orchestrate a coup, overthrowing women and assuming dominance over societal socio-economic, and political frameworks (145). He goes on to argue that in true essence, men are the true victims and women, the oppressors (146), a dissenting position that exposes the insidiousness of male privileges and shows the divergence of opinions surrounding gender dynamics and societal structures. It also challenges the conventional feminist narrative that often highlights the systemic oppression of women by men.

Moreover, the dissenting views on feminism misconstrue the true essence of African feminism which "do not seek equality but recognition" (Egbung 85). That is, feminism addresses patriarchal norms that devalue women and make them invisible. However, the dissenting views view feminism as a perceived threat and a copycat of Western American/European feminism, which focuses on gender equality in both private and public spheres. To counter this perception, Chioma Steady in *African Feminism* emphasizes that African feminism is a distinct and multifaceted entity, independent of its Western counterpart that fails to:

> effectively address concerns about corporate globalization, race, class, and other social
> divisions... it finds largely to be fuelled by an anti-male ideology and rooted in

individualistic preoccupations with gender equality in jobs, positions, power, and sexual expression, while focusing less on social and humanistic transformations (1).

Given Steady's perspective, African feminism is portrayed as a diverse and complex movement that goes beyond the narrow focus of Western feminism. African Feminism is characterized by a commitment to addressing many social issues, race, and class divisions. Moreover, it seeks to avoid being reduced to a singular, anti-male ideology and strives for more comprehensive social and humanistic transformations.

To underscore the disparities between Western feminism and African feminism, Senegalese woman writer Mariama Ba contributes a poignant perspective in "The Political Function of Written African Literatures." According to Ba,

[T]he African woman writer has a special mission, given that the African social context is marked by glaring gender inequalities, exploitation, and ageless barbaric oppression of the so-called weaker sex. More than her male-counterpart, she must document fully the African women's condition. Injustices are still evident, segregation continues, despite the ten-year plan for women's development declared by the United Nations, in spite of grandiose discourse and laudable intentions. Discriminations are still abundant inside families and institutions, on the street, in the workplace, in political assemblies. (416)

Ba's perspective highlights the importance of female writers in literature. It further highlights how these writers use their voices to address social injustices and gender-based disparities within the African context. The narratives of these female writers' act as conduits for change and a voice for the voiceless.

Accordingly, Lewis Desiree in *Introduction: African Feminisms* applauds African female writers for exploring strategic forms to ensure an equitable and inclusive society. She adds that

"fiction and autobiography are important means by which African women writers contest legacies of imperial and male dominance" (7). This means that the literary forms used by these writers are powerful tools by which they reclaim their voices, challenge existing power structures, and contribute to reshaping the narratives that have historically been shaped by imperialism and male perspectives. Also, the use of these literary forms has a universal appeal because it transcends cultural boundaries and can foster cross-cultural understanding and empathy.

Furthermore, the need for women writers to assert their unique voices and perspectives through writing resonates with Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's notion of the woman writer's role which is to "examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme images of "angel" and "monster" which male authors have generated for her" (17). This directive from Gilbert and Gubar is to remind the woman writer that through writing, she can transcend, confront, and achieve true liberation from historically imposed images and redefine the narrative surrounding women in literature.

Adichie and Dangarembga are no different in these regards. These writers project their sentiments using female characters and set within the African context. Their female characters are particularly those who defy societal expectations imposed by patriarchy, as noted by Egbung Itang in *Gender Complementarity in African Literature* (86). Also, a literary scholar, Lindsay Aegerter in her review of Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, emphasizes that Dangarembga's novel "...allows her female characters to protest the predicament of African women not by positioning themselves in opposition to their oppressors...but by depicting African women's identity in terms of constantly shifting personality" (232). This means that Dangarembga portrays resistance by presenting her female characters as multifaceted individuals who resist

being pigeonholed into stereotypical roles defined by patriarchy. It also means that

Dangarembga transcends conventional narratives by avoiding direct societal confrontation.

Instead, her female characters transform and evolve from society's established image of women.

This approach taken by Dangarembga is evident at the beginning of the text, where she inserts

herself through the narrator, Tambu. By employing this narrative strategy, the author establishes

a personal connection with her readers and allows her readers to comprehend the experiences

and responses of female characters to gender disparity. The protagonist Tambu recounts,

> ... [M]y 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. (*Nervous Conditions* 1)

Dangarembga's protagonist, Tambu's enumeration of the female characters who defy societal

norms aligns with Aegerter's perspective of Dangarembga's intricate narrative approach which is

within the context of her society. Through the female characters in her text, Dangarembga

prompts a heightened awareness of the importance of women having a voice and actively

participating in shaping their destinies rather than passively conforming to prescribed roles. To

address this, a literary scholar Carolyn Shaw in "'You Had a Daughter, but I Am Becoming a

Woman': Sexuality, Feminism and Postcoloniality in Tsitsi Dangarembga's 'Nervous Conditions'

and 'She No Longer Weeps,'" appraises the author on her idea of feminism reflective in her

narratives. According to Shaw, for Dangarembga, "feminism stands for voice, personal integrity,

assertion of self...recognition of the value of women's productive and reproductive labor" (14).

Also, Chichaya Rutendo in her review of Dangarembga's narratives describes her as one who is

interested in penning down issues that affect her as well as other women ("Black and Female by

Tsitsi Dangarembga"). What this means is that Dangarembga's narrative is a powerful tool for advocating gender equality and empowering women within the complex context of her society.

Moreso, it is noteworthy that Dangarembga may have drawn inspiration from the teachings of a prominent Black lesbian feminist writer, Audre Lorde in "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action." Lorde, acknowledging the significance of resistance, underscores the importance of women writers addressing societal silences, stating, "there are many silences to be broken" (44). While resistance is an important factor in dismantling silence, Lorde urges women writers to become advocates for other women, stressing, "Where the words of women are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in our pertinence to our lives" (44). This highlights the pivotal role of women writers as catalysts for change, urging them to empower fellow women and encourage them to speak out, as Lorde asserts that their silence cannot offer them protection (Lorde 41). Also, it underscores the transformative power of literature in dismantling societal silences and fostering empowerment through narratives.

In a similar vein, Chimamanda Adichie remains deeply rooted in the African context, aligning herself with the legacy of influential female writers like Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Mariama Bâ, Ama Ata Aidoo, and Tsitsi Dangarembga. As a third-generation writer, Adichie follows in their footsteps by portraying resilient female characters in her narratives, addressing themes such as gender roles, advocacy for women's rights, agency, and resilience that resonate with the broader landscape of African women's literature.

In Adichie's play *For Love of Biafra* (1998), a prequel to her novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie's central character, a woman, Adaobi defiantly rejects her lover, Mohammed, because he is from the North which was regarded as the oppressor's side during the Nigeria/Biafra civil war.

Americanah (2013) features another female character, Ifemelu, embodying strength as she navigates cultural complexities and establishes her identity in a foreign land. *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) portrays Olanna and Kainene, two sisters grappling with the impact of the Nigerian Civil War on their families, highlighting women's strength in times of conflict. In *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), Adichie presents the character, Kambili with whom she addresses the themes of domestic violence, religious fanaticism, suppression of voice, and how women can break free from oppressive circumstances. Also, in her non-fiction work *Dear Ijeawele or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017), Adichie, using her own voice, offers advice on raising a feminist daughter, sharing personal experiences and insights. Through this medium, she portrays women, including herself, as voices of wisdom and agents of change.

For this reason, Chielozona Eze in her review of Adichie in "Introduction: The Ethical Turn in African Literature," observes that Adichie is one of those writers who is interested in exploring the condition of humans in her local sphere and continues to draw attention to the woman's body as a violated entity (Eze 2-3). Also, in connection to Eze's stance, Heather Hewett in "Coming of Age: Chimamanda Adichie and the Voice of the Third Generation" praises Adichie as one who writes about the embodied experiences of female characters in Nigeria and the Nigerian diaspora (81). Thereby positioning Adichie as not just a storyteller, but a socially conscious writer committed to addressing profound themes in African women's literature.

Although Adichie focuses on the victimization of women within the African context, she does not leave aside the catastrophic/psychological effects of colonization, gender disparity, and domestic abuse on the individual psyche. Her literary works, particularly *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Purple Hibiscu*s can be regarded as trauma narratives, a concept which Vickroy Laurie in *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* describes as works that keenly address

humanmade traumatic situations. These narratives serve as implicit critiques, shedding light on how social, economic, and political structures can both create and perpetuate trauma (Laurie 4).

<p style="text-align:center;">*Patriarchy in Africa*</p>

According to a Nigerian gender scholar, Oyeronke Oyewunmi in "Colonizing Bodies and Minds: Gender and Colonialism," patriarchy in Africa can be traced to Africa's colonial history and that asides from the colonizer and the colonized at the time of colonialism in Africa, there were two other categorizations of humans— men and women. The Europeans, according to Oyewunmi, separated men and women based on gender, they also interacted more with the male chiefs to structure policies while neglecting the female chiefs (121-122). Through this claim, Oyewunmi believes that men became more visible and given power over their female counterparts, which gave rise to patriarchy in Africa. However, 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 Egbung Itang in "Gender Complementarity in African Literature," define it as a systemic structure that privileges male superiority while subordinating females (83). Nneka 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 consider them as mere

appendages to the society. It is a system which urges the accentuation of the logic of women isolation and subtle exclusion from participation in national politics (334). Thus, it explains that women are treated as mere appendages to society with patriarchy restricting their autonomy and perpetuating gender inequalities. In a similar vein, Monique Ekpong takes a feminist perspective in "Feminist Consciousness," she defines patriarchy as a "system of sexual relationship… in which males rule over females as a matter of birthright priority" (84). Thereby implying that male domination has stood the test of time, leading men to consistently regard women as their inferiors both physically and mentally. Also, Johnson Allan refers to patriarchy as a "male-centered, male-identified, and male-dominated" social structure (24), that is an observation that underscores the idea that patriarchy is not just a system where men hold power, but it is oriented around male perspectives, interests, and dominance.

All these definitions denote patriarchy as a social structure characterized by male dominance and female subordination. Hence, before this contemporary definition of patriarchy took precedence in gender discussions, Max Weber in 1947 approached the concept from a political perspective. Weber described patriarchy as a "system of government in which men ruled societies through their position as heads of households" (quoted in Walby 214). This earlier definition underscores the idea that patriarchy extends beyond individual behavior and encompasses broader political structures, emphasizing the role of men as leaders within the societal framework. However, what underscores the above views is a male-dominated system where the subjugation of women occurs.

Patriarchy, a universal concept associated with the subordination of females, assumes a distinctive prominence in Africa. Adeyinka Aderinto supports this perspective, observing that though women worldwide face subjugation and discrimination, it is a common practice in

developing regions such as Asia and Africa (176). Hence, the heightened prominence of patriarchy in Africa is intricately linked to the historical influence of colonialism, which played a significant role in shaping and reinforcing gender dynamics on the continent.

In her research on patriarchy in Africa, Tamale in "Taking the Beast by its Horns: Formal Resistance to Women's Oppression in Africa," asserts that the advent of colonialism pushed the African woman to limits of subordination and stripped her of the power she exuded before it came to Africa (5). This implies that women wielded power before the coming of the colonialists.

To support this stance, a scholar Sudarkasa in "The Status of Women in Indigenous African Societies" claims that in precolonial times, African women were conspicuous in "high places." They occupied the roles of queen mothers; queen-sisters; princesses, chiefs, and holders of other offices in towns and villages (91). This assertion reinforces the idea that, before colonialism, African women held positions of authority and influence.

However, Irakoze, in "Pre-colonial Africans were also patriarchs," challenges the notion that patriarchy was introduced by colonialism, asserting that it existed before the arrival of colonialists. She argues that African women during precolonial times simply adhered to their assigned roles, and contrary to the romanticized view, "pre-colonial Africa was never heaven for women" (Irakoze). Another scholar, Maria Rojas, aligns with Irakoze's perspective and agrees to the notion that patriarchy predates colonial rule, stating that the "societies of precolonial Nigeria believed men superior to women and, to some extent, in control of women" (1). This viewpoint counters the idea that colonialism solely shaped patriarchal structures in Africa, emphasizing that patriarchal norms existed within indigenous African societies prior to external influence. Also,

26

the viewpoints surrounding the origins of patriarchy in Africa make the discourse on patriarchy a complex topic.

Additionally, male dominance in Africa is evident not only in societal structures but also within the familial unit, particularly manifested in male children being favored over their female counterparts. This gender disparity is highlighted in Sylvia Tamale's work "Gender Trauma in Africa," which sheds light on this issue of gender roles, articulating the impact of patriarchy on the lives of African women. According to Tamale,

> Patriarchy...draws an artificial line to separate the domestic (private) arena from the public one. The public sphere represents men and is the locus of socially valued activities such as politics and business, while the private is representative of domestic activities centered around the family. The former represents society, while the latter represents culture. Women are confined to the domestic arena, a space where men rule over them as heads of the family? while men spend most of their time in the public realm. The rationalization is that women's reproductive roles make them biologically and "naturally" predisposed to rearing children and taking care of the domestic sphere. Biology, instead of gender, is used to explain social differences between men and women. (52)

By highlighting this issue, Tamale proves that inequality in Africa is a grave problem that limits women and confines them to certain roles. It is worthy of note that the renowned patriarchal scholar Chinweizu believes that men and women should be assigned different roles. According to Chinweizu, public spaces are meant for men, while the private sphere is designated for women. His reasoning for this division is based on what he identifies as the five pillars of female power, each associated with women's roles in the private domain:

Women's control of the womb; women's control of the kitchen; women's control of the

cradle; the psychological immaturity of man relative to woman; and man's tendency to

be deranged by his own excited penis. These conditions are the five pillars of female

power; they are decisive for its dominance over male power (14- 15).

This means that Chinweizu's perspective arises from his identity both as a man and an African

who supports gender inequality. His stance also reinforces traditional gender stereotypes,

restricting individuals' opportunities and choices based on assigned gender roles.

In her memoir, Mukhtar Mai highlights the roots of such views held by men like

Chinweizu. According to her, in Africa, "A woman is nothing more than an object of exchange

from birth to marriage, according to custom, she has no rights" (qtd. in Williams). This

underscores how gender-based discrimination is deeply ingrained in patriarchal norms,

portraying women's value solely to their roles as wives for domestic duties and reproduction and

neglecting their rights and agency. For this reason, Judith Sargent Murray condemns such

patriarchal norms regarding them as partial. In her text "On the Equality of the Sexes," she posits

that a culture is partial when it teaches the male child to "aspire" while the female child is "early

confined and limited" (876). Thus, Murray's argument calls for a reevaluation of these cultural

norms, advocating for a more inclusive and equitable approach that recognizes the potential and

aspirations of both genders.

Furthermore, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie brilliantly identifies that the roots of patriarchy

are within the confines of the home. She emphasizes that dismantling this issue requires a

transformation in the way children, both male and female, are raised and that women,

particularly mothers, wield the power to effect change and shape a future free from gender

inequalities. In *Dear Ijeawele or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, Adichie imparts

crucial guidance for mothers in nurturing feminist ideals in their children, emphasizing the significance of cultivating a mindset that acknowledges equality.

Her first foundational tool for mothers is to instill in their daughters the unwavering belief that they matter equally, irrespective of societal norms or gender expectations. This fundamental assertion, "I matter. I matter equally. Full stop" lays the groundwork for dismantling ingrained prejudices and fostering a sense of self-worth in young girls (8).

To combat the imposition of gender roles, Adichie advocates for rejecting the notion entirely. Mothers are urged not to limit their daughters based on societal expectations, steering clear of reinforcing stereotypes that dictate what activities are deemed suitable for each gender. This includes debunking the fallacy that skills like cooking are inherently tied to gender, emphasizing that such life skills are universal and not predetermined by one's sex.

She further expresses how mothers should act and how they should raise their daughters in the following lines:

"Be a full person. Your child will benefit from that" ("First Suggestion").

"Do not ever tell her that she should or should not do something because she is a girl" ("Third Suggestion").

"We also need to question the idea of marriage as a prize to women...stop conditioning women to see marriage as a prize." ("Fourth Suggestion")

"Please see Chizalum as an individual. Not as a girl who should be a certain way" ("Fourth Suggestion").

"Encourage her to speak her mind" (Eighth Suggestion).

"Teach her to question our culture's selective use of biology as 'reasons' for social norms." (Eleventh Suggestion)

In doing so, Adichie's suggestions in her Feminist Manifesto are highlighted to raise and nurture a new generation that questions, challenges, and transcends the limitations imposed by patriarchal structures, fostering a society where individuals are valued for their inherent worth rather than constrained by gender-based expectations.

<p style="text-align:center">Trauma in African Women's Literature</p>

Trauma is a pervasive theme in African women's literature that reflects the harsh realities of gender-based violence. According to the World Health Organization, approximately 20% of women in the Western Pacific, 22% in Europe, 25% in America, and 33% of women in Africa have endured various forms of violence in their lifetime ("Violence against Women"), a statistic that exposes the insidious treatment women go through based on their gender and the resulting trauma that follows after experiencing such violence.

The resulting trauma that follows after experiencing oppressive practices based on one's gender is referred to as gendered trauma and this trauma finds resonance in the works of African women writers. In Tobi Oloyede's "The Resilience of Female Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence in Southwest Nigeria," she defines gendered trauma as an outcome of oppressive societal structures, particularly stemming from "patriarchal societal institutions that devalue women" (27). That is, the root of women's psychological torture is linked to gender dynamics and power imbalances ingrained in Africa's societal fabric.

Moreso, these narratives often explore the intersectionality of trauma with postcolonialism, examining how historical events such as colonization, slavery, and conflict have left lasting imprints on the lives of African women. Female writers not only shed light on these historical traumas but also interrogate societal norms like patriarchy that perpetuate power imbalances and contribute to the cycle of trauma. In shedding light on the reason African women

writers portray trauma in literature, Michelle Balaev in "Trends in Trauma Theory," highlights

that these narratives demonstrate how "a traumatic event disrupts attachments between self and

others by challenging fundamental assumptions (Balaev 150). In other words, trauma narratives

shed light on the destructive nature of traumatic experiences on individuals whilst critiquing the

factors that perpetuate trauma. To further emphasize how writers explore trauma in narratives,

Balaev writes:

> The trauma novel conveys a diversity of extreme emotional states through an assortment
>
> of narrative innovations, such as landscape imagery, temporal fissures, silence, or
>
> narrative omission...authors employ a nonlinear plot or disruptive temporal sequences to
>
> emphasize mental confusion, chaos, or contemplation as a response to the experience.
>
> The narrative strategy of silence may create a 'gap' in time or feeling that allows the
>
> reader to imagine what might or could have happened to the protagonist. (159)

These narrative innovations as highlighted by Baleav foster the reader's engagement in

understanding the multifaceted nature of traumatic experiences. Also using these traumatic

innovations, Emilie Diouf in "African Women Writing Trauma," describes that the African

female writer appeals to her audience "as an 'other,' about the 'other' from within a social,

cultural, and political framework, in which the 'other' experiences strategic and institutionalized

oppression is a journey of expression" (Diouf 32-33). Diouf's use of the word "other" is

reminiscent of Simone Beauvoir's argument in *The Second Sex.* In it, she challenges society for

relegating women to the position of the 'other' and for positioning men as the 'subject.' Thus,

using this concept, Diouf implies that the African female writer relays her message by writing to

other women like her in a patriarchal society, using the stories of other women who have been

subjugated by the patriarchal society as a means to encourage them to rise above oppression,

confront societal vices, and strive for autonomy and agency.

CHAPTER 3. TSITSI DANGAREMGBA'S Nervous Conditions (1988)

Introduction

This chapter is focused on the analysis of the selected work for this research and how the work

relates to the theoretical frameworks outlined for this study. The chapter explores how Tsitsi

Dangarembga portrays gendered trauma and how it connects to patriarchy. It also explores the

different female characters in the text looking at them through a lens as victims and/or villains.

A Synopsis of Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions

Nervous Conditions (1988) is a bildungsroman novel set in post-colonial Rhodesia,

(present-day Zimbabwe South Africa) within the late 1960s to early 1970s. It is a novel told

using a first-person point of view and the focus of the novel is on five major female characters:

Tambu, Maiguru, Nyasha, Lucia, and Mainini. In addition to the major characters, the male

characters such as Babamukuru, Jeremiah, Takesure, Nhamo, and Chido are minor characters

whose stories revolve around the female characters.

Dangarembga introduces Tambu, the central character of the narrative whose family

members are deeply entrenched in patriarchal norms. They limit Tambu's access to formal

education, preferring to equip her with domestic skills because of her gender, However, her

brother, Nhamo is opportune to go to school. Fortunately, the death of Nhamo paves the way for

Tambu to attend the mission school which was initially designated for her brother. This event

lays the foundation for the central theme of the novel—gender inequality.

While under her parents, Tambu thought that poverty and lack of education influenced

her parents' decision as they urged her to "...Stay at home with [her] mother. Learn to cook and

clean. Grow vegetables" (15). However, she realizes that the limitation was beyond affluence

and education when she moves to Babamukuru's home to attend the mission school. Tambu

realizes that her role model, Maiguru, Babamukuru's wife was subjected to several limitations within their home solely because of her gender. Nyasha, Babamukuru's daughter also faces the same fate as her mother and becomes traumatized.

Tambu conforms to the patriarchal norms in Babamukuru's household like his wife, Maiguru, and his daughter Nyasha. However, she breaks free from the limiting norms when she refuses to attend her parents' white wedding which was masterminded by Babamukuru because of his conformity to the colonial ways. Nyasha and Maiguru on the other hand, rebel against Babamukuru and challenge the status quo.

Through this narrative, Dangarembga weaves a tapestry of voices portraying societal limitations imposed on women, its impact on their physical and psychological well-being, and how the female characters in the text subvert/transcend the limitations imposed on them, achieving agency.

<div align="center">

Patriarchy in Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions

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Patriarchy, a social structure characterized by elements such as exploitation, control, domination, and oppression, is a pervasive and central theme in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions.* In her novel, Dangarembga intricately captures how women are devalued, misrepresented, exploited, and abused by society through the lens of five female characters: Tambudzai, Mainini, Lucia, Nyasha, and Maiguru.

Dangarembga vividly exposes the patriarchal culture prevalent in African societies, particularly through the lens of educational disparities. In many African homes, there is a preference for educating male children over their female counterparts, and this is driven by the belief that a girl's education primarily benefits the family into which she marries. Consequently, rather than investing in the education of female children, they are often groomed with domestic

skills, perpetuating the notion that their primary purpose is to be domestically equipped for marriage. Just like Dangarembga, Ayo Kehinde in "Patriarchal Suppression and Neurosis" posits,

> Preference for male pre-disposes the girl-child to danger (physically and psychologically), from birth to childhood. She is seen as a burden, not an asset, to the paterfamilias. A boy child is seen as a person who can enlarge the family. On the other hand, a girl child is seen as one who will reduce the household, because she can be "acquired" by another family as a wife. (Kehinde 176)

This means that gender favoritism/inequality in most African homes affects not just the physical, but the psyche of the girl-child because she begins to view herself as inferior and the family's sacrificial lamb. In addition to this perspective, it is evident that women are undervalued and deprived of learning beyond the domestic sphere, that is, they are relegated to the private sphere (domestic roles) while the public sphere is reserved for men —a proposition that anti-feminist writer and masculinist, Chinweizu supports.

This gender dynamic pervasive in most African contexts is intricately portrayed in *Nervous Conditions* when Tambu's father, Jeremiah opposes her pursuit of knowledge and education, asserting, "Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables" (15). This perspective underscores men's definition of femininity and indirectly confines Tambu to domesticity—a role and a fate already accepted by her mother through marriage.

In contrast, Tambu's brother, Nhamo, is bestowed with the opportunity of 'lifting the branch' of his family from poverty through education (4) — an African ideology critiqued by Judith Sargent Murray in her essay, *On the Equality of the Sexes*. Murray, questioning the fairness of such practices, asserts, "As the years increase, the sister must be wholly

domesticated, while the brother is led by the hand through all the flowery paths of science...it is partiality!" (876). That is, gendered education is evidence of the inherent injustice meted out to women. Through this observation, Murray piques her readers on the systemic bias that perpetuates gender inequalities.

The prioritization of the male child over the female child within a family as highlighted in *Nervous Conditions*, creates a power dynamic where men naturally assume a superior position. This inherent superiority allows them to exert control over their female counterparts, subjecting them to feelings of inferiority and a sense of discouragement solely based on their gender. This assertion is acknowledged in Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*, where she observes that the family system is a significant contributor to women's oppression (32), highlighting that the familial unit is where patriarchal values are ingrained in children, particularly the boy-child who is taught domination and control of the resources within the family.

A good example of the manifestation of such an oppressive dynamic within the family structure is Tambu's brother, Nhamo. Nhamo displays his superiority towards his sisters and actively subjugates them, using his perceived masculinity as a tool for control. Tambu realizing that Nhamo is trying to carry on the patriarchal tradition, expresses her dissatisfaction with the way Nhamo exploits her and his other sisters into performing tasks for him. She highlights that Nhamo is invariably playing society's script, referring to him playing patriarchal roles. According to Tambu, "[Nhamo] only wanted to demonstrate to us and himself that he had the power, the authority to make us do things for him. I hated fetching my brother's luggage" (10).

Nhamo's oppressive behavior as a man and the privileged 'subject' extends to his questioning Tambu's quest for education which firmly aligns with the societal norms that dictate

girls should not pursue academic endeavors. His dismissive remark, urging Tambu to "Pound well while I am eating potatoes at the mission!" (49), serves as a vivid manifestation of society's ingrained gender bias which portrays the power given to one gender over the other and how the woman is confined to domestic roles while the man enjoys the privileges of education.

Furthermore, how the patriarchal culture constrains and dictates women's roles within the family is vividly portrayed in *Nervous Conditions*. Through her narrator Tambu, Dangarembga's audience gains insight into the lives of women under patriarchal control with each one confined to predetermined roles solely based on their gender. First, Tambu's experience of being confined to domestic roles due to her gender resonates with the broader portrayal of how patriarchal norms dictate the lives of women in her family. Her mother, Mainini, and her aunt, Maiguru, face similar constraints imposed by societal expectations tied to their gender roles.

Through the narrator, 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, while he is revered within his community for his honorable deeds due to the wealth he displays while Maiguru is reduced to domesticity like the other women in his family. Due to Maiguru's passivity and silence to victimization, her daughter Nyasha gets caught in the same web of control. Nyasha becomes subjected to her father's control as he dictates the trajectory of her life to maintain his societal status.

In addition, Dangarembga critiques the patriarchal culture drawing her reader's 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 (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 (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 is a representation 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" (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, Dangarembga subverts traditional gender stereotypes by portraying the patriarchs in *Nervous Conditions* as weak men, contrary to the conventional notion that describes women as weak. The narrative highlights how the male figures exploit the strength of the women in their lives, challenging the assumed power dynamics. Examples from the text show how Nhamo, feeling threatened by Tambu's pursuit of education, resorts to stealing her farm proceedings to hinder her progress— an action that reflects his insecurity and the extent to which he perceives Tambu's empowerment as a threat to his status. Ironically, he receives assistance from Babamukuru, whose wealth comes from a woman. Babamukuru, a respectable man in his community is portrayed as the 'government' stealing from Maiguru to enrich himself and maintain his societal status. Also, Tambu's father, Jeremiah, is depicted as a self-indulgent fellow who prefers to sit in his homestead while his wife, Mainini, takes on the responsibility of going to the farm and selling her proceedings to support the family. By portraying these patriarchal figures as dependent or exploitative, Dangarembga disrupts conventional gender norms which

agree with Gilbert and Gubar's teaching, that is, to "transcend the extreme images of 'angel' and 'monster' which male authors have generated" for women (17). A stereotype that records women as the subjugated sex and passive actors in society. Thus, the author transcending these stereotypes helps women gain autonomy to challenge society's image of them.

The Roles of Women in Nervous Conditions: Victims or Villains

"There's two roles' women fit into: victim or villain. People will always see you as one thing. And the women who are victims are only victims because they don't have the guts to be the villain." _Ellen Pompeo

Pompeo's assertion of the roles that women fit into indicates a dichotomy in society's categorization of women. The terms 'victim' and 'villain' are synonymous with the early 18th century to late 19th-century European classification of the woman as 'angel' and 'monster' which was famously used by writers such as Virginia Woolf, Coventry Patmore, Gilbert, and Gubar. Victims, in this context, refer to women who conform to societal norms and their roles for them without protest. These women are passive actors within the patriarchal structure, and they are comfortable with men's image of them as the weaker sex, inferior and submissive. On the other hand, women who are labeled villains are women who choose to challenge and disrupt the norms placed upon them by society. They invariably kill the Angel in the house by speaking up against oppression while also educating other women to take up agency.

Women as Victims in Nervous Conditions: Accepting the Status Quo

Dangarembga vividly portrays women in the text who are victims of patriarchy and have become comfortable with the position and limitations placed upon them by society. According to bell hooks, the way to recognize such victimized women is "they accept their lot in life without visible questions, without organized protest, without collective anger or rage" (1), an assertion

that encapsulates that they accept the status quo. One female character Dangarembga portrays as having accepted the status quo is Mainini, Tambu's mother.

Given out in marriage at the age of fifteen to Jeremiah, Tambu's father, Mainini experienced a succession of male dominance that shaped her worldview and dictated her role within the family. Because of her gender, she experienced control first by her father and then by her husband and became dispirited, thus, conforming to the societal norms and expectations imposed by patriarchy. Unluckily for Mainini, her husband's laziness and alcohol use make him less productive in the homestead. She becomes the breadwinner, taking care of her children's fees and supporting the homestead using money made from her farm proceedings.

Mainini's experience with patriarchy becomes evident in her style as a parent. She encourages her children, including Tambu, to conform to established norms and not challenge the patriarchal structure. Tambu observes, "My mother, lips pressed tight...continue silently at her labours. The ferocious swings of her arms...restrained Netsai and me from making the slightest murmur of rebellion" (7), hence it highlights that Mainini perpetuates the cycle of gender expectations by limiting her daughters from breaking free from traditional roles. Another excerpt from the text that reiterates how Mainini conditions her daughters to accept the status quo is when Tambu seeks support from Mainini, as a woman and as her mother, to convince her father that women can be sent to school just like their male counterparts. She uses her aunt, Maiguru as an example of a woman who has got formal education. Instead, Mainini aligns herself with her husband's views on femininity and advises Tambu to heed her father. Mainini asserts:

Maiguru knew how to cook and clean and grow vegetables. 'The 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 can't decide today I want to do this, tomorrow I want to do that, the

next day I want to be educated! When there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one

who has to make them. And these things are not easy; you have to start learning them

early, from a very early age. The earlier the better so that it is easy later on...And it is

worse, with the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the

other...What will help you, my child, is to learn to carry your burdens with strength

(Dangarembga 16)

Mainini's response to Tambu's query is an indication of how most African mothers reinforce the

patriarchal structure rather than challenging it. By highlighting that the "business of

womanhood" is hinged on reproduction and domestic skills, Mainini contributes to the

perpetuation of gender disparity and limits the possibilities of her daughters breaking free from

traditional assigned roles. Her acceptance of the status quo echoes a feminist writer, Alexandra

D' amour's assertion that the impact of patriarchy on mothers controls their perception of a

woman's role and influences the way she (sub)consciously raises her daughters ("The

Patriarchy's Damage to Mother/Daughter Relationships").

Netsai's character in *Nervous Conditions* adds another layer to the exploration of women

who accept the status quo within the narrative. As one of Tambu's sisters, Netsai experiences the

oppressive behavior of her brother, Nhamo, who asserts his perceived superiority and authority

over his sisters. Nhamo's oppressive antics involve treating Netsai as a servant in the homestead,

assigning her tasks such as fetching his luggage without consideration for the weight or burden

imposed on her. Netsai's subjugation reflects the deeply ingrained patriarchal norms that favor

male superiority. Her silence and acceptance of the assigned societal roles highlight Tambu's

description of her as "the type that will make a sweet sad wife" (10), a commentary that has a

broader implication for women who are silent in the face of oppression. To add, the phrase 'sweet sad wife,' highlights that the consequence of not breaking free from traditional roles imposed on the woman is a sadness that disrupts the women's psychological makeup. Accordingly, Netsai's character mirrors the submissive life of her mother who has accepted the ingrained patriarchal norm and has passed it down to her children.

Maiguru is yet another character in the narrative that embodies the archetype of the "Angel in the House," which encapsulates the idea of a submissive wife to Babamukuru and a dedicated mother to her children, Nyasha and Chido. She serves as a blueprint for other women in her husband's family and was once used by Tambu to draw a parallel of comparison in her conversation with her mother. She expresses, "Look at Maiguru,...She is a better wife than you!" (10), an assertion that challenges her mother to see how women like Maiguru are treated in marriage as compared to how her father, Jeremiah treats her mother.

Tambu states:

> I could not follow the sense of my mother's words. My mother said being black was a burden because it made you, but Babamukuru was not poor. My mother said being a woman was a burden because you had to bear children and look after them and the husband. But I did not think this was true. Maiguru was well looked after by Babamukuru, in a big house on the mission...She was altogether a different kind of woman from my mother. I decided it was better to be like Maiguru, who was not poor and had not been crushed by the weight of womanhood. (16-17)

Here, the woman is described as facing dual oppression—that is, the oppression of being black and African and the oppression of being a woman—a double-edged sword that race and society

have placed upon her. To further restate Mainini's assertion, Dangarembga in her novel *Black and Female* emphasizes that this dual oppression pervasive in the text mirrors Zimbabwe where "to be ...black and female... is to live at the epicenter of structural racism and a brutal militarised patriarchy" (96). However, Tambu rejects this assertion with the belief that the limitation she experiences stems from the poverty mindset of her father and her mother because, according to her, women like Maiguru (her aunt) are neither oppressed by race nor gender but unknown to Tambu, regardless of a woman's social class, Maiguru is seen as inferior and second-class citizen in society.

Consequently, Tambu becomes disillusioned when she realizes that Maiguru, much like her mother, is subjected to and silenced by patriarchal control. This sense of disillusionment is vividly illustrated through the portrayal of Babamukuru's residence. The outward charm of his home sharply contrasts with the stark reality found within, particularly the kitchen. The kitchen which is society's domain for the woman is described by the narrator as a neglected space with "old linoleum", "broken windows", and "uncoordinated color patterns" (67); a description that stands as a poignant metaphor for the challenges endured by the women who inhabit it (Maiguru and Nyasha) and serves as a symbolic representation of the broader struggles faced by women in society to be recognized.

Tambu who had once believed that Maiguru was living a better life than other women in her homestead realizes over time the internal struggles Maiguru and Nyasha face at the hands of Babamukuru. For this reason, she asserts:

> The victimization, I saw, was universal. It didn't depend on poverty, on lack of education, or on tradition. It didn't depend on any of the things I had thought it depended on. Men

took it everywhere with them. Even heroes like Babamukuru did it. And that was the

problem... Femaleness as opposed and inferior to maleness (118)

From her assertion, one can tell that Tambu expresses her disillusionment through the idea that

the subjugation of women is universal and transcends socioeconomic status, tradition, and

education. She, therefore, becomes aware that society has it ingrained in every man to see

himself as superior and to see the woman as inferior.

Furthermore, Maiguru's silence despite her husband's exploitation of her wealth

highlights her passivity in the face of victimization. However, there is a possibility that Maiguru

"did not have a name for the tyranny of private life" that she was experiencing at the time

(Herman 41). That is, she lacked the words to describe the specific form of abuse or control she

was experiencing and that "a well-established democracy in the public sphere could coexist with

conditions of primitive autocracy or advanced dictatorship in the home (Herman 41). Her

situation becomes an example of women who, despite being victims of oppression, find

themselves unable to confront or challenge it. Notably, her consistent use of a low tone and

endearing terms like "Daddy-dear" and "Daddy-pie" to massage her husband's ego underscores

her role as a people-pleaser, as observed by Tambu (74). This portrayal further highlights the

power dynamics within their relationship as a couple and sheds light on the societal expectations

and constraints that force women into subordinate roles, where challenging the status quo

becomes a herculean task.

In addition, Tambu's character opens another layer to the exploration of women who

accept the status quo within the narrative. Despite her defiance against patriarchal norms that

silenced women, and denied them access to formal education, including Nhamo's reinforcement

of gendered hierarchies among the siblings, Tambu undergoes a transformative shift in her

behavior and mindset when she begins to question Nyasha's resistance to Babamukuru's oppressive practices.

Her introspective realization of this transformation is articulated in her own words from the text:

> I had grown much quieter and more self-effacing than was usual, even for me...I hardly ever talked unless spoken to, and then only to answer with the utmost respect whatever question had been asked...I did not question things. It did not matter to me why things should be done this way rather than that way. I simply accepted that this was so. I did not think that my reading was more important than washing the dishes...As a result of these things that I did not think or do, Babamukuru thought I was the sort of young woman a daughter ought to be and lost no opportunity to impress this point of view upon Nyasha.
>
> (*Nervous Conditions* 157)

Tambu's realization of her conformity and submission to patriarchal expectations echoes one of the insidious impacts of patriarchy which is silence. Compared to her earlier defiant spirit in the face of victimization and oppression, Tambu conforms to patriarchal dynamics within Babamukuru's home for fear of losing her sponsorship, thus, becoming society's archetype for the submissive woman which is the angel in the house—an image she condemns her mother for embodying in the homestead.

Trauma as Portrayed in Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions

According to Jeffery Alexander in "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," trauma is not a mere occurrence, but a product influenced by society (2). This means that the events unfolding in society play a pivotal role in triggering and shaping traumatic experiences, thus, Dangarembga, in addition to portraying the societal dynamics at play in post-colonial Rhodesia, beams her spotlight on the psychological impact of living within a system that limits

opportunities, enforces strict gender rules and roles, and perpetuates unequal power dynamics on women. Gendered trauma which is a pervasive theme in *Nervous Conditions* refers to the psychological and emotional turmoil experienced by the female characters within the patriarchal society. In *Nervous Conditions*, gendered trauma manifests in various forms, such as limitations because of one's gender, silence in the face of victimization, internal conflicts, depression, anxiety, fixation, dissociation, hopelessness, fear, and sadness.

Tambu's mother, Mainini, becomes a 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 49).

This societal expectation 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, Makitiki et al. in their research emphasize that "if a wife fails to produce sons, she would be marginalised...she would be regarded as a social outcast" (31). This means that a boy child accords a woman's respect within the family she marries and not having one reduces her worth in society. For this reason, this research proposes that Mainini's psychological trauma may not only represent the traumatic loss of her child Nhamo but also highlight 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 (*Nervous Conditions* 57)

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

Tambu, another female character in the narrative, grapples with gender-based limitations that illustrate how limitations tied to one's gender can result in trauma. Her pursuit of formal education, a domain traditionally reserved for men in a society dominated by patriarchal norms, becomes a source of frustration and internal conflict. She becomes helpless in the face of trauma from recognizing that her identity as a woman dictates the opportunities available to her.

Furthermore, Tambu confronts the trauma of guilt following the death of her brother, Nhamo. The death of her brother, which opens the pathway for Tambu to access formal education, triggers a sense of guilt as she witnesses her mother's trauma. She begins to entertain the thought that her ambitions may have played a role in her brother's demise and her mother's

trauma, fostering a profound internal conflict fueled by the unintended consequences of her

ambitions.

Accordingly, Nyasha experiences trauma that stems from traditional and colonial

constraints. Torn between two cultures—the traditional Shona culture of her family and the

Western culture she encounters in England—Nyasha grapples with internal conflict and

confusion. Her father, despite having studied in England, aligns with traditionalist views,

particularly in the belief of the inherent inferiority of women to men. Consequently, he

endeavors to instill Shona norms in his children, Nyasha and Chido.

However, Nyasha rebels against these cultural expectations, becoming a focal point for

the clash between traditional and Western values within her family. Her father's attempt to mold

her into the archetype of a Shona woman, submissive and conforming to societal expectations

leads to a strained relationship. Her rejection of these norms intensifies the conflict, resulting in

physical punishment and the degradation of her femininity as consequences for 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 in the

following lines:

> 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 some private world
>
> that we could not reach. Sometimes when I talked to her, quite apart from preferring not
>
> to answer, she simply 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 (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 experiences. She becomes barricaded from the present and perceived in another world of her own. In addition, she experiences "speechless terror" (Vanderkolk 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 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 (202-204).

This physical toll of trauma on Nyasha, with the description of her skeletal appearance which implies an anorexic condition, echoes Bessel Van der Kolk's theory 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.

Women as 'Villains' in Nervous Conditions: Resilience

"Every mother and daughter is a victim of patriarchy, and every mother and daughter has the opportunity to stand against it" _Alexandra D' amour

In *Nervous Conditions*, the depiction of women as 'villains' within the concept of patriarchal oppression serves as a lens through which the theme of resilience is explored. Tobi Oloyede, in her dissertation, defines resilience as the "ability to withstand and overcome the adverse effects of traumatic events" (24), a concept evident in the narrative under discourse. By highlighting the female characters in *Nervous Conditions* as 'villains,' this research explores how Dangarembga

portrays these women as people who transcend societal limitations through their resilience, serving as agents of change and challenging the systemic bias that sustains gender disparities.

A good example of a resilient character in the narrative that challenges societal norms from the outset is Tambu. Following the gendered nature of African societies, particularly the Shona community where Tambu is a native, the girl child is believed to be domesticated. That is, she is taught to take care of the home, rear children and take care of her husband. For this reason, she is denied access to formal education with the belief that it would benefit the family she marries or be a waste of investment. Tambu, confronted with this societal dynamic chooses to challenge the status quo by requesting seedlings from her parents to start a farm to pay her school fees through her farm proceedings. By choosing to tread this path, Tambu defies restrictive gender roles and breaks away from the limitations placed on women in her community.

Furthermore, Tambu defiantly challenges Babamukuru's authoritative control over her by refusing to attend her parent's wedding. Driven by his strong religious beliefs, Babamukuru compelled his brother, Jeremiah, to undergo a white wedding, convinced that it would ward off misfortune from their family. Tambu rejects this notion, perceiving it as a mockery of her parents although her parents accept the idea due to Babamukuru's influence in the family. However, her ability to voice her dissent is subdued by the fear of losing Babamukuru's sponsorship, a scholarship that effectively silences and subjugates her.

Despite the initial constraints placed upon her, Tambu defiantly breaks free from the image of the 'good girl' that Babamukuru imposes on those who do not challenge his authority. Instead, she embraces the identity of the 'evil thing,' a label assigned to those who defy his authority, by refusing to attend the wedding. By challenging Babamukuru, Tambu is aware that

the consequence of her defiance is the forfeiture of "[her] right to Babamukuru's charity" (170).

Yet, she gracefully accepts the punishment for her refusal to conform to his expectations,

understanding it as a cost for her newly acquired identity (171). Hence, the new identity she

refers to implies her emancipation from oppressive control and her prioritizing her agency over

positive validation or financial support suggests empowerment.

Mainini also undergoes a remarkable transformation in the narrative when she moves

from a static character confined by societal expectations to a dynamic character who challenges

patriarchal norms. Earlier in the text, she was portrayed as a quiet, often tired, "dispirited"

figure, and one "crushed by the weight of womanhood" she conforms to the established gender

roles and encourages her daughters to embrace these norms without any form of rebellion.

However, Mainini's character undergoes a significant evolution when she challenges Jeremiah

for agreeing to send Tambu to Babamukuru's house after the death of Nhamo. This act marks a

departure from her previous adherence to patriarchal norms, as she questions and opposes a

decision that would further reinforce traditional expectations for women. In doing so, Mainini

breaks free from the traditional values of the Shona culture, which often emphasize "silence and

obedience" for women (Hill 79). Mainini's shift from a static to a dynamic character is further

emphasized in *Nervous Conditions* when she defiantly breaks her silence about her husband's

idleness and laziness in the homestead to other patriarchs in the family. Through this act, Mainini

demonstrates a departure from her previous passivity to a willingness to challenge the

established order through her newly found agency.

Accordingly, Babamukuru's wife, Maiguru shifts from being a static character to a

dynamic force when she sheds her people-pleasing attitude to challenge her husband's

oppressive control in the family. This pivotal shift occurs when, for the first time, she decides to

raise her voice against the injustice Tambu faces in her household because she resolutely rejects Babamukuru's request to attend her parent's wedding. However, when Maiguru attempts to intervene and advocate for Tambu, Babamukuru dismisses her, asserting his unilateral authority and reminding her that Tambu is his brother's child, implying his exclusive right to decide and administer punishment. Undeterred, Maiguru challenges this established order, drawing inspiration from the defiance exhibited by her daughter Nyasha and Tambu. Maiguru asserts:

> Yes, she is your brother's child...But when it comes to taking my money so that you can feed her, and her father and your whole family and waste it on ridiculous weddings that's when they are my relatives too. Let me tell you, Babawa Chido...I have had enough!...when I keep quiet you think I am enjoying it (174-175)

The pivotal moment in which Maiguru raises her voice against the injustices faced by women in her household represents a transformative turning point. Through this act, she transcends fear, aligning with Judith Herman's assertion that women under patriarchal control "were silenced by fear," and by speaking out, she challenges the prevailing atmosphere that permits various forms of domestic exploitation (41). Also, by speaking out against the oppressive norms in her home, Maiguru not only confronts the immediate injustice but also sheds light on the concealed conditions of women in the domestic sphere, further echoing Herman's observations. Her voice becomes a vehicle through which the readers gain insight into the harsh realities faced by women within the confines of their homes.

Furthermore, Maiguru's resilience marked by a departure from societal expectations, effectively dismantles the societal image of the "angel in the house," a concept that traditionally confined women to submissive roles. The act of leaving her husband, although temporarily, becomes a powerful statement of resistance and independence as the text records a remarkable

transformation after her return, Maiguru speaks more, discards her passive demeanor, and smiles more, reflecting a significant benefit for women who decide to challenge oppressive practices that stifle them.

Similarly, Maiguru's daughter, Nyasha emancipates herself from her father's oppressive practices when she resorts to physical confrontation due to the relentless physical and psychological abuse that she endures at his hands, serving as a poignant reminder of the systemic violence women who challenge or question the status quo face. Prior to this transcendent moment in the text, Dangarembga portrays Nyasha as a character with 'nervous conditions' because she is torn between self and fitting into her father's expectation of the 'good daughter.' Despite Nyasha's relentless pursuit of academic excellence and her diligent involvement in domestic chores, her endeavors go unnoticed and unappreciated just like the other women in the text whose "needs and sensibilities...[are] not considered a priority, or even legitimate" (12). However, this was not the case for her brother, Chido, who enjoys unrestricted freedom, preferential treatment, and recognition solely because of his gender.

Rather than recognition, Nyasha is reduced to whoredom and is physically and mentally abused by her father who due to double standards tries to maintain a positive image in society while subjecting his wife and daughter to domestic abuse and exploitation echoing Judith Herman's sentiment that "the real conditions of women's lives were hidden in the sphere of the personal, in private life." Herman also adds that these women due to fear cannot speak of their experiences in the private spheres and their silence breeds more domestic exploitation (41). Thus, Nyasha's resilience, marked by striking her father in the face portrays the breaking point of a woman subjected to patriarchal abuse and control. She asserts her reasons for breaking free from the shackles of traditional expectations in the following lines.

Nyasha asserts:

> I'm convinced I don't want to be anyone's underdog. It's not right for anyone to be that.
> But once you get used to it, well, it just seems natural, and you just carry on. And that's
> the end of you. You're trapped. They control everything you do. It's the same everywhere
> [and] he has no right to treat me like that, as though I am water to be poured wherever he
> wants. (119-121)

This assertion details her journey of self-liberation from the 'other' to a 'subject' in a split
second. By rejecting the notion of an 'underdog,' Nyasha proves that "silencing or the loss of
voice does not result in a loss of agency" because her body was "in one way or another, a
response to the culture that [she] live[s] in" (Viswanath). Thus, implying that every woman has
the power within her to challenge the unjust treatment stemming from patriarchal rule. Through
her defiance, Nyasha also creates awareness of the demeaning effects of succumbing to societal
expectations that trap individuals and how one can transcend/reject these roles and treatment
through self-empowerment.

Lucia, on the other hand, is an interesting character within the narrative. Unlike her sister,
Mainini, she is unmarried, opinionated, independent, and does not succumb to traditional norms
imposed on women in her society. She leaves her father's home to stay with Mainini who is ill.
While at that, she gets pregnant for Takesure, one of Jeremiah's brothers. Due to this event, she
is treated like an outcast by the other patriarchs such as Babamukuru. However, Lucia challenges
the patriarch's opinion of her and why the blame for fornication is only meted out on just the
woman and not both parties involved in the act. Lucia's defiance came as a shock to the other
female characters who had already conformed to the domineering power of patriarchy. She also
challenges Babamukuru for the injustice meted out on Tambu who refused to attend her parent's

wedding. This made Babamukuru refer to Lucia as a man because, to the patriarchs, it is unlikely for a woman to challenge their authority. Thereby exposing how women are viewed in a patriarchal society.

Interestingly, Dangarembga's portrayal of female autonomy in *Nervous Conditions* reflects a collective agency among women which echoes Tharini Viswanath's idea that the agency of female characters cannot be gotten merely from voice but because they 'coexist in a state of fluidity and interdependence' (50). This means that within the narrative, Dangarembga's female characters experience empowerment and transform their identities through collective agency. Mainini, for instance, challenges cultural norms by observing her daughter Tambu, and her sister, Lucia defy gender-based limitations. Maiguru, in turn, confronts the oppressive system within her home as she witnesses Tambu and Nyasha rejecting traditional societal roles that confine women to domesticity and undermine their strength through fear. Tambu, inspired by Nyasha's bold resistance, asserts her agency within Babamukuru's house, breaking free from the barricades of fear and embracing a new identity independent of the limitations imposed by her father.

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*, the empowerment of one woman becomes a catalyst for the emancipation of other women, illustrating the power of change that is embedded in shared experiences and women's collective solidarity.

CHAPTER 4. CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE'S Purple Hibiscus (2003)

Introduction

This chapter focuses on deconstructing the text under discourse by exploring how Adichie

portrays the female characters in the text, how they navigate gendered trauma imposed on them

by the patriarchy, their response to trauma, and how they challenge patriarchal norms.

A Synopsis of Chimamanda Adichie's Purple Hibiscus (2003)

Purple Hibiscus (2003) is a bildungsroman novel written by the Nigerian feminist writer,

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. It is a story divided into four parts and which begins in medias res

(in the middle of events)—its parts include Breaking gods (Palm Sunday), Speaking with Our

Spirits (Before Palm Sunday), The Pieces of Gods (After Palm Sunday), and A Different Silence

(The Present). The story is told through the central character, Kambili Achike to give readers a

bird's eye view of life in postcolonial Nigeria and her family dynamics both nuclear and

extended.

Set in Enugu, Adichie introduces the Achike family. Eugene Achike/Papa, the head of the

Achike family, is a wealthy religious fanatic who is feared and revered by members of his

household because he dictates what they should do and how they should do it. Eugene's

autocratic rule and tyrannical parenting style create a stifled environment infused with fear

which makes silence become the order of the day. His wife (Mama) and his children (Kambili

and Jaja), conform to the regimented lifestyle because any form of disobedience is met with

physical abuse.

Eugene is a devoted Catholic who rejects the African traditional gods. For this reason, he

cuts ties with his father (Papa Nnukwu) for not conforming to his mode of religion, and his sister

(Aunt Ifeoma) for being Papa Nnukwu's caregiver. Due to his hatred for his father's way of life, he prohibits his children and his wife from visiting his father because he does not want them possessed by his father's heathen ways. Adichie's character Eugene becomes a typical example of Nigeria after colonialism because he does not just reject the African way of worship but the African culture, preferring to speak only in English and conditioning those around him to do the same.

Mama or Beatrice Achike is a major character in the narrative. She is uneducated and conforms to Eugene's tyrannical practices in the home. Due to fear, she does not complain when abused or when her children are abused. She suffers draconian punishments for perceived disobedience that resulted in two miscarriages. In contrast to Mama is Aunt Ifeoma who is opinionated and educated. Despite being a widow, Aunt Ifeoma does not conform to society's image of her. She takes care of her three children (Amaka, Obiora, and Chima) all alone, raising them to be free, outspoken, and independent unlike her brother's children, Kambili and Jaja.

The catalyst for transformation occurs when Kambili and Jaja visit their Aunty Ifeoma and her three children in Nsukka. They realized that even without having so much as their father did, Aunt Ifeoma and her children were happy and knew so much more about the world than they did. The visit becomes a turning point exposing Kambili and Jaja to an unusual way of life—one marked by laughter, critical thinking, and a sense of freedom, forcing them to question their father's authority and the suffocating nature of their existence.

Through the narrative, Adichie juxtaposes the female characters in the text to show how unbridled power from a patriarch can disrupt a person's overall well-being. In addition to weaving a tale of trauma, Adichie foregrounds the theme of resilience to challenge oppressive practices.

Patriarchy as Portrayed in Purple Hibiscus

When someone is caged, or oppressed, it is crucial to examine all the bars of the cage to get full

understanding of their inability to escape; close, myopic examination of just one bar will not give

a full understanding of why the person is trapped _Estelle Disch (33)

Building upon Disch's assertion, Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* vividly portrays a

metaphorical cage rooted in the theme of patriarchy—a pervasive system that entraps,

subjugates, marginalizes, and silences women solely based on their gender. To examine all the

bars of the cage, Adichie through her protagonist, Kambili exposes the factors that keep women

silent and passive in the face of victimization. These factors include tradition, marriage, and

children.

To portray how the African traditional norms play a role in subjugating women, Adichie

vividly highlights how society empowers men to see themselves as superior and establish

dominance whilst degrading women and relegating them to subservient roles. A perfect example

of such a patriarch is Eugene Achike who is revered and feared by members of his household;

particularly, his wife Beatrice and children, Kambili and Jaja. Eugene's authoritarian rule

involves dictating the actions of his wife and children. Hence, any disobedience from the group

is met with violence which instills fear and effectively silences the women in the household.

For this reason, silence becomes a potent tool for submission and control within the

patriarchal framework. Kambili recounting the effect of patriarchal rule within their household,

describes that her father's autocratic rule has compelled Mama to speak with a "low and

calming" voice, preferring to speak sparingly like the way "a bird eats, in small amounts" (8-20),

thereby echoing how silence was her mother's coping mechanism to remain invisible because

"to speak about experiences in domestic life was to invite public humiliation, ridicule, and

disbelief" (Herman 41). That is, beyond imploring silence as a coping mechanism, Mama's fear stems from her thoughts of the societal consequences that exposing the real challenges she faces in the private sphere may attract. Just like Mama, the narrator, Kambili describes how silence due to fear of the patriarch permeates the lives of every member of their household and how it restricts open communication rendering them passive and powerless.

Kambili describes:

> [We]... spoke more with our spirits than with our lips. Our steps on the stairs were as measured and as silent as our Sundays: the silence of waiting until Papa was done with his siesta so we could have lunch; the silence of reflection time, when Papa gave us a scripture passage or a book by one of the early church fathers to read and meditate on; the silence of evening rosary; the silence of driving to church for benediction afterward. Even our family time on Sundays was quiet. (16 and 20)

These lines encapsulate the power dynamics in Eugene Achike's home and further portray how the fear of violence prevents members of his household from expressing their thoughts freely. For this reason, they devise a means to speak with their spirits, not their lips, suggesting an indirect and internalized way for them to maintain communication without incurring the wrath of the patriarch, Eugene.

Adichie also portrays that African societies are highly patriarchal, particularly the Igbo culture, through her introduction of the *Umunna*, a group of patriarchs who make laws that systematically disadvantage and devalue women, thus, underscoring how these patriarchs perpetuate gender inequality. The *Umunna*, as depicted by Adichie, plays a significant role in determining a woman's societal standing, assigning her roles within the family, and reinforcing a preference for male offspring. The emphasis on a male child as the one who will sustain the

family's legacies and name further highlights the gender bias ingrained in this cultural structure.

This gender inequality is palpable in the narrative, particularly when Beatrice and Aunt Ifeoma recount instances where the *Umunna*, not regarding the woman, would invariably say hurtful things. For instance, Mama faces the *Umunna*'s judgment, leading them to decide that Eugene Achike should take a new wife because Mama has only two children. However, the focus was not on her having two children but on the fact that she has only one son, implicitly dismissing Kambili because of her gender as a woman. Mama shares her ordeal in the hands of the *Umunna* with Kambili in the following lines:

> You know after you came and I had the miscarriages, the villagers started to whisper. The members of our Umunna even sent people to your father to urge him to have children with someone else. So many people had willing daughters, and many of them were University graduates. They might have borne many sons and taken over our home and driven us out. (20)

These lines expose the harsh reality of women whose worth is tied to their reproductive capabilities, particularly their capability to bear male children. It also highlights the societal pressures women face to fulfill the traditional roles imposed on them within the patriarchal framework. Mama's use of the phrase, "they might have borne many sons and taken over our home and driven us out" implies the invincibility of the woman. That is, just like her, Kambili's presence in Eugene's home is not recognized because of their gender. Aunt Ifeoma, on the other hand, is accused of killing her husband, with little consideration given to the adverse psychological impact of such hurtful words on her, underscoring her marginalized status as a second-class citizen within society. Through these instances, Adichie exposes the systemic biases and discriminatory practices perpetuated by patriarchal structures, providing a nuanced

60

exploration of how these cultural norms contribute to the subjugation of women in African societies.

In addition, Adichie exposes the pervasive gender inequality that permeates the narrative through the contrasting treatment of male and female characters, particularly involving Aunt Ifeoma and Papa Nnukwu, Eugene, and the members of his household. This is seen in how despite the way Eugene treats his father, Papa Nnukwu because he does not conform to the Christian ways, Papa Nnukwu still garners respect for him. This is in stark contrast with Aunt Ifeoma who despite her role as Papa Nnukwu's caregiver for many years, is despised and her opinions dismissed because according to him, her opinions do not count because of her gender (83).

Also, the gender imbalance extends to Eugene's household where Jaja, as a male, can challenge Eugene's authority without facing severe consequences. Jaja also uses his position as a man to his advantage to save his sister on several occasions from their father's abuse. In contrast, the women in the household are subjected to severe violence and abuse when they challenge Eugene's authority which portrays society's double standard and further reinforces how patriarchal control negatively silences the woman through abuse. This is evident when Kambili narrates her pregnant mother's ordeal at the hands of her abusive father during one of their visits to the Priest. Mama had insisted that she would not go because she felt nauseous but when she noticed Eugene's countenance, she changed her mind and decided to see the priest. However, the narrator describes that Mama gets punished for disobedience.

Kambili narrates:

> I WAS IN MY ROOM...when I heard the sounds. Swift, heavy thuds on my parents' hand carved bedroom door...I sat down, closed my eyes my eyes, and started to count.

Counting made it seem not that bad. Sometimes it was over before I even got to twenty. I

was at nineteen when the sounds stopped. I heard the door open. Papa's gait on the stairs

sounded heavier, more awkward, than usual...Mama was slung over his shoulder like jute

sacks of rice... "There's blood on the floor," ...We cleaned up the trickle of blood which

trailed away as if someone had carried a leaking jar of red watercolor all the way

downstairs (32-33).

The vivid imagery created in these lines mirrors the insidious nature of domestic violence within

Eugene Achike's household and the double standards that fuel gender inequality. The narrator's

poignant narration of the brutality and extent of abuse meted out on her mother behind closed

doors illustrates the enduring violence that perpetuates Mama's silent suffering. The narrator's

act of counting thus becomes a coping mechanism for her to distance herself from the traumatic

event that permeates her life indirectly as a witness to such violence. Also, Adichie through this

imagery, reveals the layers of Mama's trauma, prompting readers to draw a connection between

the domestic abuse as an underlying cause of Mama's miscarriages which had a devastating

impact on her physical and mental well-being.

Furthermore, Adichie paints a vivid picture of the traditional perception of women,

portraying them as weak and harmless, through her representation of the *mmuo* (masquerade), a

traditional religious practice. This gender dichotomy is expressed in Papa Nnukwu's description

of the masquerades. He posits to Aunt Ifeoma, Kambili, and the others, "Look ...this is a woman

spirit, and the women mmuo are harmless" (85) but asks them to avert their gaze when the male

mmuo emerges, a customary practice in African societies till date. The narrator further highlights

the stark contrast between the two masquerades. The female masquerade is described as a

'small,' passive figure, serenaded and objectified by the male gaze which aligns with traditional

expectations of women as subordinate and pleasing to the man while the male mmuo is described as a 'big,' fearful, powerful, and an active character aligning with the traditional image of men as dominant and exuding strength. Thus, through this depiction, Adichie portrays that gender imbalance is a traditional construct.

The societal expectations placed on women within the narrative are further explored through the lens of Papa Nnukwu's patriarchal belief that women should be wholly dependent on the man and that a woman cannot survive on her own without a man. This is evident when he says to Aunt Ifeoma, "My spirit will intercede for you, so that *Chukwu* will send a good man to take care of you and the children" (83) — an assertion that mirrors a deeply ingrained patriarchal perception that women should be reliant on the man which symbolizes passivity. Papa Nnukwu's expression also echoes a patriarchal belief that a woman's success is tied to the presence of a man in her life. Mary Wollstonecraft lays credence to this claim in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. She asserts that in patriarchal systems, "women are considered...so weak that they must be entirely subjected to the superior faculties of men" (19). However, Aunt Ifeoma challenges this traditional belief when she tells him, "Let your spirit ask Chukwu to hasten my promotion to senior lecturer, that is all I ask" (83), thus, implying that a woman can transcend and dismantle the image of a passive figure and the limitations placed upon her by the patriarchy.

Another form by which the patriarchal system perpetuates the subjugation of women is through the institution of marriage. In Africa, there is a mental conditioning that "the only way women can rise in the world [is]—by marriage" leading to them being "entirely subjected to the faculties of men" (Wollstonecraft 6). The girl child is groomed to prioritize marriage over formal education, so she is taught to acquire domestic skills making her wholly dependent on the man. An example of such a victim of this mental conditioning is Mama who despite enduring abuse

from Eugene, believes that "A husband crowns a woman's life" (75). However, Aunt Ifeoma challenges this narrative, asserting that marriage is another form of enslavement and that "life begins when marriage ends" (75) because, through marriage, women are devalued and controlled.

Aunt Ifeoma's perspective aligns with Beauvoir's stance that marriage subjugates women, including her property to rigorous control making her 'a slave' (124-125). In addition to Mama, Aunt Ifeoma gives instances of her students who are influenced by societal conditioning to prioritize marriage over formal education. A choice that invariably confines them to the home. She asserts:

> They marry earlier and earlier these days. What is the use of a degree, they ask me, when we cannot find a job after graduation?...At least somebody will take care of them when they marry. Six girls in my first-year seminar class are married, their husbands visit in Mercedes and Lexus cars every weekend, their husbands buy them stereos and textbooks and refrigerators, and when they graduate, the husbands own them and their degrees. (75)

This portrays how society conditions the woman thereby controlling, subjugating, and devaluing her through the confines of marriage.

Women as Victims in Purple Hibiscus: Accepting the Status Quo

The character, Mama (Beatrice) is a poignant example of a victim of patriarchy who succumbs to the traditional roles imposed upon her. She endures many years of abuse which invariably leaves her silent and epitomizes Leslie Morgan Steiner's assertion in her TED Talk that "abuse thrives in silence" (14:38/15:44). Adichie portrays Mama as an archetype of what society wants because she lacks formal education but is raised to embrace domestic roles which makes her reliant on Eugene. Eugene, taking advantage of Mama's ignorance, exerts his

masculinity on her and inflicts harm on her. However, it is evident that Mama, like many other domestic violence victims, grapples with labeling the abuse she experiences or what Betty Friedan calls a "problem without a name" (qtd. In Herman 41). Instead, she clings to the belief that "a husband crowns a woman's life" (75), reflecting the societal conditioning she underwent before marriage. This societal conditioning in addition to making the woman reliant on the man, compels her to silently endure or ensure that the experiences in the home are kept private —a privacy that Judith Herman challenges adding it could create "a powerful barrier to consciousness...[that]... render[s] [her]...reality practically invisible" (Herman 41). This assertion from Judith Herman is evident in Aunt Ifeoma's conversation with Mama when she presents her with the option to leave Eugene. That is to break free from patriarchal norms that disrupt her overall physical and mental well-being.

 However, Mama questions:

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

These lines encapsulate Mama's fear of societal judgment, replacement, and the uncertainty of financial dependence which highlights her sense of entrapment. To her, breaking free would leave her vulnerable, preferring silent suffering as a coping mechanism. However, from the text, it becomes evident that silence is both a shield and a prison for her. The mention of disregarding cultural norms for Eugene's attention is symbolic of the cycle of women's entrapment and the power dynamics in society.

Also, Kambili suffers victimization within her household because of her gender. Like her mother, Beatrice, Kambili cannot label her experiences and thinks she deserves the incessant

abuse meted out to her. Thus, her succumbing to the status quo made her a metaphorical slave. In addition, Kambili's ignorance of the societal conditioning of the patriarchy is shaped by watching her mother do the same things she did. Thus, Beatrice becomes a model for Kambili as she endures abuse in silence—a learned behavior that exposes how patriarchal norms are transferred from mother to daughter, echoing Alexandra D'amour's assertion that "Every mother and daughter is a victim of the patriarchy" because of their shared experiences within the patriarchal framework ("The Patriarchy's Damage to Mother/Daughter Relationships").

Trauma as Portrayed in Purple Hibiscus

According to Bessel Van der Kolk, it is important to ascertain when a traumatized individual became fixated on their trauma and the event that shaped their psyche (7), an assertion that is profoundly relevant in analyzing Kambili's struggles within the narrative. The narrator, Kambili's psychological trauma stems first from witnessing her mother's physical suffering, in what Tihamer Bako and Katalin Zana call the "we experience" whereby trauma transfers from a mother to a child in the abusive environment indirectly (qtd in Oloyede 25). 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, Bessel Van der Kolk writes:

> Traumatic experiences do leave traces, whether on a large scale...or close to it...They also leave traces on our minds and emotions, on our capacity for joy and intimacy, and even

on our biology and immune systems. Trauma affects not only those who are directly

exposed to it, but also those around them. (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" (37), "I still saw my baby brother's

spirit strung together by narrow lines of blood" (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" (99), all echo Van der Kolk's

emphasis on fixation in traumatized victims because her mind froze at the time of the event. In

addition, this research suggests that Kambili experiences trauma 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" (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 that succumbs to her experiences within

the household and "loses her basic sense of self" (Herman 68). As a woman in a patriarchal

system, Mama becomes conditioned to societal expectations for women. She becomes a passive

character and puts on 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 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" (865). That means, the death of Mama's unborn children triggered a psychological trauma that left her scathed.

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. (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). 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]" (8), a symptom that is common with traumatized victims.

Women as Villains in Adichie's Purple Hibiscus (Resilience)

"Challenging sexist oppression is a crucial step in the struggle to eliminate all forms of oppression" _bell hooks (36)

Adichie vividly portrays the theme of resilience through the imagery of the broken figurines and the etagere in Eugene's household. Within the narrative, Kambili describes how Mama cleans the figurines in their home whenever she goes through domestic abuse. Her description of the meticulous way Mama polishes the figurines thus highlights that it was a part of her coping mechanism shielded in silence. Although polishing the figurines was a technique

for her to dissociate her mind from the traumatic event, it is worthy of note that the figurines metaphorically represent the Achike household. That is, the ritual of polishing the figurines in silence becomes symbolic of Mama keeping her family together without anyone knowing the real experiences of the private sphere due to the fear of societal judgment and the uncertainty of financial dependence.

However, the silence that hangs over Mama is metaphorically broken when Papa destroys the figurines by throwing a missal at Jaja for refusing to attend mass. This becomes a turning point foreshadowing the events that unfold in the narrative. Before the destruction of the figurines, Mama who never sheds a tear or speaks through her trauma breaks her silence when she visits Aunt Ifeoma and Kambili to recount the incident that led to her second miscarriage. According to Mama,

> I got back from the hospital today...You know that small table where we keep the family
> 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...I was
> six weeks gone. Eugene did not know, I had not yet told him, but it is true. (248-249)

After Mama describes the traumatic event that took place, the narrator observes that Mama cried profusely and was uncontrollable. Kambili's observation of Mama voicing out her trauma to Aunt Ifeoma and the subsequent tears that follow her narration contrast with her stoic demeanor when the first miscarriage happened. This significant shift is thus captured as Kambili describes that Mama became a different person after breaking her silence. Kambili further observes:

> I had never seen Mama like that, never seen that look in her eyes, never heard her say so
> much in a short time...She did not lower her voice to a whisper. She did not hide the tiny smile
> that drew lines at the edge of her mouth. She did not sneak Jaja's food to his room, wrapped in

cloth so it would appear that she had simply brought his laundry in. (251-258) Mama's new

identity in the above lines echoes the impact of 'transforming silence into language' as posited

by Audre Lourde and how voice is an act of empowerment (42). In addition to transforming

silence into language, Mama transforms her silence into action when she plots with the

housekeeper, Sisi to poison the oppressor, Eugene, gaining full autonomy.

In a similar vein, Kambili's resilience becomes symbolic of the purple hibiscus in Aunt

Ifeoma's garden which was about to bloom (253). This symbolism is evident when Kambili puts

on a new identity after she visits Aunt Ifeoma in Nsukka. Before her visit, Kambili conformed to

traditional patriarchal norms that dictated what she did and how she would do it. She was

subjected to draconian punishment for disobedience several times by her father. However, just

like the purple hibiscus, she blooms when she breaks free from fear and silence which keeps her

isolated.

Aunt Ifeoma on the other hand, is an opinionated character who rejects the role of the

angel in the house that her husband's family tried to impose on her after his death. She believes

that a woman can survive without the help of a man by raising three children all by herself. She

fuels Beatrice, Kambili, and Jaja, making them rise above the traditional norms that were

imposed on them through her assertion that "when a house is on fire, you run out before the roof

collapses on your head" (213). Thus, Aunt Ifeoma becomes the key to Mama, Kambili, and

Jaja's empowerment, echoing the impact of interconnectedness/interdependence in challenging

oppressive structures.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

Both texts under discourse are evidence that the African culture is highly patriarchal. Hence, as female writers from Africa, Adichie, and Dangarembga engage in a form of "consciousness-raising" (Herman 41), a proactive fight to raise awareness and to persuade readers to question the social construction of gender. In their endeavor, they explore the theme of patriarchy, showing readers how the system relegates women to the background, making them second-class citizens. Also, in their exploration of the pervasive impact of patriarchy, these writers, explore the concept of home as an alienated space by clearly depicting how the female characters in their narratives are alienated in their own homes, an assertion which Dangarembga in an interview with Rosemary George and Mary Scott clearly supports that in *Nervous Conditions*, "none of the women are at home" (314), which means that rather than a haven, patriarchy creates a stifling and oppressive space for women.

Furthermore, Adichie and Dangarembga's narratives detail not just the horror of domestic abuse but its enduring scars/ consequences on African women in what Bessel Van der Kolk describes as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). That means, for the female characters in *Nervous Conditions* and *Purple Hibiscus*, the past is not past. In portraying the enduring scars of domestic abuse and violence, Adichie and Dangarembga highlight that trauma is not one size fits all. That is, the female characters in their narratives do not have a single story of the traumatic events that permeate their lives, and it is for this reason that their response to trauma differs. For example, although characters like Nyasha in *Nervous Conditions*, and Mama (Beatrice) in *Purple Hibiscus,* challenge the oppressive system and found their voices through collective autonomy, the narrative ends with them still struggling with their basic sense of self. Nyasha resort to self-mutilation while Mama in *Purple Hibiscus* becomes a shadow of herself after

killing her husband, Eugene, because her mind remains fixated on the traumatic events. It is for this reason that Jaja having witnessed Mama's voice for the first time, tells Kambili that traumatized victims like Mama "...may have started talking now, but she will never heal" (259), an observation which further echoes Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence."

In Nixon's explanation of violence, he divides violence into the "spectacular" and the "slow" which are useful concepts in analyzing the consequences of traumatic experiences on women in a patriarchal society. According to Nixon, spectacular violence is something 'instantaneous' and reverberating; while slow violence is "low in instant spectacle but high in long term effects...destroy[ing] the individual long after the cause has faded from view" (9-10). This means that it is when the instant spectacle of abuse and oppression ends that the slow violence of the traumatic event begins and may never end for the victims who witness the event, like in the case of Nyasha and Mama.

In furtherance, although Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* share a lot of similarities in terms of characterization, themes, and symbols, there is a difference in the way both authors portray resilience. On one hand, Dangarembga projects resilience through voice as a weapon, while in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, the character Beatrice (Mama) kills the oppressor, Eugene. Beatrice describes this event thus, "I started putting the poison in his tea before I came to Nsukka. Sisi got it for me; her uncle is a powerful witch doctor" (290). This vivid description of how Mama kills her oppressor is reminiscent of Mcfarlane and Rachel's stance that "PTSD and a history of abuse...contribute...to criminal histories" (168), that means that aside the physical and psychological toll of trauma, trauma has a disruptive impact on an individual's behavioral health. Therefore, it is worthy of note that the gradual poisoning of Eugene by Beatrice until he succumbed to his death is demonstrative of

Eugene's gradual destruction of Beatrice in the household through abuse, an observation that implicitly means that Beatrice paid Eugene back in the same coin.

In summary, Adichie and Dangarembga use literature as a potent tool to highlight the importance of voice and female solidarity as an essence of true liberation in contrast to merely having education. Although both authors highlight the need for women to be educated in order to put a name to the incessant abuse and oppression they go through in the private and public spheres, they also point to the fact that education does not equal emancipation as seen in characters like Maiguru in *Nervous Conditions* and Aunt Ifeoma in *Purple Hibiscus*. That is, simply being educated cannot dismantle patriarchy or traditional norms as Audre Lorde points out that "The Master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (110), which points to formal education and patriarchy, intensified by colonialism, as both tools of colonization that cannot be used against the other. However, Lorde points out that the real power that is feared by the patriarchal world is "the need and desire[for women] to nurture each other [which] is not pathological but redemptive" because "without community there is no liberation [but] only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression" (111-112), highlighting the importance of interdependency as a key to liberation.

Although Adichie and Dangarembga are on a mission to liberate women caged by patriarchal norms through literature, gender inequality remains a global issue as underscored by its placement as the fifth goal in the United Nations Sustainability agenda. Thus, in promoting voice and collective autonomy, this study suggests that a powerful strategy in dismantling patriarchal norms is the initiation of change from within the home. Mothers, as primary educators, and caregivers, play an important role in empowering the next generation, especially girls from their formative years, to take up space in society. Also, by teaching children the

importance of equality and resilience within the family, parents lay the foundation for an equitable future. This study also calls on society to stop labeling women who have decided to speak up against oppression and adversity as monsters or villains because fear has led silenced women to their early graves like the case of popular Nigerian gospel music artiste, Osinachi Nwachukwu who died because of domestic abuse and because she could not voice out her ordeal for fear of societal judgment.

Silence empowers a perpetrator to inflict more harm, so to reduce the mortality rate of women who lose their lives because abuse and oppression, it is imperative to educate men and women to be feminist, a stance by Adichie describing anyone who says "Yes, there is a problem with gender, and we must fix it!" (Adichie 24:19-29:36).

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"A Stylistic Analysis of Metaphors in Maya Angelou's

"The Caged Bird""

Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture, 2024,

"Breaking Chains of the Mind: African Immigrant's

Battle With Mental Slavery in Chimamanda Adichie's

Americanah

The UNC SAELLF-Fall 2022 Conference, "Afrofuturism

in Nnedi Okoroafor's *Binti*

Research Interests: African Literature, Gender, and Trauma studies,

Afrofuturism, Postcolonial Literature