



Breaking the Silence



*The influence of Class, Culture and Colonisation on African Women's Fight for Emancipation and Equality in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus**

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Abstract

This thesis will examine how colonisation has influenced the African women's fight for emancipation and equality as depicted in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) by Tsitsi Dangarembga and *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Dangarembga and Adichie individually are contemporary African post-colonial writers who have drawn worldwide attention with their novels about young women's fight to be heard and seen in their respective societies. Their stories independently depict problems such as racism, sexual oppression, religious fanaticism and cultural alienation as experienced by their characters in post-colonial Africa. The British Empire's colonial rule in Africa lasted for more than a century and had serious consequences for its native population. Colonialism was particularly hard on the women who were made invisible in the African society. Not only were they oppressed in terms of being colonized, they were equally oppressed in their own traditional society.

Contents

.....	0
Abstract.....	3
1. Introduction	5
1.1. Colonisation and the African Woman.....	7
1.2. The Missionary Education.....	9
1.3. The Post-Colonial Period.....	10
1.4. “The Danger of a Single Story”	12
2. <i>Nervous Conditions</i> by Tsitsi Dangarembga.....	15
2.1. Background	15
2.2. “The Weight of Womanhood”	16
2.3. Escapism and Emancipation.....	24
2.4. The Mission	26
2.5. Colonial Resistance	30
2.6. Living in the Third Space	35
2.7. Nyasha’s Rebellion	39
2.8. Anorexia and Bulimia as a Response to Oppression.....	42
2.9. Summary	44
3. <i>Purple Hibiscus</i> by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie	46
3.1. Background	46
3.2. Silence and Submission.....	47
3.3. The Infallible Father	49
3.4. The Bringer of Joy.	53
3.5. A Quest for Voice and Identity.....	55
3.6. A New Generation.....	58
3.7. Saints and Sinners.....	60
3.8 Faith and Forgiveness	63
3.9. The Complexities of Culture, Class and Colonisation.....	70
4.0. Summary	75
5. Conclusion.....	77

1. Introduction

“For most of history, Anonymous was a woman” (Woolf: *A Room of One’s Own*). By this statement Virginia Woolf pointed to the insignificant role women have been given throughout history. Invisible, oppressed and fighting to be acknowledged in society has been women’s fate in all parts of the world. This thesis will examine how colonisation has influenced the African women’s fight for emancipation and equality as depicted in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) by Tsitsi Dangarembga and *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Dangarembga and Adichie individually are contemporary African post-colonial writers who have drawn worldwide attention with their novels about young women’s fight to be heard and seen in their respective societies. Their stories independently depict problems such as racism, sexual oppression, religious fanaticism and cultural alienation as experienced by their characters in post-colonial Africa.

My interest in the colonial/post-colonial period goes back to my first year as a student. I was introduced to a beautiful novel called *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys which genuinely evoke my attention for the women’s situation in this epoch. Reading *Jane Eyre* as a young girl I completely adored the love story between Mr.Rochester and Jane Eyre. The discovery of Bertha Mason’s tragic destiny in *Wide Sargasso Sea* would change my view of the heroic Mr.Rochester radically, and motivated me to study the post-colonial literature with renewed interest. When Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Leymah Gbowee and Tawakkol Karman in 2011 received the Nobel Peace Prize "for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women’s rights to full participation in peace-building work" (Nobel Prize.Org: 2012) , I probably was as grateful as them. Not only did they truly deserve the prize, they should have received it years ago. The history of the African women is one of the most heart breaking and blood-stained chronicles I ever have read. They have been fighting against slavery, wars and

victimization through centuries in a battle that is far from ended. Studying the colonial/postcolonial periods from a black female perspective has given me a new and more nuanced view of the complexities of colonisation. The African women are not only a homogenous mass of disempowered, inferior “Others” but prove to inherit willpower, skills and strength which make them capable to influence and empower their own situation. There is a saying which states that “you have to know the past to understand the present” which I believe is essential in this case. Only by learning their history we can understand and support the contemporary African women.

My thesis starts in chapter one with an overall view of the problems discussed in *Nervous Conditions* and *Purple Hibiscus*. I will shortly introduce colonisation, the missionary education and discuss its impact on women in the post-colonial era. The last chapter in the introduction discusses “The Danger of a Single Story” and illustrates how our perception of people, issues and cultures are shaped by the stories we are told. The post-colonial literature has been largely dominated by white men whose presentation of African women often has been one-dimensional and subjective.

Chapter 2 is dedicated *Nervous Conditions*. The novel depicts the complexities of culture, class and colonisation in Rhodesia in the beginning of the 1970’s which will be illustrated and discussed in relation to protagonist Tambu. I will discuss the novel from a historical viewpoint looking not only to the colonial view of African women but similarly how these attitudes reflect women’s position in post-colonial time. The analysis will follow Tambu’s way from poverty and entrapment to freedom and independence, examining her growing consciousness about the society she lives within.

In chapter 3 I will analyse Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s novel *Purple Hibiscus* which takes place in Nigeria in the beginning of the 1990’s. The novel shares many similarities to

Nervous Conditions. It is a coming-of-age novel which depicts the growth and development of a young Nigerian girl in a time with fundamental upheavals in her country as well as within her family. The novel is focalized through protagonist Kambili who silently observes the injustice done not only to her family, but her country as well. My analysis will follow Kambili's way from silence and voicelessness to healing and voice. Sexual oppression, religious fanaticism and the complexities of colonisation are recurring issues which will be analysed in comparison to *Nervous Conditions*.

1.1. Colonisation and the African Woman

The British Empire's colonial rule in Africa lasted for more than a century and had serious consequences for its native population. Colonialism was particularly hard on the women who were made invisible in the African society. Not only were they oppressed in terms of being colonized, they were equally oppressed in their own traditional society. Anthropologist Oyeronke Oyewumi states that "African females were colonized by Europeans as Africans and as African women. They were dominated, exploited, and inferiorized as Africans together with African men and then separately inferiorized and marginalized as African women" (Oyeronke: 257). If native men were reduced to heathens and savages, the women were stereotyped either as virgins or whores in the colonists' eyes. According to Oyewumi there was a hierarchy of four, not two categories in the colonial situation with the European man on top and the African woman at the bottom, categorized as the "Other", (Oyeronke: 256) which corresponds with Simone de Beauvoir's study of women's role in "The Second Sex". De Beauvoir states that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman", due to the patriarchal view of women as inferior and "Other" (De Beauvoir: 295). The Victorian ideal of women as submissive and self-sacrificing angels in the house was an image

which would survive for a long time in the British middle-class. The phrase “angel in the house” originates from the British poet Coventry Patmore who wrote the poem “The Angel in the House” (1854), where he praises his angel-like wife Emily as the perfect housewife. In her thesis De Beauvoir discusses how women from a very early stage in life are brought up to believe that denying their true self is the only way to achieve happiness and gain acceptance. By accepting the role as “the angel in the house”, woman effectively is silenced and reduced to a devoted, submissive servant in her own life. De Beauvoir claims that women universally are oppressed and silenced by men in patriarchal societies that define woman as the second sex and thus deny her independence and creative fulfilment.

Silencing women has always been one of the most effective weapons used by the patriarchy to gain control over women. Anthropologist Irene D’Almeida argues that “Silence presents the historical muting of women under the formidable institution known as patriarchy, that form of social organization in which males assume power and create women an inferior status” (Kolavole: 4). While Western women united and successfully fought for gender equality and freedom in the 1970’s, the average African woman still found herself in a patriarchal society without any voice of her own. The emancipation and liberty experienced by her fellow sisters in Europe did not reflect most women’s positions in Africa at the same time. They were structurally inferior and defined as second-class citizens, designed to be child-bearers and nurturers with few possibilities to influence their own future. Silence and sexual oppression have thus been central issues in African women’s discourse due to two important aspects: colonialism and patriarchal African traditions.

1.2. The Missionary Education

The Western missionaries' most important goal in Africa was to "civilize and enlighten" the natives in line with their religious beliefs and ethical principles. Regarding the natives as savages and under-class citizens, the missionaries found it necessary to teach the natives how to convert to Christianity and a "civilized Christian" way of life. Fostering young native boys was an effective solution; by raising young Africans on the missionary stations the Government secured an obliging submissive staff of African civil servants who eventually served the government's interest. The relationship between Christianity and the traditional religions was tense; the missionaries resented the natives' traditions which included witchcraft, idolatry and spirituality. They sought to convert the natives according to the Western view of godliness where prayers, purity and fasting were important parts of the Christian rituals. The contrasts between Christianity and traditional religions caused not only conflicts between the missionaries and natives but also alienation toward the indigenous culture:

The colonial ideology is that of domination and exploitation of the colonized, intended to derive maximum profit from minimum investment. To realize this objective, the colonizers went ahead to deny the being of the colonized, their person, their culture, their worldview. In its place was installed the person, the culture, and the universe of the colonizer for the realisation of the interests of the latter. The successful implementation of this ideology alienated the colonized (Upkong: 6).

The missionaries' idea was not only to convert the natives, but to transform the culture they colonised as well. English language, customs and education were all part of this transformation.

Education and Christianity were closely linked but the British Government did not open schools for Africans until 1920, and then preferably for boys (Weinrich: 38). If the parents could afford it, girls occasionally could attend school but as late as 1976 only 20.2 % of all Rhodesian girls between 15-17 years had received a formal education (Weinrich:39). The Christian ideology did influence all the children who received missionary education, but had a particularly negative impact on the girls who were educated in the Victorian spirit where women were anticipated to assist their husbands' as faithful servants. In this way, the missionary education for girls continued rather than dissolved the existing gender inequality by training the girls exclusively to be good missionary housewives. Likewise the government preferred English as the official language, which dismantled the possibility of many Africans to learn their native language properly. The academic curriculum was in line with the British, creating alienation toward their own indigenous cultures and heritages. For many Africans the post-colonial mixture of languages, religions and traditions caused a clash of cultures which was difficult to integrate with, often resulting in serious psychological conflicts within the individual.

1.3. The Post-Colonial Period

Childs & Williams define the post-colonial period as “the period that covers all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (Childs and Williams:3). Whereas Nigeria gained its independence from the United Kingdom in 1960, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) could not celebrate its freedom until 1965. More than a century with British hegemony had nevertheless made inevitable changes in the respective countries in terms of social structures, language and culture. The colonial ideology

was based on the doctrine of cultural hierarchy and supremacy which included political and legal domination as well as institutionalized racial and cultural inequalities (Kortright: Colonization and Identity). In the 1970's women in the postcolonial societies would not find themselves more emancipated than during colonialism. According to Weinrich only a small per cent of the women had received an education that would prepare them for occupations such as teachers or nurses, while the majority still inherited the role of invisible housewife:

A husband and father as head of the household derived from this economic control his dominant position in the family and full authority over his wives and children. He was respected and feared because everybody realized his power over them. His words had always to be obeyed and those who aroused his displeasure were physically punished (Weinrich: 47).

Economically submissive and without any legal rights women were entirely at their husband's mercy and thus silenced as active participants in public life. The women's inferior position was furthermore strengthened by the colonizers' customary view of African women as minors and "simply more backwards" than their male counterparts, a view inherited by the earlier missionaries"(Weinrich: 166). As late as 1902 the Jesuit priest, Richard Sykes claimed that the African girls were "So featherheaded and incapable of understanding anything serious connected with life, that it is impossible to engage their attention for more than a few moments at a time or to get them to do any work, even such as sewing or washing"(Weinrich: 166). These were attitudes which would survive for a long period, and they added further restrictions on African women's possibilities to get formal education and achieve emancipation and equality in post-colonial Africa.

1.4. “The Danger of a Single Story”

The idea of the Africans as deprived and incapable was an image I strongly believed in as a child. As a little girl, Africa to me was a distant place with Hottentots and exotic wild animals. This image became a little more nuanced as I grew older and learned that African children were starving and I therefore had to eat the fish I was served for dinner gratefully. When the television entered the family home I could see the African tragedy with my own eyes; the starving, the wars and the aid provided by the Norwegian Church Relief. As a teenager I felt entitled to participate in national fund-raisings for the poor and pitiful Africans who had nothing. I felt it was my duty to try to save these wretched people and at least help to provide them with a little rice and water. Besides my undivided sympathy I really never was able to identify with the starving Africans as equal humans. They were the “Other”, the poor ones who just stared at me with their big hungry eyes and gave me moments of bad consciousness for being privileged with everything they could never have. It was not until I started my teacher education I realised that there were another side to the story I had been presented about Africa. The homogenous mass of poor Africans was not only that, they were similarly individuals with talents, hopes and dreams like me.

In her speech “The Danger of a Single Story” novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie offers many examples of how a one-dimensional story, such as the one I heard about Africans creates a biased and stereotyped understanding of a person, culture or issue. As a child Adichie was presented to a “single story” about a poor family in the next village which she genuinely perceived to be pitiful and without any talents. Meeting them for the first time she realised that there was another side to the story:

Then one Saturday we went to his village to visit. And his mother showed us a beautifully patterned basket, made of dyed raffia that his brother had made. I was startled. It had not occurred to me that anybody in his family could actually make something. All I had heard about them is how poor they were, so that it had become impossible for me to see them as anything else but poor. Their poverty was my single story of them (Adichie: Gadel. Info).

Children in particular are vulnerable in the face of a simplified story. In the post-colonial literature there are many examples of “single stories” which have contributed to a biased and prejudiced perception of the culture and people in question.

The post-colonial literary diaspora addresses the conflicts between colonizers and natives observed in the former colonies. According to Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin post-colonial literature covers literary works from post- independence and is primarily concerned with hegemony, racism, gender politics, place and displacement:

What each of these literatures has in common beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial center. It is this which makes them distinctively post-colonial (Ashcroft, Tiffin and Griffin:3).

Post-colonial literature has largely been dominated by men, and ironically often white men whose writing has taken a white standpoint. Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* and J.M Coetze in *Disgrace* independently address the conflicts depicted in colonial/post-colonial Africa but from a point of white superiority which leaves the African women stereotyped as either virgins or whores. This image of African women has to a certain degree been upheld by white feminist post-colonial writers. For example, Doris Lessing and Nadine Gordimer are writers who individually depict African women’s role in colonial Africa from their privileged white place in society. They write about injustice and inequality from an outside perspective which does not manage to undo the view of African women as a homogenous mass of

oppressed, marginalized and powerless women who need the colonizers help to survive and become independent.

The number of African female writers has always been small and reflects the reality of limited possibilities in their respective countries. Lloyd Brown states that “The women writers of Africa are the other voices, the unheard voices rarely discussed and seldom accorded space”(Brown:3), suggesting that the African women are suppressed and ignored in the literary post-colonial diaspora as well as in their societies. Acknowledged African novelists such as Buchi Emecheta in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Jean Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Ama Ata Aidoo in *Anowa* all are contemporary post-colonial writers who depict women’s particular difficulties during colonialism similarly addressing the gender inequalities in their traditional societies. In contrast to their white counterparts, these are writers who tell their stories from an insider’s perspective which create authenticity and an image of African women as strong and willing to fight for their rights.

Tsitsi Dangarembga and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie add to the recent African feminist literature with their respective novels which clearly depict the African women’s place and role during colonialism. What makes these novelists diverge from their counterparts is their ability to create a complex picture of the colonial/post-colonial situation and its conflicts. As their stories reveal, the colonial unrest was not only caused by the native’s resistance to the colonizers, but it was an unrest similarly affected by local grievance: “Unmarried peasant children challenged their elders, women battled their husbands, subject clans sometimes tried to usurp power from ruling clans, and the least advantaged attacked the better-off” (Nair:136). Dangarembga sharply depicts the tension within the African family in a way that makes us understand the complexities of the colonial struggles. For the women it was not only a battle between colonizers and colonized but also a fight against the representation of male domination in their own society. Dangarembga and Adichie thus manage to explore

multifaceted societies with characters who inherit strong and weak qualities independently of their race, class or gender.

2. *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga

2.1. Background

When Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel *Nervous Conditions* was published in 1985 it received a warm reception by the critics in Africa as much as in the West. Superlatives such as exceptional, quintessential and powerful are words used to describe this enjoyable and sensitive coming-of age– novel which is regarded as a classic within its genre. The title *Nervous Conditions* is quoted from Sartre's preface to Franz Fanon's novel *The Wretched of the Earth* where he says that "the status of 'native' is a nervous condition"(Fanon: 20). The title reflects the different characters' restlessness or anxiety due to their respective positions in a time with fundamental upheavals and changes.

Nervous Conditions describes the childhood and adolescence of two native girls, their families and the society of Rhodesia in the period from 1960 to the early 1970's. The novel is semi-biographical in the sense that it originates in the author's own upbringing and experiences as a young, black girl in colonial Africa. In an interview Dangarembga explains her motivation for writing the novel:

The one thing I was very concerned with was to leave a very real taste of life during the times that I grew up. I had been reading all the English classics, and you know how they give you a real sense of the time, of the passing of time and it just seemed to me that, well, there were people living in Zimbabwe or Rhodesia, and nobody knew about them, and if nobody set it down, then nobody would know about them. (George, Scott and Dangarembga: 311)

Situated in Rhodesia on the verge of independence, we follow protagonist Tambu through her most important years from an innocent teenage girl to a mature young woman of eighteen. The narrative is focalized through Tambu who shares the story about how her life takes an unexpected but welcoming turn when her elder brother suddenly dies. It is similarly a story about the complexities of colonization and how it affects the women closest to Tambu: “My story is not after all about death, but about my escape and Lucia’s; about my mother’s and Maiguru’s entrapment; and about Nyasha’s rebellion – Nyasha, far-minded and isolated, my uncle’s daughter, whose rebellion may not in the end have been successful.”(1) Silently observing the women in her family Tambu gradually develops a new consciousness which makes her start questioning the value of Western education and the attraction of “Englishness” her uncle embraces. While her mother and Aunt Maiguru remain entrapped in their positions, Tambu eventually manages to break free from “the weight of womanhood” at the homestead but realizes that her escape and liberation comes at a price.

2.2. “The Weight of Womanhood”

“I was not sorry when my brother died.” (1) Tambu’s controversial opening sentence is shocking but similarly comprehensible regarding her position as a young black girl growing up in Rhodesia in the 1970s. Her statement tells about a sister’s ambivalent feelings toward her elder brother but reveals equally how her own female position has limited her future prospects. Tambu’s consciousness of the unfair treatment of the girls in the family is clearly apparent in her observation of her brother’s attitude and ruthless behaviour towards her and the younger sisters: “Knowing that he did not need help, that he only wanted to demonstrate to us and himself that he had the power, the authority to make us do things for him” (10) Nhamo’s position as the eldest boy in the family allows him to harass and bully his sisters as

he pleases. As the expected future head of his clan he is the cherished and prioritized child who naturally takes command of the women in the household. In contrast to Nhamo, Tambu continuously fights for her education while she fulfils her duties helping her mother with the daily household tasks on the homestead:

The thought of my mother working so hard, so alone, always distressed me, but in the end I decided to prepare the evening meal so that she would be able to rest when she returned. (10)

As the oldest daughter in the family, Tambu naturally submits to her role in the family as her mother's helping hand similarly taking care of her younger sisters. Coming from a poor family does not give Tambu any prospects of a better future than her mother. Although she wishes to attend the local school she is not favoured to do so; according to the tradition it is the privilege of boys to get a formal education to prepare them for future obligations as husbands and providers. While her brother goes to school Tambu and her sisters are supposed to work on the homestead with their mother and learn to be good caretakers.

Tambu's mother Ma'Shingayi is a hard working woman who has come to terms with her role and place in the family and is not willing to recognize Tambu's dissatisfaction: "This business of womanhood is a heavy burden...When there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one who has to make them... And these days it is worse, with the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other. "(16) The poverty of blackness is familiar to Ma'Shingayi who herself was born into a poor family. Due to the British colonisation in Rhodesia, many African farmers lost their land and were forced to settle down in less productive areas of the country. The colonists claimed the land to build missionary stations and develop industrial enterprises where the Africans previously cultivated their acreage. Another devastating side effect of the European colonisation was the negative impact on the position of women; the existing gender inequality was enforced by the

imperialists' utilisation of the women's work capacity. By placing them home and giving them less opportunity for education, they left the women with no choice regarding their future prospects. Married to Jeremiah in the age of fifteen Ma'Shingayi has no knowledge of another life than that requires hard work and sacrifices. Schmidt notes that "the creation of 'native' reserves not only served the interests of capital, by forcing women and children to subsidize male wages through agricultural production; it also served those of older men, by facilitating their control over women and children (Schmidt: 99). Ma'Shingayi apprehends and accepts the reality of her life and does not support her daughter in her desire of a different life. Rather than encourage Tambu in her efforts to raise money for her school fees, she argues that being black and female is a double burden which cannot be escaped. Her advice to Tambu is to be strong and accept the role she is born into rather than fight against it.

Ma'Shingayi's attitude reflects an established perception of women's role in society maintained by generations before her. The bond between the mother and child is regarded as the keystone of all social relations and in the traditional African society a woman's main purpose is to be a child bearer and nurturer. It is a role that defines her but at the same time places her at home without any possibilities for education and economic independence. Anthropologist A.K.H Weinrich notes that from pre-colonial times an African woman was only respected because of her children, not because of what she was in herself (Weinrich: 118). A man would value a son more highly than his wife because he belonged to his own lineage, hence was the birth of a boy of prime importance. Girls were less significant and were not welcomed with equal enthusiasm. Their only advantage was the bride wealth they brought into the family which enabled the sons of the home to marry. Like Ma'Shingayi girls from poor families often were pledged into arranged marriages, frequently with older men who could provide their families with food. A survey from Rhodesia in 1952 revealed that as many as 10% of all marriages was between immature girls and adult men (Weinrich: 118). A

2005 analysis of UNICEF shows that in some African regions more than half of the girls aged 15-18 are married to men who are at least 10 years older than themselves (UNICEF: 2012).

Unlike her mother, Tambu has difficulties coming to terms with her predestined future and does not want to follow her mother's footsteps and get married in a young age. To Tambu, education signifies emancipation from poverty and the restrictions which follow the traditional female role. Nor does she find any support or understanding with her father who does not see the necessity for girls to be educated:

My father thought I should not mind.' Is that anything to worry about? Ha-a-a, it's nothing,' he reassured me, with his ability to jump whichever way was easiest, 'Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables. (15)

Like Tambu, the girls start their education in agriculture early and along with their mothers and grandmothers to become skilled agrarians. Tambu's father Jeremiah is a traditional farmer and represents the common patriarchal view that formal education for the girls is wasted money, because daughters will leave their family unit to get married and have their own children to feed when they reach maturity. African women are traditionally famous for their contribution to the households and food production systems which provide their families with the necessary nourishment and household money. The women's tasks are not easy and require multiple skills and good physique. Daily chores include in addition to agrarian tasks cleaning, collection of firewood and water, preparation of food and the care and education of the children: "Of whatever kind the mother's work, pounding and grinding grain, cultivating in the fields or carrying water, whatever movement is made by the mother the child remains on her back, neither rain nor cold can change this"(Schmidt: 48). Women's position in society is primarily as mother and wife and she has to remain subordinate to her husband and do what she is told. Jeremiah's opinions reflect the patriarchal gender interpretation which

stated that “A woman was a woman, so she was supposed to obey her husband’s instructions and rules” (Schmidt: 19). Traditionally, the hierarchy between men and women was reinforced by the social distance between the genders. Men and women did not eat or work together. Schmidt notes that “male power is institutionalized, embedded in the political, economic and religious organizations of society“(Schmidt: 20). At Tambu’s homestead the women’s inferior position is particularly visible during mealtime. Babamukuru’s homecoming is celebrated by the entire family with a feast prepared by the women who are not allowed to enjoy meals together with the men:

In the kitchen we dished out what was left in the pots for ourselves and the children. My aunt Mavis, Shupikai’s mother, in her joy over Babamukuru’s return, had been unrestrained in dishing out the meat for the house so that there was not enough left in the pot to make a meal for those who were not dining there. As a result the youngest of us had only gravy and vegetables to go with our *sadza*. (40)

In spite their inferior position African women’s contribution to their society has been seen as irreplaceable. Their work capacity and practical skills were as significant as their husband’s patriarchal status and made it even more important to the colonists to keep them at home. Even if the women structurally were inferior to the men, they still had a small opportunity to influence their husbands in private. Although Ma’Shingayi does not directly support Tambu in her desire for schooling, she speaks against her husband when Tambu asks for seed: “Listen to your child. She is asking for seed. That we can give. Let her try.”(17).

Ma’Shingayi manages to convince her husband that Tambu should get the chance to try and eventually fail her project as a part of her agrarian education. According to Schmidt, “Shona women devised strategies for both coping with and resisting their structural inferiority” like Ma’Shingayi so cleverly does (Schmidt: 15).

Tambu is a fighter and refuses to accept her parent's ideas about her natural place in life as mother and wife. She knows her only chance to escape the poverty and help her family is through education. She has been to school for a short time and she is determined to go back. Due to the lack of money she finds her solution in growing her own crop of maize on her late grandmother's patch of land:

I worked on the homestead, in the family field and on my own plot. How I mumbled adoring, reverent prayers to my grandmother in those early days of my market gardening. My grandmother, who had been an inexorable cultivator of land, sower of seeds and reaper of harvest until, literally until, her very last moment. When I was too small to be anything more than a hindrance in the family fields, I used to spend many productive hours working with my grandmother on the plot of land she called her garden. (17)

Tambu adored her grandmother and remembers with love the time spent with her learning how to cultivate the land and grow vegetables. Like Tambu's grandmother, older women always have had a special status within the African society. According to the traditional belief the spirits of grandparents held an important place in the spirit world which made them particularly wise and suited to settle disputes in and between families. Grandmothers similarly played an essential role in the education of the family's children, teaching them the family's history and traditional customs. Through her grandmother's stories, Tambu learns how the Europeans stole the family's land and enslaved them on their own farms. Her grandfather managed to escape but later was killed in the mines because "he had not been a good man," (19) refusing to follow the white mine-owners rigid rules. Left alone with six children to feed, Tambu's grandmother sent her oldest son Babamukuru to the mission "who surprised the missionaries by performing exceptionally well at school, in spite of putting in a full day's work at the farm."(19) By sending away her eldest son to the mission grandmother secured the rest of the family from starvation. To Tambu, her grandmother's stories "indicated that life could be lived with a modicum of dignity in any circumstances if you

worked hard and obeyed the rules.” (19) By growing her own maize, Tambu continues the old traditions of cultivating and harvest the land like her grandmother and the generations before her. Her grandmother’s inheritance also gives Tambu an opportunity to earn the money she needs in order to pay her school fees and start her long-desired education.

Like Tambu’s grandmother, her aunts Maiguru and Lucia represent important role models for her. Married to the chief of the family clan, Maiguru belongs to the fortunate part of the African population:

Maiguru was well looked after by Babamukuru, in a big house on the mission which I had not seen but of which I had heard rumours concerning its vastness and elegance. Maiguru was driven about in a car, looked well-kempt and fresh, clean all the time. She was altogether a different kind of woman than 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)

Being a prosperous well-educated woman Maiguru represents the opposite of Tambu’s mother Ma’Shingayi, but she is not necessarily more emancipated from the “weight of womanhood” than her less fortunate fellow sisters. In spite of her academic qualifications and economic contribution she is equally oppressed in terms of being subservient to the male members of the extended family. She is, in many ways, tied to the traditional culture and the patriarchal rules within the family just as much as Tambu’s mother is. Her position as teacher and wife to the head master at the mission school does not liberate Maiguru from being oppressed either in her family or in society. Maiguru acts as Babumukuru’s humble servant. She cannot speak for herself in the family and her existence is the one of the “angel in the house”; silently serving her family’s needs. Her husband’s desires become her duty and she quietly agrees with his often irrational decisions regarding the family. The fact that he uses violence against his children when they disobey him makes Maiguru try even harder to please him. Maiguru herself struggles to find a balance between traditions and the modern kind of

life she has adapted during her university stay in England. She likes the civilized Western way of running a household and the comfort that comes with it. Electrical household devices and an indoor bathroom with hot running water are privileges Maiguru knows how to appreciate.

Not to be recognised in her native country as a well-educated woman is hard for Maiguru to accept. She admits to Tambu with bitterness that she as well as Ma'Shingayi has made her sacrifices for the benefit of the family:

What it is', she sighed,' to have to choose between self and security. When I was in England I glimpsed for a little while the things I could have been, the things I could have done if- if – if things were- different- But there was Babawa Chido and the children and the family. And does anyone realise, does anyone appreciate, what sacrifices were made? As for me no one even thinks about the things I gave up. (103)

When Maiguru temporarily walks out of the marriage it only gives her a little more space in relation to her husband. She has made her point and comes back as a more determined and confident woman who dares to raise her voice toward her husband. Nevertheless, the equality she seeks in the partnership is impossible due to the existing gender inequalities. As long as she chooses to stay in the marriage, Maiguru similarly has to submit to her husband's rules because that is how her society works. Like Maiguru most African women did not get the emancipation they hoped for at the mission. They could get a formal education, but the unspoken purpose was always to marry a "proper missionary man" and serve him in his work. Historian Schmidt notes that "mission women and girls found that they had exchanged one form of patriarchal authority for another. The watchful eyes of African patriarchs were replaced by the paternalistic rules and regulations of European missionaries" (Schmidt: 123). The missionary education actually meant emancipation to a certain degree only for a very few African women. Particularly gifted African girls were given the possibility of a higher education at Christian convents run by nuns and originally reserved for white girls. Being

educated teachers or nurses would remove them from the poverty of the villages, but not necessarily give them gender equality in terms of economic and personal independence. Like Maiguru they would often find themselves in another patriarchal system which marginalized them as much as the traditional one did.

2.3. Escapism and Emancipation

Tambu's aunt Lucia represents a new generation of African women who claims respect in terms of her femaleness. In contrast to Maiguru and Ma'Shingayi, Lucia represents the family's "femme fatale"; she is strong, independent and sexually emancipated. She is what the colonists judged as "indolent", "immoral", "frivolous" and "slothful" (Schmidt: 99). African women were, by the colonists, frequently described as "lustful animals" and judged to be responsible for the immorality of the African society. Unlike her elder sister Ma'Shingayi, Lucia avoided getting married at a young age and instead had rich lovers who provided her with money. Born into poverty, Lucia has first-hand experience with African women's limitations, and she refuses to be a part of them:

Lucia too was bored with this meandering talk. 'Nyamashewe, Mwaramu' she interrupted, beginning the formal greetings. Technically she shouldn't have begun the greetings. Being of such low status, she ought to have waited for her superiors to start enquiring about each other's health before she opened her mouth. (133)

Lucia is bold and stands up for herself in a way few other women have done before her. She inherits qualities which make her dare to challenge the patriarchal system without fear. Outspoken and independent, she becomes an important role model for Tambu who fights for

her education and freedom. For Lucia, marriage for marriage's own sake is out of the question. She would rather starve than depend on a man: “As for Takesure, I don't know what he thinks he can give me. Whatever he can do for me, I can do better for myself.”(147) As a future husband Takesure with his frivolity and laziness is not an option for Lucia who manages well on her own.

Unlike the other women of her family Lucia has a strong belief in her own abilities and she knows she is better off on her own than getting married. She has no intentions of dedicating her life to pleasing a man without being pleased herself. Her stubbornness and courage is her drive, a drive we do not see in her fellow sisters. Where Maiguru and Ma'Shingayi adjust and keep quiet, Lucia raises her voice when injustice is done to her: “We just watched her as she strode in there, her right eye glittering as it caught the yellow paraffin flame, glittering dangerously at Takesure, who wisely shrank back into his corner of the sofa. 'Fool!' snorted Lucia, looming over his arms akimbo. 'Fool!'”(146) Lucia dares to challenge the patriarchy and she gets away with it. She is an outsider in many ways, suspected to be bewitched with supernatural powers which make the men a little afraid of her. According to Mbiti, African people believe that some individuals have access to power which they use for destructive purposes. Takesure is convinced that Lucia is a witch, “unnatural and vicious” (148) who “walks in the night” doing terrible things. (146) Lucia uses it to her own advantage and to achieve the respect she wants from the patriarchy. Schmidt notes that only a small minority of women achieved this position of authority. Diviners, midwives, spirit mediums and older women were part of a minor elite of women who challenged the established gender roles and similarly achieved some status and authority (Schmidt: 42). Lucia is one of the women, who with courage and strong will battles her way to a missionary education, which in the end enables her to become economically independent.

2.4. The Mission

The death of Tambu's brother Nhamo leads to a dramatic change in her life. Being now the eldest child in the family her uncle Babamukuru decides that she is the one who shall receive education at the mission school and secure the family's future. In spite of her mother's strong objections, Tambu is ecstatic. Until that point, her life has revolved around the homestead, the village and the local school and further education have been an unrealistic dream to her. The mission and the Whites is a wholly new experience to Tambu who cannot wait to start her new life. Her only knowledge about the missionaries is the stories told to her by Nhamo and her late grandmother:

The Whites on the mission were a special kind of white person, special in the way that my grandmother had explained to me, for they were holy. They had come not to take but to give. They were about God's business here in darkest Africa. They had given up the comforts and security of their own homes to come and lighten our darkness. It was a big sacrifice that the missionaries made. It was a sacrifice that made us grateful to them, a sacrifice that made them superior not only to us but to those other Whites as well who were here for adventure and to help themselves to our emeralds. (105)

Tambu's understanding of the missionaries' role is a result of her upbringing during British colonisation. The missionary schools in Africa started with the European occupation in 1890 lead by British Cecil John Rhodes who "regarded mission - work as one of the best means for opening up and civilising a country" (Schmidt: 123). The purpose of the mission schools was not to provide Africans with a purely academic education; the natives also had to be taught in industry, "orderliness and cleanliness." The idea of the natives as dirty, retarded savages who needed to be taught how to behave was deeply rooted in the British colonial attitude. Stories told by the first British immigrants left no doubt that the natives needed to be "enlightened and civilized" according to Western ideas. David Goldberg notes that "Racial rule is accordingly taken to be legitimated in virtue of the assumption that non-Europeans are

inherently inferior to Europeans, indeed, so inferior as to be incapable for the most part of self-governance”(Goldberg: 82). The European colonial idea of the black natives as inferior both in body and mind similarly strengthened the vision of intellectual enlightenment and education in the colonies. Together with the missionaries they saw an opportunity to civilise and save the Africans’ souls with the European Christian values and hence delegated the natives land to build their missionary stations and schools. According to Jesuit Father A. Casset, the curricula in African schools must include “Reading, writing, a little arithmetic, joined to the insistence of good manners and respect to those above them, the necessity and dignity of labour and the inculcation above all, of moral cleanliness”(Schmidt: 123). The sentence “respect to those above them” clearly states the missionaries’ view of the natives as inferior and in need of discipline and guidance.

The missionary education was in the first years of colonial rule strictly reserved for the boys who were trained to get into paid labour and thus become important servants and tax payers for the British Empire. Some of the boys came to the missions as orphans or prisoners from war and were taken under the charge of the Fathers. In this way, they controlled the boys’ upbringing and education from a very young age. African girls were not allowed into the mission schools before 1898 and then with a considerable more restricted education than the boys. Like the African men, the colonialists looked down on the native women and girls and thought it useless to give them an academic education since their role was assumed to lie in the domestic sphere. The missionaries later had to acknowledge the African mothers’ importance in their children’s upbringing. They knew they had to influence the mothers in order to raise the children in a “civilised” Christian manner because “It is useless to hope for permanent progress in the native population unless the women rise as well as the men. So long as the women cling to the customs, habits and ideas they will hold back their husbands and especially their sons” (Schmidt: 129). In 1920 the British Government opened public

schools for Africans, but it was not compulsory and the girls did not get easier access to schooling. When the industry expanded there was a need for a stable labour force and junior civil servants but this did not include the women and girls (Weinrich: 37). In contrast to the British children enrolled in these schools, the Africans had to pay an annual school fee for their children, which made it even more difficult for the parents to afford education for their children. When parents had to prioritize, they would send their sons to school due to their future roles as family providers. According to the tradition Tambu's only brother Nhamo is entitled to start his education from an early age:

Nhamo began school in the year that he turned seven. This was the age at which the Government had declared that African children were sufficiently developed cognitively to be able to understand the abstractions of numbers and letters: 1=1=2; k-i-t-s-i = kitsi. Nhamo was one of the youngest children in his class. Perhaps other parents, believing that we really were a retarded lot, thought it best to let their children's abilities mature a little before exposing them to the rigours of formal education. And, of course, there was the question of the fees. (13)

The notion of men as superior to women also reflected the missionary education which emphasized men's worth as the head of the households and figures of authority in society. The missionaries brought with them the Victorian Christian ideal of "the angel in the house" and educated the girls consequently according to domestic chores. This way the colonists reinforced the already existing patriarchal system in Africa who subsequently oppressed and marginalized women in terms of personal freedom to choose their own future. It was a general belief in the colony that African girls who learned English would leave their home villages in favour of the cities and hence become prostitutes. The British Government wanted the girls home to reproduce the labour force while the parents were afraid their daughters would become "unmanageable" and not marry the men chosen for them (Weinrich: 37). Being an African poor girl Tambu is struggling against both the tradition and the government when she fights for her education and freedom. Only the death of her brother and a wealthy

uncle makes it possible to pursue her dream of emancipation from the poverty and oppression in her home village.

Tambu's uncle Babamukuru is a natural product of the colonial missionary education. He came to the mission as a young boy and has been educated in the colonial system to achieve a respected position in the colonial system:

He was a rigid, imposing perfectionist, steely enough in character to function in the puritanical way that he expected, or rather insisted, that the rest of the world should function. Luckily, or maybe unluckily for him, throughout his life Babamukuru had found himself- as eldest child and son, as an early educated African, as headmaster, as husband and father, as provider to many – in positions that enabled him to organize his immediate world and its contents as he wished. (88)

Babamukuru has received a proper imperial education that gives him the right to “organize his immediate world and its contents as he wished”. He rules his wife and children according to the Christian values with which he has been indoctrinated at the mission. The traditional pre-colonial religion is something of which he strongly disapproves, characterizing it as ungodly and primitive: “I could not tell my father what curses my mother had wished on Babamukuru (...) I was truly frightened that she would device some terrible mischief if she had the opportunity to engage the services of a medium.” (...)

Uncle Babamukuru is the British Empire's and God's loyal servant and runs his family according to his beliefs which implies a total submission from his wife Maiguru and the children. Tambu has learned early to be humble and grateful to the Whites who provide for her long-awaited education and genuinely admires her uncle. To her “Babamukuru was God, and therefore I had arrived in heaven. “ (70) Brought up in the traditional environment has not yet given Tambu any negative preferences about the mission and the Western culture. When she arrives her new home Tambu only perceives the mission school as exciting and a temporary liberation from poverty and “the weight of womanhood.” She embraces the

mission's luxury facilities, her close friendship with cousin Nyasha but most of all the "various and extended library" where she can read "everything from Enid Blyton to the Bronte sisters." (94) The missionary education's curriculum was held in consistent accordance with the British syllabus and emphasized religious instruction together with English as the main language. This implied compulsory education in English literature, history and science. The educational idea was to make the Africans accustomed to the British culture and Christian values from an early age and thus transform them into loyal, obedient servants for the Government. The distance between the children's traditional life and the missionary education often lead to alienation and loss of the native language. Tambu's brother Nhamo "lost" his Shona language after a short period of time at the mission, and adjusted quickly to the modern facilities and lifestyle in his uncle's home. To Tambu, the mission means a step closer towards her long-desired freedom, and by Nhamo's death this is a dream which suddenly and unexpectedly comes true. Using the advantages of the colonial system Tambu breaks free from the image of the incapable pitiful African woman created by the white hegemony.

2.5. Colonial Resistance

Unlike Tambu her mother despairs about sending Tambu to the mission. Being a traditionalist Ma'Shingayi is the character that most resents the "Englishness" her eldest children are exposed to. Observing Babamukuru's family she genuinely believes that it is the "Englishness" that represents the curse in her life:

It's the Englishness,' she said. It'll kill them all if they aren't careful and she snorted. 'Look at them. That boy Chido can hardly speak a word of his own mother's tongue, and, you'll see, his children will be worse. Running around with that white one, isn't he, the missionary's daughter? His children will disgrace us. You'll see. And himself, to look at him he may be look all right, but there's no telling what's price he's paying'. She wouldn't say much about Nyasha. 'About that one we don't even speak. It's speaking for itself.' Both of them, it's the Englishness. (207)

Ma'Shingayi's resistance to the Western culture is grounded in anxiety not only of losing her eldest daughter to Western culture. It is equally a resistance to the missionary station itself. The negative effect she observes by the mission's influence is to a large extent correct, but she categorically refuses to see what could be a positive outcome for Tambu in terms of education and independence. In fear of the anticipated consequences she strongly objects to sending Tambu to the mission:

You Jeremiah, are you mad? Have you eaten some wild scrub that has gone to your head? I think so, otherwise how could you stand there and tell me to send my child to a place of death, the place where my first child died! Today you are raving! She will not go. Unless you want me to die too. The anxiety will kill me. I will not let her go. (56)

Ma'Shingayi's perception of the mission "as a place of death" is associated with two circumstances: First her son Nhamo who died from a disease caught at the mission, and second her resistance against the colonial influence to which Tambu inevitably will be exposed, and which Ma'Shingayi fears will alienate her daughter toward her own culture. Besides losing a companion and helper Ma'Shingayi sees her daughter's education as a threat to the domestic structure which has been maintained by the family's women for generations. Sending her daughter away places a double burden on her and the remaining children. According to Schmidt, parents were particularly reluctant to send the girls away because they needed them at home to help with agricultural and domestic tasks (Weinrich: 141). With the girls at school their mothers would have to carry a heavier workload at home. Another

argument was that it was in the household's interest to marry the girls away in a young age in order to collect their bride wealth. African girls who developed relationships with white students would presumably be influenced by Western values and become "Anglicized" and distant from their own traditions. There was a concern that "by exposing the young girls to European ways, the girls would be enticed away from their village homes to the "glamorous" life in the cities" (Schmidt: 133). The fact that Nhamo rapidly "lost" his Shona language after a relatively short time at the mission enforces Ma'Shingayi's belief in the Catholic school as a demoralizing place for Tambu. She does not want to see Tambu become like Maiguru's daughter Nyasha whom she perceives as completely "Anglicized" by her stay in England. Observing her lack of traditional manners and loss of the Shona language, Ma'Shingayi finds Nyasha to be "a miserable child" (52)¹. By rebelling her mother and go to the mission, Tambu makes her first break with the compulsory traditional female role.

The Catholic Church wedding imposed and paid by Babamukuru similarly evokes Ma'Shingayi's anger: "I could not tell my father what curses my mother had wished on Babamukuru (...) I was truly frightened that she would device some terrible mischief if she had the opportunity to engage the services of a medium.(188) Having lived together with her husband Jeremiah her whole adult life and given birth to their mutual children, Ma'Shingayi does not understand Babamukuru's need for a ceremonial Catholic Church wedding. According to Babamukuru the couple live in "sin" (149) and thus need to be "married in church before God" (149) Pregnant and powerless Ma'Shingayi does not have the willpower to oppose Babamukuru's wedding plans. In a conversation with her sister Lucia, the reader comes to understand how oppressed Ma'Shingayi feels when she directly accuses her patriarchal society of being responsible for her ill-fated life and position as woman:

¹ Nyasha's situation will be discussed in chapter 2.6

Does it matter what I want? Since when has it mattered what I want? So why should it starts mattering now? Do you think I wanted to be impregnated by that old dog? Do you think I wanted to travel all this way across this country of our forefather's only to live in dirt and poverty? Do you really think I wanted the children for whom I made the journey to die only five years after it left the womb? Or my son to be taken from me? So what difference does it make whether I have a wedding or whether I go? It is all the same. (155)

Ma'Shingayi's speech reveals a bitter and disillusioned woman who has lost faith in the society into which she is born. In spite her indifference to the wedding, it deeply annoys her that she is dressed up in a white wedding gown and a veil, which she finds equally humiliating and foolish." To wear a veil at my age, at my age to wear a veil! Just imagine- to wear a veil!" (187) The Catholic wedding rituals completely collide with Ma'Shingayi's traditional belief about cohabitation and marriage but her inferior position forces her to accomplish the ceremony without objections.

Despite Babamukuru's threats, Tambu refuses to participate in her parents' wedding. She finds the wedding ridiculous reducing her parents to "the level of the stars of a comic show." (165) Her resistance is so severe that it almost kills her simultaneously making her question her uncle's religious rule for the first time since her arrival at the mission :“ My vagueness and my reverence for my uncle, what he was, what he had achieved, what he represented and therefore what he wanted, had stunted the growth and faculty of criticism, sapped the energy that in childhood I had used to define my own position.” (164) At the homestead Tambu was an outspoken and strong headed girl who never was afraid of sharing her opinions about issues concerning her second-sex position in the family. In contrast, upon entering the mission and Babamukuru's house, Tambu is transformed into the silent, obedient daughter she is expected to be. The rebellion against Babamukuru signals a turning point for Tambu; it enables her to take back her critical position and to claim her own voice and identity.

Tambu is presented with an opportunity for higher education when she receives a scholarship to the convent Sacred Heart, an offer which devastates her mother even more than sending Tambu to the mission did. As a consequence Ma'Shingayi goes into a deep depression. She does not see how a missionary education possibly could liberate Tambu from "the weight of womanhood" other than alienate her from her family and culture. Committed to the traditional customs, Ma'Shingayi would prefer that Tambu married a local man and continued the tradition into which she is born. Like Ma'Shingayi, Uncle Babamukuru initially objects to letting Tambu go to the convent. He wants her to finish her courses at the mission, marry a decent man and set up a decent home:

In all that we are doing for you, we are preparing you for this future life of yours, and I have observed from my own daughter's behaviour that is not a good thing for a young girl to associate too much with these white people, to have too much freedom. I have seen that girls who do that do not develop into decent women. (183)

The convents run by nuns were designed to educate white African girls and offered one of the best educations for women in Africa. For a black girl it was a rare opportunity to gain admittance and Tambu is overjoyed by the thought of going away to Sacred Heart to continue her education: "I was to take another step upwards in the direction of my freedom. Another step away from the flies, the smells, the fields and the rags, from stomachs which were seldom full, from dirt and disease." (186) By getting a higher education, Tambu will not only improve her and her family's living conditions, she will also gain a new freedom from the limitations of her gender. The Young Ladies College of Sacred Heart gives Tambu a professional foundation but paradoxically an introduction to racial discrimination as well. In contrast to the white students, all the Africans at the school are entitled to share a small room because, as the nun says "we have more Africans than usual this year and so we had to put them all in there." (198) The missionaries' idea was to keep the African girls "as near to

native life as possible” and therefore forced them to live together in dormitories. (Schmidt: 133) They found it unwise to entirely change the girls living conditions, because they would not live according to the European standards when they got married. It was a common concern among the nuns that the girls would feel alienated when they returned to the villages if they were too much exposed to the European lifestyle and the things they neither could nor should have.

2.6. Living in the Third Space

The clash of cultures is evident in *Nervous Conditions*. The influence of the dominating culture on the natives manifests itself in all areas of the people’s lives. Whereas some of the characters embrace the “Englishness” others strongly reject it. In the middle are the children who grow up in-between the traditional and British culture, a location Homi Bhabha refers to as the Third Space (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin: 156). The Third Space is a psychological location emerged from both the existing and the imposing culture and hence creates a hybrid space where the two cultures interrelate. The nature of hybridity is typically reflected in language, traditions and ethics causing issues particularly related to identity. In *Nervous Conditions* Nyasha is a character who occupies the Third Space, struggling to find her identity as a young Rhodesian female:

We shouldn’t have gone’, Nyasha was saying, looking disheartened. ‘The parents ought to have packed us off home. They should have, you know. Lots of people did that. Maybe that would have been the best. For them at least, because now they’re stuck with hybrids for children. (79)

Born in Africa and raised in England Nyasha is a child caught between two worlds who struggles to find her place when the family returns to Rhodesia. Having spent most of her childhood in England, Nyasha finds it hard to adjust to the mission community and its

expectations. She has forgotten most of her Shona language and traditional customs which make her feel like an outsider at family gatherings. The stay in England has made Nyasha genuinely alienated from her Shona culture which she considers to be old fashioned and authoritarian. In particular the second-class position the women hold annoys her. She does not want to be inferior to men and finds it unfair that her brother Chido is given all the privileges and freedom she cannot have in terms of being a girl. Nyasha gradually becomes more self-conscious as she grows older and fails to learn the African etiquette properly. For example, Tambu observes that “Nyasha liked to avoid her parents and their friends at this time because they were bound to say something offensive, like complaining that her gym-slip was too short or grumbling that in three years she had still not learnt the correct way of greeting the elders.” (100) Nyasha’s relationship to her parents is tense. She is a strong-headed and intelligent girl who refuses to adjust to her father’s expectations of her as the obedient and submissive daughter. She claims the right to decide for herself how to dress and behave which creates an on-going conflict between her and her father. .

To Babamukuru’s annoyance Nyasha has adopted the English way of life and appears as a modern English young girl both in appearance and behaviour. She speaks English fluently, smokes cigarettes and wear short modern dresses “hardly enough of it to cover her thighs” (37) The African beauty ideal is not to Nyasha’s taste who has embraced the Western slenderness as the appropriate look. She finds Tambu’s figure fairly nice except from her bottom which she describes as “rather large” (92). In contrast to the Western beauty ideal the Africans embrace large bottoms as a sign of good health and fertility. As the head master’s daughter, Nyasha belongs to the privileged part of the community and lack of food is not a concern. Babamukuru is proud to hold his position as the wealthy provider and food is a major issue in the family. Whereas Maiguru organizes every mealtime to a feast, Nyasha declines the porridge and toast “because too much food would make her fat”(93) Her

obsession with body and shape is perceived as strange by Tambu who comes from a village where food is a shortage and people suffers from malnutrition and hunger every day.

Babamukuru tries in various ways to transform his Anglicised daughter into the good native girl he wants her to be. Constantly criticising her for being outspoken and disobedient, their first serious fight occurs around the dinner table. Babamukuru does not find *Lady Chatterley's Lover* suitable literature to his daughter and to Nyasha's dismay it is seized and removed without further discussion. The scene that follows clearly indicates Nyasha's strained relationship not only to her father but similarly to food. As the unchallenged head of the family, Babamukuru silences her but fails to make her eat her dinner. With the intention of standing up for herself, Nyasha uses food as a weapon to rebel her father and gain some kind of control and dignity in the situation. It seems that her eating is the only thing her father cannot supervise and the dinner incident is only the first of many conflicts to come between Babamukuru and Nyasha.

Babamukuru's wife Maiguru agrees with her husband that their stay in England has had negative effects on the children:

They are too Anglicised' explained Maiguru. 'They picked up all these disrespectful ways in England' she continued conversationally,' and it's taking them time to learn how to behave home again. It's difficult for them because things are so different. We keep trying to teach her the right manners, always telling her Nyasha do this; Nyasha why didn't you do that? But it's taking time. Ha Nyasha! That child of mine has her own thoughts about everything! (74)

Nyasha's "disrespectful ways" are expressed through her negative attitude to the expected manners but similarly through ways that to her was natural behaviour in England. Having lived in England with the family for five years, Nyasha has adjusted to a Western lifestyle with more freedom in terms of gender equality. Back in Rhodesia she meets a society with a

completely different view of what is respectful or disrespectful in terms of being a young girl. What her mother calls “the right manners” is to Nyasha sometimes impossible to understand. Unlike her elder brother Chido Nyasha is not allowed to move freely around the mission. She is severely controlled by her father who demands good school results in order to secure her future as a good missionary wife.

In contrast with Tambu, Nyasha is not happy with the missionary school. The colonial education and social expectations diverge strongly with Nyasha’s own view of women’s role in the Rhodesian society. Despite being one of the best students she does not succeed in becoming an accepted part of the school society, which makes Nyasha a lonely and isolated girl. Tambu realises that it is not Nyasha’s English accent that causes the other girls to dislike her, but something deeper: ‘She thinks she is white, they used to sneer, and that was as bad as a curse. “’She is proud, pronounced others. ’She is loose, the most vicious condemned her.’” (95) Being the headmaster’s daughter does not exactly help Nyasha’s case who even more determined strives to pass with top grades and hence pleases her father. Being the second-best student is neither an option to Nyasha nor her father who to her teachers’ delight puts all her energy into the school work. Achieving the best results at school Nyasha receives praise from the teachers but the home situation with her father does not improve. According to Babamukuru it is “important to be good, to listen to what we, your parents tell you to do, to study your books diligently and not let your mind be distracted by other things.” (89). To Nyasha, this demand of obedience becomes one of the major problems in her relationship with Babamukuru.

2.7. Nyasha's Rebellion

Scholarly perfectionism and hard work become Nyasha's escape from a situation she finds intolerable. Whereas Tambu enjoys the family's literary part of the library, Nyasha becomes absorbed in the history books. She is determined to find out about the imperial rule and how it works around the world because as she says " 'you have to know the facts if you were ever going to find the solutions'"(94) Having lived in Europe for years Nyasha has experienced how it is to live in the free part of the world. During her stay in England, she like her mother has had a glimpse of how her life could have been if she had grown up in a Western society. Living in England she probably would have been given the possibility to choose the future she wanted without the gender restrictions she meets in Rhodesia. Paradoxically it is the same government that contributes to place limitations on her when she returns to Africa. The traditional gender roles stand strong and make it difficult for Nyasha to find support for her ideas in her local society. Her view of the colonial rule and missionaries hence differs profoundly from Tambu's who is raised in the traditional environment. Nyasha understands how the patriarchal system which suppresses women is strengthened by the colonial rule. She becomes convinced that unless Rhodesia becomes independent her people, and the women in particular, always will suffer from injustice and sexual oppression.

Being trapped and controlled is not an option to Nyasha who confesses to Tambu her despair about the situation at home: "You grow and you compensate. You have to. There's no other way. We're all trying to do it you know. All of us. But it's difficult when everything's laid out for you. It's difficult when everything's taken care of. Even the way you think" (175) Nyasha finds herself in a situation where she is denied the chance to have her own

opinions or make her own choices about how to live her life but she does not submit without a fight. It does not come as a surprise that the on-going battles between Nyasha and her father one day culminate in a devastating fight that brings their relationship to crisis. Coming late home from the school dance Nyasha is being accused of putting her father in disgrace by behaving like a “whore” (116). Babamukuru holds the Christian view of women as either whores or Madonna’s. According to the missionaries African women were natural loose women who needed to be controlled and educated to be the desired “angels in the house”; silent, obedient and invisible. As the Head Master at the mission it is particularly important to Babamukuru that his daughter behaves according to the rules. The argument ends with Babamukuru threatening to kill Nyasha because she dares to challenge his undisputed authority as the head of the house. Nyasha is lucky to come away from the situation only injured, but Tambu questions for the first time her uncle’s position as a male authority. She realises that the victimisation of women she has seen in the village is universal: “It didn’t depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition. Men took it everywhere with them.” (118) The incident with Nyasha and her father hence becomes an awakening for Tambu who comes to see her cousin’s position differently and thus to better understand her rebellion.

Nyasha realises that her situation will not change for the better and that her future is determined by the cultural frame in which she lives. Young African girls are expected to obey their fathers and future husbands and are prepared to a life as wives and child bearers. Being educated does not necessarily mean that you become more emancipated than less fortunate women; rather it means that one kind of patriarchal system is exchanged for another. Being the strong and self-opinionated girl Nyasha is, she finds it impossible to follow the rules given to her by her father and society. She sees this oppression in her mother’s marriage and loathes the way Maiguru has to submit to her husband: “’ You have to keep moving’, she said. Getting involved in this and that, finding out one thing and another. Moving, all the

time. Otherwise you get trapped. Look at poor Mum. Can you imagine anything worse?”

(98) When Maiguru actually leaves her husband for a few days, she has her daughter’s full support. It relieves Nyasha to see that an escape from the entrapment will be possible.

Likewise, she understands that her situation at home does not entirely rest on Babamukuru

alone: “It’s not really him, you know. I mean not really the person. It’s everything, it’s

everywhere. So where do you break out to?” (176) In this passage Nyasha shows a genuine

understanding of the colonial world she lives within and that she is caught in a system more

than by her father. She realises that her father is as much of a victim as she is. His

expectations of her origin from his own Christian up-bringing and their ideas of women’s

place in society. As the responsible servant of the colonial rule, Babamukuru acts according

to the system he lives within. The fact that Maiguru decides to return to her husband only a

few days after she leaves reinforces Nyasha’s beliefs that she herself is trapped in a

deadlocked situation. She sees her own future emerging exactly the same as her mother’s and

that is a future she does not embrace.

Nyasha’s problems escalate when Tambu is about to leave for the convent to continue

her studies. Tambu is her only friend and confidante, and the loss of the close relationship is

devastating to Nyasha’s health. Her continuing fights with Babamukuru develop into an

endless battle about Nyasha’s eating habits. Tambu notes that she “was looking drawn and

had lost so much of her appetite that it showed all over her body” (109) Babamukuru

repeatedly insists that Nyasha must eat: “You will eat that food’, commanded the man. Sit

and eat that food. I am telling you. Eat it!” (192) When commands do not work Babamukuru

threatens Nyasha: ”She must eat that food, all of it. She is always doing this, challenging me.

I am her father. If she doesn’t want to do what I say, I shall stop providing for her- fees,

clothes, food everything.” (193) To restore the family peace Nyasha eats only to go the

bathroom where Tambu can hear her “gagging and choking” (193) to get it out again.

Nyasha has developed bulimia and is in her first stage to get life-threatening ill with anorexia nervosa. Her poor state of health is clear to Tambu when she returns for a visit; Nyasha is “definitively thin” (201) and looks “skeletal” (202). She has become quieter and studies even harder than before. Her nervous state of mind worries Tambu who understands something is very wrong with Nyasha. When the final breakdown comes, Nyasha is beyond common sense by rage and frustration:

She rampaged, shredding her history book between her teeth (‘their history. Fucking liars. Their bloody lies’) breaking mirrors, her clay pots, anything she could lay her hands on and jabbing the fragments viciously into her flesh, stripping the bedclothes, tearing her clothes from the wardrobe and trampling them underfoot.’ They’ve trapped us. They’ve trapped us. But I won’t be trapped. I’m not a good girl. I won’t be trapped” (205)

Feeling trapped and utterly frustrated by the colonial system within which she lives, Nyasha literally eats the colonial history written by Western historians. Text becomes food, the colonial history eaten and spitted out as worthless and insignificant. Trapped in a system she loathes, she rejects being the good girl her father wants her to be. Starving herself to death becomes to Nyasha the only solution to escape her entrapment.

2.8. Anorexia and Bulimia as a Response to Oppression

Historically, eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia have been regarded as female maladies associated with the white Western middle class, a view that is verified by the white psychiatrist who first meets Nyasha. He claims that “Nyasha could not be ill, that Africans did not suffer in the way (we) had described.” (206) Most feminists agree that eating disorders among women stem from “a rebellion against patriarchy through rejection of one's own sexuality” (Mahowald: 299). Nyasha reacts to the patriarchy by starving herself which

according to feminist Naomi Wolf is a natural response to the oppressive system within which she lives. She argues that anorexia and bulimia begin "as sane and mentally healthy responses to an insane social reality: that most women can feel good about themselves only in a state of permanent semi starvation" which is seen in Nyasha's rebellion against her authoritarian father (Wolf: 198). Buchan and Gregory (1984) support her view:

Psychosocial factors are more important than biological in accounting for the infrequent cases of anorexia in Zimbabwe. They note the social and psychological conflicts engendered by the changes in culture for their patient and particularly emphasize the importance of extended family interaction patterns in ameliorating the development of anorexia nervosa (Dolan: 67-79).

Babamukuru's constant criticism of Nyasha leads to self-hatred and ultimately anorexia nervosa which almost kills her. Being a female she lives a restricted life controlled by a father who rigidly determines her actions every day. To stop eating is what she comes to see as her only way of resisting a colonial world she does not want to live in.

Nyasha's situation represents a well-known topic among the children of the empire: they find themselves between two cultures, struggling to identify with either of them. The clash of cultures is especially hard on females due to the different expectations presented by either culture. The mainstream Western world's slim beauty ideals collide profoundly with the African sturdy standard of attractiveness. Short sexy dresses are not favoured as decent clothing in a strict Christian patriarchy where women are supposed to be silent virgins. Even more serious is the colonizers' view of African culture as inferior which results in cultural mimicry among natives. According to Homi Bhabha the colonial strategy was to create the natives "to be Anglicized" which meant adopting the coloniser's cultural habits, intentions and values (Bhabha: 1990). Traditional languages had to give way for English and Christian values became the new guiding star. Together with the changes followed strict rules which enforced the already restricted position of women. Nyasha has assimilated the Western way

of living to a degree where she has lost her native language Shona and cultural traditions. Returning to Rhodesia she is forced to adjust to system she perceives as oppressive and unjust. Contorted and dismayed Nyasha's future happiness rests in finding the balance between the cultures.

2.9. Summary

In spite of her young age Tambu becomes aware of the injustice between the genders within her society and realizes that education is for her the only possibility to be able to influence and alter her status as a second-class female. She is determined and grasps the opportunity she is given without hesitations when her brother dies: "If you were clever, you slipped through any loophole you could find. I for one was going to take any opportunity that came my way. I was quite sure about that; I was determined...I would go" (179). Seeing her mother's hard work with carrying water, growing the crops and being beaten on a regularly basis by her husband makes Tambu convinced that the mission is her only chance to gain independence and liberty.

During her stay at the mission Tambu gradually understands that her freedom comes at a cost. Like Nyasha she enters the Third Space where she needs to reevaluate her previous ideals and attitudes toward the colonial influence. As a child she perceived the missionaries only as liberators who could rescue her from "the weight of womanhood" and her predestined future as mother and wife. Tambu's "single story" of the missionaries was emancipation. The process of observing Maiguru and her cousin Nyasha teaches Tambu another side of the missionary story, which gives her a new awareness of the complexities of colonisation. The "Englishness" and its standards of living do not necessarily emancipate her more than her traditional society at the homestead.

Tambu's stay at the convent makes her question the missionaries' idea of women's role and she "refuses to get brainwashed" as she puts it, by the white culture's influence and marginalization of Africans. She no longer embrace the "Englishness" she previously saw as emancipating, recognising the negative effects the European influence has particularly on women. She recognizes that missionary education for African women did not liberate them but rather sent them back to the domestic sphere where they could fulfil their role as subservient wives to their husbands. Women were marginalized and oppressed in terms of being women and regarded as second-class citizens, not only by their own society but similarly by colonialists. Another negative result was the alienation many Africans experienced as a result of their European education. As Tambu grows older and sees this unfair treatment of women she reaches a new consciousness and fights not to lose her sense of self and her African identity in her journey toward freedom. Tambu knows she is educating herself away from her family and culture and she describes her emancipation "as a long and painful process" (208)) but concludes that "the cost would balance" (186) and that her sacrifice "would be worth it to dress my sisters in pretty clothes, feed my mother until she was plump and energetic again, stop my father making a fool of himself every time he came into Babumukuru's presence."(186) At that point Tambu reaches another level of consciousness about the mission and its role in the Rhodesian society. She knows that her future will be determined by her subsequent choices. The victimization of women she sees does not depend on class or culture, but it is universal. For her the convent becomes another step away from poverty, and a step toward emancipation from her limited future role as mother and wife.

3. *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

3.1. Background

Purple Hibiscus is young Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's first novel. Published in 2003 it was awarded with The Commonwealth Writer's Prize and the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award. "Stunning", "remarkable" and "heartfelt" represent only a few of the superlatives used by the critics.

Set in the early 1990's *Purple Hibiscus* takes place in the postcolonial era, introducing us to a family and society where things start to fall apart; Nigeria begins to fall apart under a military coup, and likewise Kambili's family life is shaken to the depths: "Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère." (3) "Things started to fall apart" is a direct reference to Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*, a novel written 25 years before *Purple Hibiscus*. The novels are thematic similar and spin around the breakdown of family and community under the pressure of religious dogmatism and colonial influence.

Having been raised in the postcolonial era author Chimamanda Adichie has strong opinions about the negative colonial effects on women and the missionaries' role in this development. In an interview with Ike Anya she says that

Religion is such a huge force, so easily corruptible and yet so capable of doing incredible good. The streak of intolerance I see masquerading itself as faith and the way we create an image of God that suits us, are things I am interesting in questioning. I am also interested in colonized religion, how people like me can profess and preach an aspect of their indigenous culture and yet cling so tenaciously to a religion that considers most that indigenous culture evil (Anya.Ike 2003).

Like *Nervous Conditions*, Adichie's novel depicts a young African girl's journey from a naïve teenage girl to adolescence and maturity. Exposed to sexual oppression, religious fanaticism and the complexities of colonisation protagonist Kambili, like Tambu, gradually becomes aware of the flaws of the society in which she lives. The novel starts in medias res on Palm Sunday, but through flash backs and Kambili's memories we follow her psychic and physical development during three of the most important years of her life. Oppressed and silenced Kambili needs to find her way from silence and voicelessness to voice and healing.

3.2. Silence and Submission

In contrast to Tambu in *Nervous Conditions*, who is born into poverty, Kambili belongs to the Nigerian black elite. Blessed with material wealth Kambili and her elder brother Jaja lives an economical privileged life compared to the average Nigerian citizen. Her father Eugene is like Babamukuru, a respected figure in the society and the proud provider of a family which he keeps in total control by rigid religious rules and potential violence. Kambili's world is centred entirely on her education and family life where rules and order are crucial leading stars:

Kambili was written in bold letters on top of the white sheet of paper, just as *Jaja* was written on the schedule above Jaja's desk in the room. (...) Papa liked order. It showed even in the schedules themselves, the way his meticulously drawn lines, in black ink, cut across each day, separating study from siesta, siesta from family time, family time from eating, eating from prayer, prayer from sleep.(23-24)

The rigid schedules make the home into a prison where Eugene is the self-appointed executive and his family his obedient subjects. Their luxurious home reflects the feeling of entrapment where Kambili "feels suffocated" despite the spacious open rooms. (7) Confined

by “compound walls, topped by electric wires” Kambili’s family is physically as well as psychically excluded from the outside world living in their father’s unpredictable mercy.(9) Commanded into her father’s bedroom for punishment Kambili associates his bright open room as a never ending heaven and a place “there was nowhere to run to” when penance waits. As the family’s chief of executive and self -appointed God, Eugene carries out his duties and regularly tortures his family to become the humble servants of God. Kambili recalls her father’s disciplinary penalties from an early age when she herself had to pick up her spanking stick in the garden, learning how to find branches which Jaja “soaked in cold water because he said that made them less painful when they landed on their body.” (193) The fear expressed by Kambili when someone in the family fails to live up to Eugene’s expectations is characterized by a silence that speaks louder than words. Growing up in a home with the anxiety of anticipated violence has made Kambili lose her ability to speak out: “I cleared my throat, willed the words to come. I knew them, thought them. But they would not come.”(48) Kambili, Jaja and their mother Beatrice have over the years learnt to communicate without words, only interconnecting with their eyes. The silence in the house is by Kambili referred to as “the years when Jaja and Mama and I spoke more with our spirits than our lips” (16) in fear of evoking Eugene’s dissatisfaction:

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 sculpture 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 the church for benediction afterwards. Even our family time on Sunday was quiet, without chess games or newspaper discussions, more in tune of the Day of Rest. (31)

The family’s world circles entirely around Eugene’s inflexible and rigid time schedules where there is no room for laughter or joy. Eugene’s God is a dark and vindictive God who threatens with fire and hell where modesty and subservience are not shown. His family

members become his prisoners and obedient subjects who have to subdue to a father and husband who perceives himself to be God's executive. His extremism includes his wife Beatrice who is abused and beaten on a regularly basis when he needs to let out his rage. The abuse of their mother Beatrice is something Kambili and Jaja know about but never speak out about. Kambili reveals that the knocking sounds from her parent's bedroom are easier to forget if she just imagines that it is the door that has gotten stuck: "If I imagined it hard it enough, then it would be true" (33). The idea of her father abusing their mother is a burden to painful to comprehend to Kambili and her brother. When Beatrice is beaten so badly that she miscarries, the siblings clean up the blood, but they do not talk about the incident: "We did not talk about Mama. Instead, we talked about the three men who were publicly executed two days before, for drug trafficking." (33) In order to cope with the violence Kambili and Jaja repress their feelings and try to pretend that the abuse never happened.

3.3. The Infallible Father

Silently observing her father's abuse Kambili is terrified to make mistakes which evoke Eugene's displeasure. At the same time she shows an unconditional love and admiration for what he represents in society. Like Tambu initially perceives Babamukuru as God, Kambili's sees Eugene as the infallible father who is protective, generous and closer to God than anyone she knows. She remembers moments of his solicitude from childhood and admires his importance in the local church where he is praised for his generosity. Like Babamukuru, Eugene does what he assumes to be his duty as the loyal servant of the British Government. Brought up by the missionaries, Eugene has learned to appreciate the gift of subordination and humility. Piousness and discipline are fundamental values Eugene pursues in the upbringing of his own children. Within the local Catholic Church Eugene is seen as an

authority in line with God. According to the local Catholic priesthood it is “the pope, Papa and Jesus – in that order” (4), due to his godliness and generous donations.

Like her fellow sisters in *Nervous Conditions* Kambili in terms of being the family’s daughter is bound to play the second fiddle. Her brother Jaja is like Nhamo, the important child who represents the pride and hope of the family. His male position makes him get his father’s undivided attention while Kambili constantly struggles to be acknowledged by Eugene. Unlike Nyasha, who rebels her father and literary fights for her privileges, Kambili continuously tries to please her father no matter what she actually feels about the subject. Constantly praising him, she tells that she needs him “to smile at me, in that way that lit up his face that warmed something inside me” and when her father at moments recognizes her efforts Kambili feel “as though my mouth were full of melting sugar.” (26) Besides the rituals of the “daily love sips” of her father’s tea there is a genuine lack of closeness and affection between father and daughter. (8) Kambili’s love for Eugene is innocent and unconditional but simultaneously grounded in a genuine fear of reprisal if she not meets his standards to satisfaction as a Catholic, daughter and student.

Like Tambu and Nyasha, Kambili receives her education at the best missionary school for girls and studies hard to perform well. “Daughters of the Immaculate Heart” is an expensive private school run by Catholic Reverend Sisters preparing the girls for higher education. Sheltered by high walls “topped by jagged pieces of green glass with sharp edges jutting out” (45) the school stands as a prison- like building where discipline and order are decisive concerns. Like Tambu’s missionary school “Daughters of the Immaculate Heart’s” curriculum is based on the Empire School where English knowledge and religion form the academic cornerstone. The teachers describe Kambili as a “brilliant, obedient student and a daughter to be proud of” (39), acknowledging her academic skills and hard work, while her school mates perceive Kambili to be a “back-yard snob” with whom they do not want to

socialize. (52) Her silence is interpreted to be snobbish and arrogant leaving Kambili lonely and isolated from the rest of the girls. In many ways she shares Nyasha's position as the outsider which makes her intolerable in the schoolyard. Kambili has, in terms of carrying heavier burdens, accepted her place at school as inevitable only striving to be the best student in class. The failure of coming second involves penalties and humiliations from Eugene which Kambili fears more than anything: "I had come second. I was stained by failure." (39) This way both home and school become prisons to Kambili where she is measured solely from her practical and academic standards which never succeed to be perfect in her father's eyes.

The failure of taking second at school is far from the only thing Kambili fears. Her father's expectations demand absolute perfection and anything less provokes his unpredictable rage and cruel punishments. Staying in the same house as the "heathen" grandfather Papa- Nnukwu is one thing that is not tolerated and God's wrath toward this excruciating sin is literally scalding:

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

Kambili's silent fear and pain of her father's torture is heart breaking, leaving the reader with a desperate hope of rescue in the last moment. The only person Kambili could possibly rely on is her mother Beatrice who is too terror- stricken to do anything than quietly observing her daughter's agony. Having been beaten and controlled by Eugene for years Beatrice has lost her own voice and is helplessly witnessing her children's suffering. Kambili herself

accepts the inevitable without questioning the ethics of her father's decisions. Her upbringing has taught her to tolerate Eugene's revengeful God without critical objections leaving her to believe she has deserved the torture to which she is exposed. Until the last beating when she is so seriously wounded that she almost dies, Kambili stands out as a passive victim to her father and close society. Her only role model has been Beatrice who endures the same pain and helplessness as her children, a pain Kambili does not want to participate in anymore. The rebellion she shows during her father's last attack shows a girl who has lost her absolute faith in God. She refuses to play by the rigid rules set by her father, even if it almost costs her life. She simply cannot take anymore: "Perhaps it was what we wanted to happen, Jaja and I, without being aware of it. Perhaps we all changed after Nsukka – even Papa – and things were destined to not be the same, to not be in their original order" (209) This acknowledgment shows another, more mature Kambili who starts to resent her father's truths as the only ones. Learning about her father's death Kambili tells us that she "had never considered the possibility that Papa could die (...) He had seen immortal." (287) To Kambili, Eugene always was the infallible father. The love she felt for him as a child was based on fear of reprisals if she did not perform to his ideals.

The grown-up Kambili views her father with a new understanding. She manages to see his cruelty, but also how he, like her, was a victim of the system in which he was raised. His death is to Kambili not a victory but rather a sad necessity which finally allows her to gain independence and maturity. Like Tambu rebels Babamukuru and finally breaks free from his domination, Kambili similarly takes her first steps toward healing. By refusing to accept her father's supremacy she finally is on her way to find her own voice and identity without the heavy chains of misplaced dependability her mother Beatrice carries.

3.4. The Bringer of Joy.

Beatrice's life bears many similarities to Maiguru in *Nervous Conditions*. Brought up as a missionary's daughter we are told that Beatrice's father, like her husband, worshipped the dark, unforgiving God who punished sinners hard and ruthless: "He did things the right way, the way the white people did, not what our people do now" (...) I was only ten when he died, but I remembered his almost albino-green eyes, the way he seemed to use the word *sinner* in every sentence.(67) Beatrice's up-bringing and marriage has made her a woman of few words, quietly accepting the mental and physical cruelties committed by a fanatic father and her present husband. Like Maiguru she nurtures and serves her husband in all possible ways and becomes a shadow in her own life without her own voice and opinions. Like her namesake Beatrice in Dante's "Divine Comedy", Beatrice serves as the saviour of her family. Like Dante saw Beatrice as his saviour, Eugene seems to believe that Beatrice rids him of all evil intentions and thus make her the catalyst of his frustrations.

The economic benefits of being married to Eugene represent a security Beatrice in her position is not able to change for her personal freedom and integrity. She is brought up in a time where women's place was at home and has accepted her role as mother and nurturer. She clearly shares Tambu's mother Ma'Shingayi's view of a woman's role and place in society: "A woman with children and no husband, what is that? (..) "A husband crowns a woman's life." (75) Being Eugene's wife seems more important to Beatrice than the sufferings the marriage implicates. Even when Eugene almost beats her to death and she loses her longed- desired unborn child, Beatrice still acts as the loyal and devoted wife:

She wore the same white t-shirt with GOD IS LOVE written on the front. Her green wrapper hung lower than usual on her waist; it had been knotted with a lazy effort on the side. 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)

Eugene's "accidents" have led to several miscarriages which has put Beatrice in a vulnerable position toward the manna, the extended family. According to the African tradition the family's status is equivalent with the number of children, and particularly sons in a family. With only two children Eugene is in a position where he could take a second wife in order to secure his order of succession. Paradoxically Beatrice is thankful to Eugene that he never contemplated to marry a second wife, which "might have borne many sons and taken over our home and driven us out, like Mr.Ezendu's second wife did." (20) Like Ma'Shingayi Beatrice would do anything to avoid such a fate as being thrown out of her own home, and like Ma'Shingayi she suffers in silence when wrong is done to her and her children.

Her point of view about marriage as the most important in her life becomes very clear in a discussion with Ifeoma, her sister-in-law who pleads Beatrice to leave Eugene before it is too late: "This cannot go on, *nwunye m,*" Aunty Ifeoma said," When a house is on fire, you run out before the roof collapses on your head." (213) Despite her husband's violence against Kambili, Beatrice refuses to leave, clinging to her conviction of marriage as sacred and her only way of existence. Eventually Beatrice is the character that surprises us most, silently poisoning Eugene slowly to death in order to save herself and the children. The name Beatrice, meaning "the bringer of joy" or "the blessed" gets a deeper meaning to the reader when she finally finds the courage to save her children. Her actions reveal a deeper strength than expected of a woman who is oppressed to an extent almost unthinkable, leaving her to be the true heroine in Kambili's story. Although she is the self-appointed martyr throughout, she impresses with her final and most important decision made in her life: she craves and

takes back the liberty on behalf of the family. Her personal outcome is not happy but she manages to save her children from a life in entrapment and violence, which is similarly brave and admirable taken her extremely difficult position.

3.5. A Quest for Voice and Identity

Beatrice in many ways personifies the stereotyped image of African women as subdued and victimized without a voice of their own. By introducing Ifeoma and Amaka, Adichie complicates “the single story” and offers a more nuanced and complex picture of contemporary African women. Eugene’s younger sister Ifeoma and her daughter Amaka represent Beatrice’s and Kambili’s opposites. Where the latter is suppressed and silent, Ifeoma stands out as a modern, strong, outspoken and independent woman. With her independence and courage, Ifeoma contributes to demystify the patriarchal and despotic establishment she is a part of. She shares many of the same qualities inherited by the free-minded and fearless Lucia in *Nervous Conditions*. She laughs, she speaks and she loves with an intensity that embraces not only her own children, but similarly Kambili and Jaja. What Ifeoma’s home lacks in terms of luxury and space, it compensates with its love, warmth and affection. In her small humble home where water and food are sparsely divided between the family members, Kambili witnesses a joy she never has experienced before:

Laughter floated over my head. Words spurted from everyone, often not seeking and not getting any response. We always spoke with a purpose back home, especially at the table, but my cousins seemed to simply speak and speak and speak. (...) I had felt that as if I were not there, that I was just observing a table where you could say anything at any time to anyone, where the air was free for you to breathe as you wished.(120)

Although Ifeoma received the same missionary education as her brother Eugene, the difference between the two could not have been larger. In her interview about religion, Adichie points to the different ways religion is perceived and performed in her homeland Nigeria. Some people, she argues, tend to create an image of God that suits them and allows them to be intolerant and rigid in the name of God, like her character Eugene. Where Eugene's God is dark and revengeful, Ifeoma's is joyful and forgiving, serving as her support and comfort in difficult times. Highly educated Ifeoma works as a lecturer at the University of Nsukka supporting her three children of her own after losing her husband in a tragic car accident. The big difference between Ifeoma and Beatrice is Ifeoma's independence; she does not see the necessity of having a husband to support her, she is able to manage perfectly well on her own. Neither does she bend to Eugene's wish to convert to his rigid rules in order to be supported by him, and admits to Beatrice that she rather starves than being dictated by a man:

Her whisper was like her- tall, exuberant, fearless, loud, larger than life: 'Have you forgotten that Eugene offered to buy me a car, even before Ifediora died? But first he wanted us to join the Knights of St. John. He wanted us to send Amaka to convent school. He even wanted me to stop wearing make-up! I want a new car, *nwunye m*, and I want money so that I will not have to unravel the seams of Chima's trousers when he outgrows them. But I will not ask my brother to bend over so that I can lick his buttocks to get these things (95)

Unlike Beatrice and Eugene who has adapted the European view of a civilized society, Ifeoma is close to her cultural roots. Working as a university teacher has made Ifeoma critical to the effects of the colonial influence in Nigeria. Politically engaged, Ifeoma observes the injustice done to the Nigerian people during the present military dictatorship: papers are shut down, opponents to the regime are killed and essential services are in short supply. The University of Nsukka is run by a sole administrator whose most important preoccupation is power and wealth. Like Tambu and Lucia in *Nervous Conditions*, Ifeoma uses the colonial

system to her advantage without embracing it as the only truth. Her cultural heritage is important to her without letting it become a hindrance to open up to a more modern lifestyle. She displays a nuanced view of the changes she observes in Nsukka and seeks to find a balance between the old traditions and the new way of living in her society.

Ifeoma gives Kambili the space and time she needs to open up to new experiences, letting her know how valuable she is in terms of just being Kambili, not necessarily in terms of being dutiful and obedient. As a mother she gives her children the freedom to speak out, make their own decisions and mingle with people they choose for themselves. In contrast to Eugene she is proud to have independent teenagers who are not afraid to hold on to their own opinions, even if they are not concurrent with her own views: “Mostly, my cousins did the talking and Auntie Ifeoma sat back and watched them, eating slowly. She looked like a football coach who had done a good job with her team and was satisfied to stand next to the eighteen-yard box and watch.”(121) Ifeoma does not understand how her brother can tyrannize his family to such an extent in the name of God, which to her represent love and forgiveness. Anthony C. Hoa sees Ifeoma as Womanist; a woman who believes in herself and her own abilities regardless of the boundaries of class and race (Oha: 206). She raises her children with a loving iron-hand, teaching them to think for themselves and make independent choices. Ifeoma hence becomes the modern version of the traditional Nigerian woman who manages to run a successful career while taking care of her children. She is an important role model not only to Kambili, but similarly her own daughter Amaka.

3.6. A New Generation

Amaka represents one of the strongest female voices in the novel. Like Nyasha, Amaka occupies the “Third Space”, living between two cultures in her hometown Nsukka. Unlike Nyasha in *Nervous Conditions*, Amaka appreciates the diversity of the community in which she lives. Her up-bringing is characterized by African traditions mixed with western ideas and fashion, which Amaka happily integrates with her African heritage. Growing up as Ifeoma’s daughter has taught Amaka to be critical and stand up for herself. She takes pride in her African heritage and speaks out when something collides with her cultural consciousness, like when she refuses to take an English name for her confirmation:

I told you I am not taking an English name, father, she said. (...) When the missionaries first came, they didn’t think Igbo names were good enough. They insisted that people take English names to be baptized. Shouldn’t we moving ahead?
(271-272)

The tradition of rechristening Africans with English names was part of the colonial strategy to civilize the natives. Africans were entitled to use their birth names in privacy and within the extended family whereas the English names were their public names. Unlike Kambili who had her English name chosen by her father, Amaka is able to make her own decision about the subject. Amaka has attended the local school which together with her freedom at home has given her a confidence Kambili lacks. She strongly resists what she perceives to be unjust and prejudice, and claims to be heard. Where Kambili is forced to subdue to her father’s Christian conviction, Amaka is a free spirit with “quizzical eyes, eyes that asked many questions and did not accept many answers.” (79) By refusing to take the English name Amaka stands up for herself and her cultural identity. When she questions the old Catholic

tradition of rechristening, she bravely demonstrates her strength and female integrity in a society which for centuries has placed African women at the bottom of the hierarchy.

In contrast to Kambili Amaka has had the pleasure of knowing her grandfather, a traditionalist who has passed down the myths and histories from their ancestors. His knowledge and storytelling has made Amaka very conscious and proud of her African heritage, which is reflected through her constant battle to change things to the better. Like Nyasha, she manages to see through the injustice of the system in which she lives and has despite her young age a nuanced view of the western influence she experiences in Nsukka: Amaka genuinely prefers native African musicians to American pop-music because she finds them “culturally conscious; they have something real to say.” (118) Brought up close to her own culture, Amaka is conscious about holding on to her native Igbo language. Kambili notes that she “hardly peppered her speech with English words when she spoke to Papa- Nnukwu, as the rest of us inadvertently did.” (172) Even if Amaka appreciates the modern comfort following the western influence, she determinedly holds on to her African origins and refuses to adapt to the western female ideals. By loudly claiming her identity as an African woman, she represents a strong voice who dares to speak out about the injustice she experiences.

Amaka’s political commitment is strong and even from her new home in America she continues to involve herself by writing letters to the office of the Head of the State and the Nigerian Ambassador in America. We are told that

Amaka used to write to the office of the head of the state, even the Nigerian Ambassador in America, to complain about the poor state of Nigeria’s justice system. She said nobody acknowledged the letters but still it was important to her that she do something (300)

Amaka belongs to a new generation of post-colonial young women that dares and demands the right to be heard in society. Courageous, outspoken and fighting for her rights Amaka in

every aspect stands out as a modern heroine. She thus represents the greatest hope in this novel: the hope for a better future for the next generation of young African women.

3.7. Saints and Sinners

Eugene Achike is a product of the missionary education. Similar to Babamukuru in *Nervous Conditions* he early came in touch with the British missionaries whom he genuinely feels gave him the very best opportunities in life:

I would be nothing today but for the priests and sisters at the mission. I was a houseboy for the parish priest for two years. Yes, a houseboy. Nobody dropped me off at school. I walked eight miles every day to Nimo until I finished elementary school. I was a gardener for the priests while I attended St. Gregory's Secondary School. (47)

Hard work together with the influence of the Catholic Church has made Eugene a powerful and wealthy man in his local society. He is known as *Omelora*, The One Who Does for the Community (56), sharing his wealth with the less fortunate and various charity organizations. As a successful factory owner and the holder of the local newspaper *The Standard* Eugene openly speaks out about the oppression and injustices done to the Nigerians by the present military rule. As the only newspaper in the country Eugene and his editor Ade Coker constantly challenge the ruling power with the risk of their own lives. Due to his altruistic fight for freedom and independence Eugene's political engagement and bravery has rewarded him with *Amnesty World's* human right's award. (5)

Eugene's driving force is anchored in Catholicism. With his godliness and economic contributions Eugene is seen as a man nearly as important as the Pope and Jesus by the local Catholic priesthood. He deeply admires Father Benedict as God's loyal servant and powerful Head of the Church, committing himself rigidly to the latter's religious fanaticism as the only

truth. The religious rituals at the local church are performed in Latin rather than Igbo which according to Father Benedict are “not acceptable.” (4) According to the British priesthood the native language was “unworthy” and seen as uncivilized. As a result of the British hegemony English hence became the official language when Nigeria became part of the British Empire at the end of the 19th century. Observing Father Benedict during sermon Kambili registers that

Even though Father Benedict had been at St. Agnes for seven years, people still referred to him as “our new priest”. Perhaps they would have not if he had not been white. He still looked new. The colours of his face, the colour of condensed milk and cut-open sour soup, had not tanned at all in the fierce heat of seven Nigerian harmattans. And his British nose was still as pinched and as narrow as it always was. (..) But he allowed offertory songs in Igbo; he called them native songs, and when he said “native” his straight- line lips turned down to the corners of an inverted U. (4)

Kambili’s innocent observations reveal the colonists’ inherent view of the natives as second-class citizens in need of the same kind of education and enlightenment as seen in *Nervous Conditions*. Brought up in this environment Eugene has adopted the priesthood’s rigid religious view of a pietistic and revengeful God who strikes hard and merciless upon sinners. Eugene loyally presents himself as a true Catholic servant, exerting himself to the extreme during Mass: “Most people did not kneel to receive communion at the marble altar, with the blond life-size Virgin Mary mounted nearby, but Papa did. He would hold his eyes shut so hard that his face tightened into a grimace, and then he would stick his tongue out as far as it could go.” (4) Eugene’s relationship to the church is genuinely based on a fear of committing unforgivable sins, and his relief by being cleansed from sinful actions makes him feel uplifted and free from the anguish of not getting the much needed entrance to the heavenly gateway:” I’m spotless now, we are all spotless. If God calls us right now, we are going straight to Heaven. We will not require the cleansing of Purgatory.” (107) In his efforts to please a strict

and condemning God, Eugene misses to see is the paradox obvious to the reader; the punishments Eugene exposes his family to are the reprisals he most fears from God himself.

The word *sin* is frequently used by Eugene, whose most important preoccupation is to teach his family the right path in life, following a strict time schedule where prayers occupy the largest part of the family's day. Dinnertime in the family is an occasion Eugene finds extra time to worship the gifts provided by God and the Blessed Virgin: "For twenty minutes he asked God to bless the food. Afterward he intoned the Blessed Virgin in several different titles while we responded," Pray for us." His favourite title was Our Lady, Shield of the Nigerian People. He had made it up himself." (11) Eugene's faith is extreme and interpreted through a fear of God as a revengeful Creator who is ready to punish his sinners in the hardest possible way, a lesson thought by his childhood tutors at the mission:

I committed a sin against my own body once' he said. 'And the good father, the one I lived with while I went to St. Gregory's, came in and saw me. He asked me to boil water for tea. He poured the water in a bowl and soaked my hands in it'. (...) 'I never committed a sin against my own body again. The good father did that for my own good. (p 196)

Punishing his children by scalding their feet, Eugene repeats a thought lesson which he interprets as doing a good thing for them. By "cleansing" Kambili's feet he saves her from committing further unforgiveable sins toward God, like he himself was saved as a child. In this sense Eugene stands out as a victim himself, which is reflected through his state of mind when he executes the cruel penalty, "crying now, with tears streaming down his face." (194) leaving us to believe that Eugene's actions not are a result of pure evilness. He genuinely believes that violence is a necessary tool in disciplining his children and wife to become good Christian humans.

Paradoxically Eugene deprives his own family the freedom he fights for on the behalf of the Nigerian people. Known to be a brave and fearless man who battles for independence and liberty, his family is entrapped in a prison –like existence which is blessed with material wealth but similarly crushed by violence and isolation. To Eugene power and wealth are possessions he uses deliberately to be empowered and accepted within society. His closest ally is the Catholic priesthood where he gets his best support. Eugene’s ego is frequently strengthened by Father Benedict references to him as an initiator to follow: ““look at Brother Eugene. (...) Brother Eugene spoke out for freedom. How many of us have stood up for the truth? How many of us have reflected the Triumphant Entry?”” The freedom Father Benedict so loudly speaks about does not include the Catholic Church’s grip of the natives; neither does it reflect the violence and oppression committed in the name of God during colonialism. Father Benedict’s speech solely refers to the present military rule which ironically is a direct result of years of colonial oppression committed in the name of God. Eugene, in spite of his wealth and power is not freer than his family in terms of being a colonial subject. Blinded by fear of godly reprisals, Eugene removes himself from his native inheritance and paradoxically fights to hold on to the colonial grip Nigeria has been exposed to through generations. The “heathens”, who include his own father, are in Eugene’s mind a bigger enemy to the country than the colonists’ Catholic domination and oppression.

3.8 Faith and Forgiveness

Eugene’s father Papa-Nnukwu is by his son referred to as a “heathen” due to his traditional beliefs. Kambili and Jaja are hardly allowed to see their grandfather but for fifteen minutes during Christmas vacation. Eugene will not have his children’s purity soiled by a pagan’s presence and thus denies them any close relationship to him. Kambili hardly knows

her grandfather and is curiously interrogating the obvious signs of heathenism in her grandfather's eyes during her annual visit: "I had examined him that day, too, looking away when his eyes met mine, for signs of difference, of Godlessness. I didn't see any, but I was sure they were there somewhere. They had to be." (63) In her childlike innocence, Kambili trusts her father's truth about the native beliefs as heathen even if we sense that she is not entirely convinced. There is a longing to know more about her own culture which she does not find in her own home. It is not before her family visit to Nsukka, Kambili finally gets to learn a little about the traditional religion beheld by her ancestors for generations. Observing Papa-Nnukwu's morning prayers, Kambili learns another side of religion that she has never experienced in her father's house; a religion which is forgiving and generous enough to include Eugene and his misbehaviour: "'Chineke! Bless my son Eugene. Let the sun not set on his prosperity. Lift the curse they have put on him '(...) I was surprised that he prayed for Papa with the same earnestness that he prayed for himself and Auntie Ifeoma.'" (169) In her father's house, Kambili has been taught about a revengeful and angry God who strikes hard on his sinners. Papa -Nnukwu's God is forgiving and does not distinguish between sinners and true believers: it is a God who includes everybody regardless of faith or sin.

Blaming the Catholic missionaries for his son's ridiculousness, eighty year old Papa-Nnukwu nevertheless himself belongs to the old patriarchal tradition. His sexist view of women is obviously ingrained even if it is more light-hearted displayed than by his son Eugene:

My son owns that house that can fit in every man in Abba, and yet many times I have nothing to put on my plate. I should not have let him follow those missionaries'.
- 'Nna anyi', Auntie Ifeoma said. 'It was not the missionaries. Did I not go to the missionary school too?
- 'But you are a woman you do not count.' (...) 'I joke with you *nwa m*. Where would I be today if my *chi* had not given me a daughter?' (...) My spirit will intercede for you, so that *Chukwu* will send a good man to take care of you and the children'

- Let your spirit ask *Chukwu* to hasten my promotion to senior lecturer, that is all I ask' Aunty Ifeoma said. (83)

Papa-Nnukwu's and Ifeoma's perceptions of women's role and capacity in society differ dramatically. Nnukwu holds the traditional view of women as economic inferior to men "in need to be taken care of" which synchronizes with the Catholic vision of the woman as "the Angel in the house", silenced and sexually oppressed. This way he, like his son, complies with the existing native patriarchal system in Africa who consequently oppresses and marginalizes women. Even if Papa-Nnukwu loves and admires his daughter Ifeoma, he genuinely believes she would be better off with a husband to provide for her.

The religious distance between Eugene and his traditionalist father is to Eugene unbearable, leaving him to believe his heathen father will join Hell after his death. Eugene refuses to participate in a "pagan funeral" (189) which signify the decisive conclusion with his own culture. Like Babamukuru Eugene has assimilated the new religion without incorporating anything from his traditional customs. In contrast his sister Ifeoma does not see the contradiction between the two, explaining Kambili "that the two could be interchanged." (167) What Eugene misses seeing is how his "heathen" father is at peace with his beliefs and how his religion includes rather than excludes members of society. In contrast to Eugene's angry God, Papa-Nnukwu's Creator is joyful and forgiving, which makes the old man smile in confidence even in death.

For Kambili the meeting with Papa- Nnukwu is crucial to her cultural awakening. Like Tambu who goes through an epiphany in relation to her parent's Christian wedding, Kambili's meeting with her grandfather enables her to start questioning her father's religion as the only way to salvation. She strongly feels the loss of not having known her grandfather observing the closeness between Papa-Nnukwu and Amaka: "They understood each other,

using the sparest words. Watching them, I felt a longing for something I knew I would never have.” (165) During their short time together Papa-Nnukwu manages to teach Kambili the multitude in her native culture and heritage which gives her the necessary tools in searching for an identity of her own. Clinging to the pieces of her grandfather’s painting, Kambili refuses to let go of Papa-Nnukwu. This first rebellion against Eugene is expressed by Kambili as a fight against “something lost, something I never had, would never have” (210) but similarly represent a step towards a new matureness. Papa-Nnukwu is lost, but not his culture and heritage which are values Kambili eventually is ready to die for. Critic Ogaga Okuyade similarly sees Kambili’s rebellion as her final break with Eugene’s religious hegemony when she states, “To have pieced the torn portrait of her grandfather destroyed by her father is a potent statement of her assertion of her identity and an indication that she has transverse her limitations: at this point she is no longer a victim but an actor” (Okyade: 253). The benefactor of Kambili’s new courage and fearlessness is without doubt the young Nigerian priest Father Amadi to whom she is introduced to in her Aunt’s house in Nsukka.

Whereas Eugene and Papa –Nnukwu are representatives of respectively Catholicism and Traditionalism (pre-colonial traditional religion), young Father Amadi serves as mediator between the two approaches to religion. Fresh, modern and enthusiastic he brings together the best from both sides; religiously humble but generous and outspoken about his God. With his boyish, and according to Kambili, ungodly appearance “in an open-neck T-shirt and jeans” (135) we are told that “he is so popular around campus (...) and has invitations to eat everywhere.” (134). Friendly and people –orientated Father Amadi is in spite of his young age already widely respected among his flock.

His visit to Eugene’s local church St.Agnes evokes the Catholic priesthood’s indignation when he opens up for the traditional Igbo songs during service: “ That young priest, singing in the sermon like a Godless leader of one of these Pentecostal churches that spring up

everywhere like mushrooms. People like him bring trouble to the church. We must remember to pray for him,' Papa said.”(29) Father Amadi takes on a new direction in his ministration, seeking to preserve the old Igbo traditions by infusing them into his sermons. Kambili furthermore notices that “he did not suggest, as all the other visiting priests had, that God’s presence dwelled more in St. Agnes than the iridescent saints on the floor-to ceiling-stained-glass windows stopped God from leaving.” (28) Instead he sings Igbo songs in which “the congregation drew in a collective breath, some sighed and some had their mouths in a big O.” (28) Kambili’s observation reveals a priest who wants to reform the existing tradition and renew it to better meet its native audience on their premises. This way father Amadi, like Papa-Nnukwu, presents God as generous and including in contrast to Father Benedict’s “pinch-your-nose monotone” (28) sermons who not only excludes the native customs but equally patronizes them as heathen and primitive.

In contrast to Eugene who willingly pays out wads of naira notes to the less fortunate in his close society, father Amadi invests himself in charity. Spending time with underprivileged youths in his spare time makes a huge difference to the children in question: “They all settled down on the grass to eat the oranges, and I watched father Amadi laugh loudly with his head thrown back, leaning to rest his elbows on the grass. I wondered if the boys felt the same way I did with him, that they were all he could see.” (178) While Eugene uses his money to get respect in society, Father Amadi is respected in terms of himself, his generosity and humanity. Where Eugene sees “heathens”, Father Amadi “sees Christ in their faces, in the boys faces.”(178) His human compassion includes traditionalist Papa-Nnukwu, threatening him like he “were his own relative” without any religious judgments. (164)

Like Papa – Nnukwu, Father Amadi is an important contributor to Kambili’s healing; his kindness and insight become crucial to her growth and maturing. Recognizing her integrity he works as door-opener to the girl behind the shyness and silence, liberating Kambili from her

imposed limitations and fears. Father Amadi sharply observes that even if she unlike Amaka “does not waste her energy in picking never ending arguments (...) there is a lot going on in her mind.”(173) With his pragmatic view of life Father Amadi brings out laughter and a joy of life Kambili did not know she inherited: “I had smiled, run, laughed. My chest was filled with something like bath foam. Light. The lightness was so sweet I tasted it on my tongue, the sweetness of an overripe bright yellow cashew fruit.”(180) Father Amadi manages through patience and time to give Kambili the required confidence she needs to find her voice and claim her place at school:

I joined the group of girls on the volleyball field on the second day of school. I did not hear the whispers of “backyard snob” or the ridiculing laughter. I did not notice the amused pinches they gave on another. I stood waiting with my hands clasped until I was picked. I saw only Father Amadi’s clay-coloured face and heard only” You have good legs for running. (205)

Kambili’s recently acquired self-confidence is not based entirely on her friendship with Father Amadi, she is in love with him. Ridden by romantic dreams Kambili finds it hard to concentrate on her father’s schedule “doodling on a sheet of paper, stick figures, and “Father Amadi” written over and over again” (204) The special connection between the two is apparent to her cousins as well who teases Kambili by calling her “Father Amadi’s sweetheart” (219) recognizing their mutual attraction: “He was really worried when you were sick. He talked about you so much. And, *amam*, it wasn’t just priestly concern” (219), “he sounded like a person whose wife was sick” (220) Due to father Amadi’s vow of celibacy a traditional relationship between the two is impossible, but the love between them becomes an important source of strength and spirituality to Kambili. This spirituality is evident when Kambili goes to Aokpe on a pilgrimage at Easter. Watching the congregation Kambili reaches a new understanding of faith:

And then I saw her, the Blessed Virgin: an image in the pale sun, a red glow on the back of my hand, a smile on the face of the rosary-bedecked man whose arm rubbed against mine. She was everywhere (...) 'I felt the Blessed Virgin there. I felt her,' I blurted out. How could anyone not believe after what we had seen? Or hadn't they seen it and felt it too? (...) Auntie Ifeoma glanced at me (...) 'Kambili is right' she said. 'Something from God was happening here. (274-75)

Kambili's loss of absolute faith in her father's rigid God is replaced by a new understanding of God as a part of her existence. In contrast to her childhood's learning where God is to be reached only in the white man's church, Kambili now experiences Father Amadi's perception of God as omnipresent and accessible to those who believe. It is a God who does not distinguish between black and white, rich or poor, man or woman. It is a God who is perceived as forgiving and affectionate. Her new acknowledgement gives Kambili a source of peace which allows her to breathe more freely similarly giving her the necessary foundation to mature and find her own standpoint in faith:

Amaka says people love priests because they want to compete with God; they want God as a rival. But we are not rivals, God and I, we are simply sharing, I no longer wonder if I have the right to love Father Amadi; I simply go ahead and love him. I no longer wonder if the checks I have been writing to the Missionary Fathers of the Blessed Ways are bribes to God, I just go ahead and write them. I no longer wonder if I choose St. Andrew's church in Enugu as my new church because the priest there is a Blessed way Missionary father as Father Amadi is; I just go. (303-04)

Kambili displays a new maturity which enables the old and the new to meet. Like Tambu she reaches a consciousness which makes her recognize the fallibilities of the colonial influence. Her childhood faith in her father's truths is replaced by a critical awareness towards the system she lives within. Her meeting with Father Amadi has given her a new understanding of religion as a positive and valuable force in her life. As she grows and matures, Kambili learns that she is worth being loved in terms of being Kambili, regardless of her measurable

achievements. By sharing her story with us, Kambili shows the reader a young woman who is strong, independent and finally with a voice of her own.

3.9. The Complexities of Culture, Class and Colonisation.

The title *Purple Hibiscus* reflects the theme of hybridity in the novel. The experimental purple hibiscus in Auntie Ifeoma's garden represents not only the clash of cultures experienced by the characters in the novel, but likewise a hope for a better future. In contrast to the startling red hibiscuses in Enugu who symbols a violent past, the purple hibiscuses in Nsukka represent the new time. Nigeria has gained its independence from the British Empire but is challenged by new conflicts in the post-colonial era.

In spite of its independence from the British rule the colonial influence is strongly present in modern Nigeria. Like Tambu and Nyasha, Kambili occupies what Homi Bhabha refers to as the *Third Space*; a psychological hybrid location emerged from the traditional and the imposing culture. (Rutherford:207-221) Like in *Nervous Conditions* the complexities of the colonial influence are explicitly displayed through the natives' alienation or hybridity in terms of their religion, language and ethics. According to Ngugu wa Thiong'o the British colonisation brought series of traumatic gaps on the native African population:

Colonial alienation takes two interlinked forms: an active (or passive) distancing of oneself from the reality around; and an active (or passive) identification with that which is most external to one's environment. It starts with a deliberate disassociation of the language of conceptualization, of thinking, of formal education, of mental development, from the language of daily interaction in the home and in the community. It is like separating the mind from the body so that they are occupying two unrelated linguistic spheres in the same person. On a larger scale it is like producing a society of bodiless heads and headless bodies (Supriya: 130).

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie shows the complexities of the colonisation and how it is perceived as equally a gift and curse by the individual characters. It raises questions about both the traditional and Catholic patriarchal oppression of women.

The loss of cultural authority in Kambili's hometown Enugu where the Catholic Church holds its flock in an iron grip is evident. Eugene Achike is a man who has assimilated the Catholic patriarchal values and view of his own people. He, like Babamukuru, has become what Thiong'o characterizes as a "headless body", blinded by the imperial ideologies. Having been raised by the missionaries from a very young age Eugene has become a mimic man who speaks English and completely rejects his own culture and origins as pagan and second-class citizens. According to his sister Ifeoma, the missionary education "has made him (Eugene) too much of a colonial product." (13) As in *Nervous Conditions* the colonizers' strongest device in terms of being in control of the natives was the British education, because it created obedient submissive servants who served the country's ruling power to completion.

Kambili furthermore tells us that "Father Benedict had changed things in the parish, such as insisting that the Credo and Kyrie be recited only in Latin; Igbo was not acceptable." (4) Eugene himself hardly speaks Igbo and "he did not like us to speak it in public. We had to sound civilized in public, he told us; we had to speak English." (13) The imperial idea of English as the public language in Nigeria concurs with the general colonial view of the natives as primitive and mentally retarded in need of education. Belonging to the Nigerian elite, Kambili enjoys the education and material wealth only favoured by the privileged few, simultaneously being alienated toward her own language and culture. :

Singing the national anthem was relatively new at Daughters of the Immaculate Heart. It had started last year, because some parents were concerned that their children did not know the national anthem or the pledge. (...) Only the Nigerian Reverend Sisters sang, teeth flashing against their dark skins. (48)

Kambili's observation reminds the reader of Jamaica Kincaid's criticism of the British colonialism in *A Small Place*. Growing up in Antigua during colonization Kincaid recalls that "we were taught the names of the Kings of England. In Antigua, the twenty-fourth of May was a holiday- Queen Victoria's official birthday" (Kincaid: 30). Like Kincaid, Kambili meets the world through England, its culture, values and language which she like Kincaid as a child does not question critically; she silently accepts it as the way it is.

The injustice and oppression Kambili endures in her home is similar to the Nigerian's suffering in the postcolonial era. Just as Kambili is entrapped in a violent home behind "compound walls" which are "topped by coiled electric wires", so are the Nigerian people trapped within violence, corruption and poverty. The country's political conflicts are nothing Kambili personally experiences, but rather she understands them through her father's explanations about the on-going events:

Papa looked sad; his rectangular lips seemed to sag. Coups begat coups, he said, telling us about the bloody coups of the sixties, which ended up in civil war just after he left Nigeria to study in England. A coup always began a vicious cycle. Military men would always overthrow one another, because they could, because they were all power drunk. Of course, papa told us, the politicians were corrupt, and *The Standard* had written many stories about the cabinet ministers who stashed money in foreign bank accounts, money meant for paying teacher's salaries and building roads. (24)

The independence Nigeria gained from colonialism is changed by military conflicts, corruptions and violence which eventually kill *The Standard's* outspoken editor Ade Coker. By killing *The Standard's* editor, the ruling power effectively silences the only paper which dares to speak out about the injustice and corruption that suffocate the country. Eugene himself has worked actively against the government and its military rule for years: "that what we Nigerians needed were not soldiers ruling us, what we needed was a renewed Democracy. *Renewed Democracy*. It sounded important the way he said it. (25) Ironically Eugene does

not see the importance of democracy within his own home were the family is exposed to the same tyranny as the Nigerian people. Kambili reports not only of the war going on in her own home, but correspondingly about the bigger conflicts going on in her country. The parallel between the public and the private war-zones is interwoven throughout the story. Like Nigeria is silenced by the brutal military rule, is Kambili silenced by her tyrannical father. Like Eugene is a figure of the tyrannical rule in Nigeria, Kambili becomes the representative of the oppressed Nigerian population.

The political conflicts are particularly evident in Nsukka, known for its educational institutions but also as the home of Igbo ethics. Going to Nsukka to visit Auntie Ifeoma and her cousins Kambili meets a total different world from Enugu. In contrast to Enugu which holds on to its conservatism and Catholic regime, Nsukka is described as a modern city where the Igbo culture stands strong. Visiting the local church Kambili notices that

St.Peter did not have the huge candles or the ornate marble altar of St.Agnes. The women did not tie their scarves properly around their heads, to cover as much hair as possible. I watched them as they came up for offertory. Some just draped see-through black veils over their hair; others wore trousers, even jeans. Papa would be scandalized. A woman's hair must be covered in the house of God, and a woman must not wear a man's clothes, especially in the house of God, he would say. (240)

The Catholic Church in Nsukka is presented as more liberal and public-minded than the conservative branch found in Enugu. It is evident that the women's position is stronger and more liberated than what Kambili is used to. "Women wearing men's clothes" indicates a society where the gender inequalities are about to change positively. Due to a new generation of priests like Father Amadi, the old religious rigidity is softened and appears more generous and including with its elements of Igbo traditions. Kambili's cousins are representatives of a new generation African youths, who in spite of their cultural attachment embrace the modern assets presented to them. Like Kambili and Jaja, they occupy the third space of hybridity but

are not equally restrained by religious limitations. American pop and movie stars are admired in magazines and on the varied TV-channels. Amaka appears as a modern young women with her short hair, tight clothes and strong opinions, encouraged by her mother to speak out and chose for herself among the offers she encounters in daily life.

Like Enugu, Nsukka is affected by the on-going political upheaval which reflected in the frequent lack of water, electricity, gas and other daily necessities. As Eugene correctly observes the teacher's salaries go into the corrupted ruling power's bank accounts, leaving Aunty Ifeoma and her fellow colleagues to an insecure future at the university. Burdened by the lack of money and food, Ifeoma still finds the capacity to fight for justice and liberty. Her view of her brother's dogmatism is clearly expressed; likewise her concern of the young female students who she feels should fight for their independency rather than submit to their husbands in an early age. Eventually she has to immigrate to America to find the peace and academic freedom that is not possible under the present government in Nigeria

Colonialism brought religious hegemony and oppression to the Nigerians, especially the women. In the aftermath of colonialism Nigeria experiences a new hegemony performed by military dictators who rule the country with violence and fear, leaving its people to another kind of oppression and silence. Like Amaka correctly says in one of her letters to Kambili that

There are people, who think that we cannot rule ourselves because the few times we tried, we failed, as if all others who rule themselves today got it right the first time. It is like telling a crawling baby who tries to walk, and then falls back on his buttocks, to stay there.as if the adults walking past him did not at all crawl, once. (301)

Amaka's observations about Nigeria's present difficulties echo Jamaica Kincaid's criticism of the colonising power in her home place Antigua:

Have you ever wondered to yourself why it is that all people like me seem to have learned from you is how to imprison and murder each other, how to govern badly, and how to take the wealth of our country and place it in Swiss bank accounts? Have you ever wondered why it is that all we seem to have learned from you is how to corrupt our societies and how to be tyrants? (Kincaid: 34).

The present states of Nigeria and Antigua to a large degree experiences similar problems with poverty, alienation and oppression. In Kambili's world the experimental purple hibiscus symbolizes the symbioses between the old and new. One cannot return to the past but by infusing the best part of the cultures a new future can be built with "a freedom to be, to do" (16) for the Nigerian population.

4.0. Summary

Like Nyasha in *Nervous Conditions*, Kambili is the victim of her father's religious fanaticism and individually they are silenced by their fathers' dominance and violence. Whereas Nyasha develops a severe eating disorder, Kambili becomes voiceless. Silence is her and her family's weapon to survive an unbearable home situation, and the silence described in the Achike home is sometimes louder than what is actually voiced. Pauline Ada Uwakweh observes that "Silencing comprises all imposed restrictions on women's social being, thinking and expressions that are religiously or culturally sanctioned. As a patriarchal weapon of control, it is used by the dominant male structure on the subordinate or muted female structure" (Okoye: 248). With his tyranny Eugene effectively has deprived his family their voice which strikes hardest on the women in the family. Visiting her family in Nsukka, Kambili meets a society completely different from her home village Enugu. Her stay with

Aunty Ifeoma and her cousins thus becomes an important step in her psychological development and healing.

With its cultural diversity Nsukka is a city where the old and new meet, which is seen particularly through Aunty Ifeoma's position. As a university lecturer she seems to be a traditional woman with a modern approach to life, embracing the Igbo culture but equally aware of the flaws in its female view. Critic Cheryl Stobie sees Ifeoma's garden as "the home of the titular purple hibiscus, an exceptional and glorious hybrid, which subsequently blooms in Kambili's garden too" (Stobie: 429). Ifeoma resents the idea of being a second-class subject in terms of being a woman and equally fights for her rights to be independent and self-supporting. In this respect she maintains the African female tradition as food supplier and nurturer, but in a modern version. Ifeoma and her daughter Amaka represent new voices in the African post-colonial literature, which effectively challenge the image of African women as silent, submissive and inferior. In Ifeoma's home, Kambili experiences the freedom she needs to bloom and breathe more freely. Spending time with her grandfather Papa-Nnukwu likewise brings Kambili closer to her cultural roots, which gives her a new pride of her African heritage.

Like Papa-Nnukwu, Father Amadi strongly contributes to Kambili's healing. His love and kindness enables Kambili to find her own spirituality and love. She learns to see God as forgiving and generous, rather than revengeful and unforgiving. Growing and maturing, Kambili reaches a consciousness which makes her recognize not only the fallibility of her father, but likewise the flaws of colonial influence. Her narration explores a Nigeria which is shaped by violence, corruption and a clash of cultures which in many ways alienates and distances the natives from their own heritage and culture. Like Nigeria's population, Kambili claims her freedom to be and to do as and African and as a woman. By telling her story Kambili finally breaks the silence and is able to voice her experiences. When the narration

ends she has taken only the first steps toward emancipation, but like the experimental purple hibiscus, Kambili's future seems promising and gives reasons for hope.

5. Conclusion

In my thesis, I have examined the women's role in postcolonial Africa as depicted in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. There should be no doubt that colonisation has influenced the African women in various and negative ways. The hegemonic British rule strongly contributed to the silencing of women in an already existing patriarchy which regarded women as second-class citizens. According to the patriarchal ideology women's main purpose in life was to be mothers and wives. Structural hegemony, religious fanaticism and racism made women even more invisible and silent during colonialism than they had been in their traditional societies. In the post-colonial literary diaspora African women have been portrayed either as whores or Madonna's, without an identity and voice of their own. Like Adichie points out, we only have learned a one-dimensional story of African women as power-less, submissive and insignificant.

In *Nervous Conditions* and *Purple Hibiscus*, the authors seek to present a complex rather than simplistic view of their characters which distinguishes their novels in the post-colonial literary diaspora. They effectively work to dismantle the image of African women as a homogenous group of hard-working, powerless and self-sacrificing victims. Each character is given the possibility to explain, or be explained, which give us a better opportunity to understand their actions and choices.

The novels share many similarities; they are coming-of-age novels with young female protagonists who independently fight to be heard and seen in their respective societies. In these stories, nothing is only black or white, but multifaceted regardless of class, culture and gender. Cause and effect are closely linked and give reason to reflect not only about the women's situation, but similarly how the impact of colonisation mirrors the African society as a whole. Racism and sexual oppression not only affect the underprivileged part of the population, but are observed in every level of society. The victimization of women does not depend on class or cultures, it is universal. The politics of religion split families, and the educational system serves to alienate children from their cultural heritage.

The undisputable strength of the novels is the narrative perspective. Dangarembga and Adichie individually focalize their stories through young African girls, which allows us to see the women's situation from an insider's perspective. Religious fanaticism, domestic abuse and anorexia are tabooed themes to which we seldom have been introduced in post-colonial literature. The innocent voices of young girls who share their childhood experiences, make these novels stand out as genuine and realistic stories readers believe in, and to a certain degree are able to identify with. Despite their difficult childhoods, Tambu, Nyasha and Kambili never give up their dream of a better future. The way to liberty and independence proves to be long and painful, and the price of freedom is high.

Tambu's long-desired dream of education and liberty lies beyond the end of her story; in order to become free, Tambu has to leave her family and homeland behind. Sharing her story with us, we understand that she finally manages to break free from "the weight of womanhood" she experiences in Rhodesia. To be able to choose her own future as an independent woman, she needs to leave Africa and move to the West. Her cousin Nyasha almost starves herself to death in order to be heard. Nyasha's future happiness seems to rest in finding the balance between the cultures. Fighting against the patriarchy seems to her a

lonely and endless battle that in her time, she is destined to lose. Kambili, who grows up in Nigeria twenty years later, has similar experiences of the injustice and the oppression of women in her society. Religious fanaticism and domestic abuse almost kills her, and her father's death is in the end her only way to find healing and a voice. By sharing their own stories Tambu and Kambili finally are able to break their silences. In the process, they contribute to the collective healing of African women both inside and outside the texts. Thanks to the efforts of many, including writers such as Dangarembga and Adichie, African women have gained a long-awaited voice.

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