



Resisting Gender Construction: Analyzing Tambu's Personality in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*

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Abstract: Gender discourse over the years has become a perspicuous issue all around the world as women have been continually obliterated by their male counterparts in all spheres of life. This is a vital issue to discuss in literary works as have been done by contemporary feminist advocates. Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* irrefutably highlights the social postures that have been affecting the lives of the Zimbabwean women and the general womanhood. This paper aims at showing the interconnections between female characters; Tambu, her personality traits and how she resists these stereotypical social norms which have been the hinge on which her live turns. Through Tambu, the protagonist, this paper brings into surface the rigid truths relating to the female life in Zimbabwe and the world at large. Guided by the Trauma literary theory and Social Representation theory as the theoretical paradigm, this paper is predicted on the assumption that Dangarembga seeks to present a society where a woman is capable of bringing change by resisting and challenging her fears, breaking silence and speaking out for her voice and choice to be heard.

Keywords: Gender Discourse, Gender Construction, Resisting Gender, Personality, Trauma Literary Theory and Social Representation Theory.

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INTRODUCTION

Art in general and literature in particular is not a metaphysical object but one which is interrelated with the society in which it is produced. This because, writers and artists are social beings who live and are influenced by societal activities. So, their text, which is the fruit of their creative minds, is an articulation of their society in time and space. One of the discourses that postcolonial writers grapple in their texts is the concept of gender and how gender constructs personality.

Throughout history till date, the female gender has always struggled and is struggling for egalitarianism and respect as men. This has been difficult because of patriarchy, an ideology in which men are superior to women and have the right to rule

women. This ideology has permeated the social structures throughout the world and has also spurred the reason why most contemporary women have engaged in resisting and demystifying these gender constructs by breaking through the patriarchal yoke. Helen Haste in "Sexual Metaphor" argues that "the meaning of gender is socially constructed: No culture limits the social definition of gender to biologically determined sex differences" (22). Haste also reiterates in the following words that "What is believed about gender tends to become real. For example, the belief that females are incapable of making decision may become true in a society where girls are given no opportunity to develop such skills. The belief that males are unable to sew becomes true when the culture makes sure that no boy ever gets his hand on a needle (23). As stated supra, it is lucid that the societal constructs of societies, have greatly been

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androcentric so as to be in favour of men. This is the case in the Zimbabwean society as Tsitsi Dangarembga mirrors in her narrative; *Nervous Conditions* through the prototype female character, Tambu. In the African scenario, the woman's place is in the private domain of the home, where they are engaged in procreation, cooking, cleaning and farming.

Kate O'Beirne in "Women Who Make the World Worse" gives credence to the above view as she argues that "to be born female in this culture means that you are born 'tainted,' that there is something intrinsically wrong with you that you can never change, that your birth right is one of innate inferiority (21). In her analysis, she argues particularly that women have been unjustly treated in every society. However, feminist critics of literary and cultural studies have engaged in redefining the role of the woman in the society and highlighting the role women (can) play in the evolution of the society. By so doing feminist critics hope to bring equity in gender discourses.

This direction forms the main drive of this paper which seeks to show the interconnections between female prototype character, Tambu, her personality traits and how she resist in debunking the stereotypical social norms which have been the hinge on which her live turns. In other words, this paper brings into surface the rigid truths relating to female life in Zimbabwe and the world at large. Consequently, depicting a society where a woman is capable of bringing change by challenging her fears, breaking her silence and speaking out for her voices and choices to be heard. Lending credence to this, Zuhboshi Eric argues in an article "The Ghost of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela: *Exhuming the Female Spirit in Apartheid Resistance Discourses*" that, "the role of women ... has been side-lined and not accorded meaningful prominence" (1). As such, the contemporary women have engaged in repelling, resisting and demystifying this social gender construct. Their entrapment is unquestioned because traditions collude to subdue them. Since women are victims of this prejudice, Dangarembga's prototype female character, Tambu, design survival stratagems to resist and outsmart the various social injustices for her personality to be restored.

DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

Gender Construction

It will be eminent to define some key concepts in order to understand the concept of their usage and to facilitate the understanding of this paper. They are, Gender Construction and Personality. First of all, Gender studies over the years have gained grounds as an interdisciplinary academic field devoted to analyse Gender identity and its representations. The term "gender" in Gender Studies

is used to refer to a social and cultural constructs and not the state of being male or female. In today's society, women and men have been constantly socialized and constructed into the spaces that they occupy and the paradigms that have been allocated to them. According to the *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, gender construction refers to the behavioural, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex. Butler Judith in an article states that, "...gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence" (24). As stated supra, gender is inherently artificial and is imposed by the society of the time. Gender construction can be considered as an in-built, learned and accustomed behaviour.

Also, in Simone de Beauvoir's statement "One is not born a woman, one becomes one", it is eminent that Gender constructs are embedded in every individual so much that people sometimes have to be informed that they exist and the spaces they occupy and are expected to socialise into. This attest to why as soon as children are born, their gender is constructed based on their sex and they become socialized into their roles but these roles may change based on their age and society. With this construct, women and men show the way they interact in their language and communication as women are expected to be treated as passive and polite beings rather than being assertive.

Also, in a book, *Ways of Seeing*, Berger looks at gender as a social construct as he writes that "It is society that needs to know the sex of a baby so that it can be gendered. From the minute that a child's sex is identified, everything has changed, from how the child is treated to how they are observed. It starts with the most artificial of means, and one that seems simply harmless: color-coding. Girls wear pink; boys wear blue. Then, as children grow, girls are supposed to play house and boys are supposed to play things like construction or war". (2-3). This shows that, the social construction of gender is not only just executing gendered actions or wearing gendered colours. It spreads into adulthood and includes the way women are viewed and presented in their daily lives.

As such, the way women present themselves is a direct result of societal expectations and attitudes that are placed on them from the time they are born. This is based on a notion that people have believed throughout history, the connection of sex and gender.

Personality

On the flipside, the *Longman Dictionary* defines personality as "those aspects of an individual's behaviour, attitudes, beliefs, thoughts,

actions and feelings which are seen as typical and distinctive of that person and recognised as such by that person and others". (394-395). Meanwhile, the *Oxford Language Dictionary*, defines Personality as the combination of characteristics or qualities that form an individual's distinctive. Similarly, the *Webster's Dictionary* defines it as the quality or state of being a person, a set of distinctive traits and characteristics and the complex characteristics that distinguishes an individual or a nation or group.

Also, according to Mark Sherman in his book *Personality: Inquiry and Application*, he writes "...what a person is about-his personality-still is manifested to others through verbal and non-verbal behaviours. These expressions may lead others to characterise an individual's personality... Personality is the characteristic pattern of behaviours, cognitions, and emotions which may be experienced by the individual and/or manifested to others." (1). Also, in the book *Introduction to Psychology*, Ernest Hilgard, Rita Atkinson and Richard Atkinson defines personality as "the characteristic patterns of behaviour and modes of thinking that determines a person". (377).

In other words, personality is based on an individual's most striking characteristic. As such, one can say that, someone is having an aggressive personality or a shy personality. Psychologists look at personality as regards to a person's individual's differences and the characteristics that distinguish one individual from another.

TRAUMA THEORY AS THEORETICAL PARADIGM

According to J.A Maxwell in "*Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*", a theoretical framework guides a researcher and serves two main purposes; It shows how your research fits into what is already known and also shows how your research makes contribution on the topic to the field (123). The critical theories adopted for the analysis of this paper is the Trauma literary theory and Social representation theory.

The Trauma Literary theory and Social Representation theory are interdisciplinary theories from psychology and sociology. To better get a grasp of this paper, the trauma theory will examine how events influence characters and how characters react to the events later on. On the other hand, the Social Representation theory examines the link between the society and an individual and the influence of social relations/representations on the psychological posture/process of an individual.

Foremost, the trauma theory has been gaining grounds in today's modern literary works as an independent theory on its own though its roots

can be traced back to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. Christa Schönfelder in her book argues that, "The concept of trauma has departed from its original disciplinary ground and crossed boundaries between various fields and discourses; as a result, it has become increasingly, even notoriously, complex and slippery"(28). It should be noted that, the concept of trauma can be viewed from two perspectives; the medical and the psychological perspectives. As such, trauma from etymology was situated in the domain or the field of medicine and psychology but over the years the study of trauma has become relevant in the literary and cultural studies. The trauma theory scrutinizes the ways in which traumatic happenings are experienced and manifested by character(s) in a literary text. That is, examining why the characters behave the way they do. Also, the trauma theory tries to understand the different methods by which traumatic occurrences are demonstrated, handled, uncovered and suppressed in a literary text. It is against this backdrop that the trauma theory finds its appropriateness in the analysis of this paper in the fact that it enables us to analyse Tambu's personality in trying to resist the gender constructions through the trauma lens and its aftermath on her personality.

Principally, trauma in the psychiatry refers to an injury but etymologically it is a Greek word for "*Wound*" as the Webster's Online Dictionary defines it. Trauma is said to have more psychological effects than physical. In the framework of this paper, the psychological standpoint will be adopted. It goes beyond our general idea of a physical wound on the body and dwells on the psychological effects due to stress and mental disorder that a victim goes through. This is after the victim must have been part or a witness to a traumatic event. The aftermath often leads to hysterical manifestations.

The study of trauma over the years has become relevant in the literary and cultural studies. It is worth noting that, Trauma studies began in the 1860s when clinicians began to notice that victims of railway accidents had prolonged and reactions which were unusual, extending beyond their physical injuries. It was only around the 1880s that doctors began to psychologically examine such patients. Meanwhile, the trauma theory is said to have first emerged in the 1990s when critics began to study the cultural effects of trauma. Ground-breaking publications in the field of Trauma studies like Cathy Caruth's essay collection; "*Trauma: Explorations in Memory*" in 1995 and her monograph "*Unclaimed Experience*" in 1996 is said to have sparked a lot of attention in the field of trauma studies in literary criticism. It was rapidly followed by a number of studies on trauma in fiction, non-fiction, film, and culture. This theory was initially inaugurated by

Sigmund Freud who later abandoned it and focused on the history of sexuality especially in children. Later, the theoretical trend was introduced by scholars like Cathy Caruth who pioneered a psychoanalytic post-structural approach which suggested that trauma is an unsolvable problem of the unconscious that illuminates the inherent contradictions of experience and language.

Later on, other scholars like Jean Martin Charcot, a French neurologist and a physician studied the relationship between trauma and mental illness especially in traumatized women. Charcot's major focus was on Hysteria. This study was preceded by Pierre Janet, his student looking into the influence of trauma on the development of the patient's personality and their behaviour. His findings resulted that, the intense effects on the patients were due to the events that happened to them and if re-exposed to the effects, it will alleviate the symptoms in them. Another Scholar, Van der Kolk in 2005, carried out a survey and found out that childhood abuse is more common than previously known and that those children because of these early abuse symptoms will likely suffer from behavioural, emotional, and disturbances for the rest of their lives. He suggested that multiple exposures of childhood traumas include abandonment, betrayal, physical or sexual assaults, or witnessing domestic violence can have negative sequel that continues to resonate throughout childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

The use of the trauma theory in this paper is to expose the traumatic effects of patriarchal hurdles on the female (Tambu). It also lets us know the state of mind of Tambu and why she resists against the oppressive and bias system. In the novels, the recall of the past and the present shows the foundation of trauma in Tambu and why she behaves the way she does. Also, the trauma theory also shows that through the author's use of specific languages and sentences in the texts, one can depict the state of mind and the environment that the character, Tambu is dealing with and its outcome on her personality. It should be noted that, the causes of trauma can be internal causes or external. That is, exploring how the environment and self-affect the female character, Tambu in terms of experiencing trauma. Also, one of the main principles of the trauma theory in our contemporary era is the belief that trauma creates a speechless fright which separate or kills identity. In literary studies, trauma demonstrates or shows how traumatic events disrupt attachments between self and others. Traumatic experiences make someone look at life negatively as with Tambu in the opening lines in the novel "I was not sad when my brother dies, nor am apologizing for my callousness"(1). Certain attitudes may stem from suppressed anger or frustration and may explode when it goes beyond

containment, manifesting through hysteric behaviours.

The trauma theory is therefore indispensable in our analysis of this paper which is based on the analysis and interpretation of the character's behaviours and attitudes towards a particular situation. The trauma theory allows us to probe into the characters psyche in order to gain a better understanding of their reactions and attitudes.

Social Representation Theory as Theoretical Paradigm

On the flipside, the concept of Social Representation is as an approach to the social sciences which magnets its influences from a number of disciplines, including sociology, psychology, philosophy and linguistics, making it multidisciplinary in its nature. Social representation is intended to restore to social psychology an awareness of the social by means of comprehending social life from a psychological perspective. According to its propounder Serge Moscovici (1961), social representation is the set or system of values, ideas and practices with a twin function. Firstly, to establish an order which will enable individuals to orient themselves in the national and social world order and master it. Secondly, it enables communication to take place among the members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and the code for meaning.

As such, social representations are always the representation of something. This is just as Markova in his book states that "social representation may even be considered as thoughts in movement developing through communication" (121). Social representation therefore seeks to understand the influence of social relations on psychological process of an individual. This paper as such targets to introduce the reader to some of its foremost features, while also illuminating upon the repercussions it holds for how we are to understand human beings and for the discipline of psychology itself. Tsitsi Dangarembga's society in *Nervous Conditions* as presented through the protagonist, Tambu is one which the female gender is represented through a system that constructs an understanding or theorise social life. That is, what should or should not be of the female gender. This has been the circumference which Tambu's personality sets. As such, the society has to understand the social world of female gender by the way images have been shared by members of the social group. Beck-Gernsheim corroborates this claim as he states that "...in modern societies, the individual has some autonomy and assimilating social representations may simultaneously modify them" (32).

Also, Moscovici writes that "...individuals are confronted with a great variety of specialized knowledge on the part of groups to which they belong. Each individual must make his selection at a veritable open market of representations". (963). As such, every individual is mainly surrounded by social structures which they must make a choice as to which representation they should abide to. With the appellation "social" Moscovici wants to underscore how representations arise through social interaction and communication between individuals and groups. More to that, the appellation "Social" also reflects in different ways the historical, cultural and economic contexts and practices. This social representation forms the basis why the female gender has been socially represented. Eva Figes corroborates this in an article that "women have been largely man made since the cultural meanings given to them are patriarchally determined"(15). Bhargain supports this claim as he writes that "In childhood a woman should be under her father's control, in youth under her husband's and when her husband is dead under her sons. She should not have independence". (185BC)

The Trauma and Social Representation theoretical paradigms as such helps us to read and understand the inner mind of the female protagonist, Tambu and the interpretations of the her hysteric minds through actions and language, expressed in her conscious and unconscious response/actions.

TAMBU: RESISTING PERSONALITY IMPOSITION

It is an individual's ability to manage his or her nervous conditions that gives meaning to his or her personality. Focus will be on the prototype female character; Tambu, her resistances against patriarchal bigotry and the social constructs to create a personality for herself. These resistances are not only physical as it may first come to mind, but also non-physical. This authenticates why in the ending lines of the narrative, Tambu says, "It was a long and painful process for me, that process of expansion. It was a process whose events stretched over many years and would fill another volume..." (204). In other words, it was a process of resisting the gender constructs and improving on her personality. Tambu's resistances are to clip the wings of patriarchy and give a voice to the voiceless female subalterns. This is because the role of the female gender in the Zimbabwean-Shona culture has been side-lined and has not been given prominence.

The venom Tambu spilt out in the introductory sentence of the narrative; "I was not sorry when my brother died, nor am apologizing for my callousness as you may call it lack of feeling..." (1) expresses an unapologetic psyche of Tambu, a lass of just 14 years who has suffered discrimination and

cruelty in the hands of patriarchy and its constructs in her life because of her gender. It is clear that, in Jeremiah Sigauke's family, Nhamo is the only child singled out for preferential treatment and is given the privilege to live at the mission with Babamukuru, Sigauke's elitist and educated brother so as to facilitate his education. This because, Nhamo is a boy and such a prerogative is meant for him. On the flipside, Tambu and her little sisters, Netsia and Rambania have to "Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables." (15) work hard till evening in the farm and afterwards cook and do domestic chores.

Though the female resistances in the novel may not all have been successful, a resistance was launched and it leaves a landmark. Tambu articulates "...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). This projects Dangarembga's narrative as not only about an endurance of pain by Tambu, but also the resistances she puts up in the novel against the patriarchal bondage.

One of the principal manifestation of Tambu's resistance towards her father; Jeremiah sprang when she gets to realize that all her prerogatives have been diverted to her brother Nhamo. She complains why it is always the girl child who has to give way for the brother's education. However, not being convinced with the father's excuse of having no money to send both of them to school, Tambu takes it upon her to break the patriarchal dogma which asserts that a woman cannot educate herself. As Nhamo keeps reminding her "Some things cannot be done" (17), "...because you are a girl"(21). She resists all the attempts to stop her efforts by engaging into maize cultivation to help pay her school fees. In Jeremiah's words,

"Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables" (15), she never admits backing off. Tambu decides to confront her mother because of her silence. Ma'Shingayi rather reminds her that "this business of womanhood is a heavy burden...What will help you my child is to learn to carry your burdens with strength!" (16).

As stated supra, Tambu decides to manifest her ambitions by telling her father "I will earn the fees" (17). Even though her fellow woman mother Ma'Shingayi is part of the plot not to let her manifest her capabilities, this never stops her from resisting. We also get to realize that, Tambu's gut gets to its

peak which is unlike other women who have accepted their fate. As the narration says "...destined as a woman not to aspire beyond the limitation of her subservient domestic roles, Tambu liberates herself by transcending the social and traditional space constructed for women" (123).

Again, Tambu's resistance is also manifested when she engages into a fight with her brother Nhamo, who has been quick to often remind her that she cannot go to school because she is a female "it's the same everywhere...because you are a girl" (21). This trait of Nhamo is simply to exercise his chauvinist tendencies over his sister as groomed by his father and how the society has constructed him to it. All this is to frustrate Tambu's efforts as he says "...with me it is different, I was meant to be educated" (49). Nhamo, trying to crumble Tambu's efforts, engages into stealing her mealies alongside his schoolmates, even before she could start harvesting them for sale. This resistance towards Nhamo puts across a strong message. It is also a sign of creating a personality for her. As such Tambu challenges the social construct which is believed that female education is a waste of resources. Her major source of inspiration has always been her uncle; Babamukuru. According to Tambu, education "gives plenty of power, plenty of money...plenty of everything" (50).

Furthermore, Tambu's topmost of resistance against Babamukuru is lucidly comprehended when he chooses Nhamo as the only one to get education because according to the world that they(men) rule, only the male child can "...uplift the family out of the squalor in which we were living" (4). It is believed that, educating a boy child is developing your lineage but educating a girl child, is developing the family of your in-laws. This is to the fact that, she will marry and move to the husband's house and would help to develop his lineage. As such, she should stay home and learn how to become a woman. According to the constructs of the society as the Social Representation theory postulates, the woman's place as generally accepted by the social order is in the kitchen. Tambu once laments that, "When I had finished, I cooked the vegetables (39)...I had a special task. I had to carry the water dish in which people would wash their hands...(40) By the time eating was over...we went to the house to collect the plates" (41). As such, Tambu launches her resistance in working hard and educating herself without their help despite discouragements by her father, Jeremiah who keeps reminding him "some things cannot be done" (17). This is sustained by Nhamo who articulates in an argument with Tambu that "it is the same everywhere. Because you are a girl" (21). This patriarchal/Shona cultural prerogative and construct

gives Nhamo with the mentality of having more prominence to the female gender.

Also, the opening sentence as narrative initiates can be comprehended as a verbal resistance. This unapologetic statement by Tambu is one of her resistance staged towards her late brother who is a representation of the social construct she is resisting against. Nhamo's death signifies the gradual passing of patriarchy and a new beginning towards creating a personality for her. It should be noted that, it is only after Nhamo's death that Tambu gets the opportunity of education. Lending credence from the trauma theory, women have the higher possibility of developing post-traumatic stress disorder as compared to men. Women experience trauma at an early age and this has more impact in the development of the personality. Tambu's expression is simply a manifestation of her traumatic experiences as, a lass of just 14 years, living in a society where the social constructs favours only the male gender and relegates the female gender. As such, the opening words in the narrative by Tambu's can be termed *words of resistance*.

Also, Babamukuru's imposition of a church wedding between Lucia and Takesure, is another incident which Tambu resist against by not taking part. Tambu, never in support of this "western wedding" daringly refute by saying "I'm sorry...I do not want to go to the wedding" (167). Tambu finds it to be against the Zimbabwean-Shona tradition as she considers that it "made a mockery of the people I belong to and placed a doubt on my legitimate existence in this world. I knew I had to come to a decision, take some sort of action" (166). That is why she fakes an illness on the wedding day because she does not want to be part of it. She says "... my body on the bed didn't even twitch. Meanwhile the mobile, alert me, the one at the foot of the bed, smiled smugly, thinking that I had gone somewhere where he could not reach me and I congratulated myself for being so clever (166). It is clear that Tambu uses illness/sleep to resist against Babamukuru's impositions. Even though she is later punished by Babamukuru, she considers it as "...to me that punishment was a price of my new acquired identity." (167) As such, a step towards restoring her personality.

In an article, Okuyade corroborates this as he writes that "Her absence from the wedding is not only an act of defiance, but the demystification and debunking of patriarchal codes which Babamukuru represents" (121) "This earns her severe punishment fifteen lashes (since she is fifteen years old) and two weeks of doing the maid's domestic chores" (123). For Tambu, this punishment is the price she has to pay for her incipient revolt towards freedom, as she tells us "I went about these chores grimly, with a deep

and grateful masochistic delight: to me that punishment was the price of my newly acquired identity” (169). This non-physical resistance Tambu puts up is her own form of resisting the gender constructs that Babamukuru represents.

In addition, Tambu’s education in the Sacred Heart College elevates her resistances above all fears. At the end of acquiring education at the mission school, she says “Quietly, unobtrusively and extremely fitfully, something in mind began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed...” (204). This, because “...going to the convent was a chance to lighten those burdens by entering a world where burdens are light. I would take the chance. I would lighten my burdens” (179). This is a glaring fact that education greatly contributes to her rivalry thoughts against the external world that is ruled by men. This is because Tambu “loved going to school and... was good at it” (15).

Also, Tambu’s resistance and self-consciousness elevates due to her interaction with Nyasha, her cousin which the narration refers to as the “rebellious daughter”. Nyasha is one of the people who have been very instrumental in the development of Tambu’s personality. Tambu remarks that, Nyasha is one of the people who see ills and rebels against them. Tambu narrates that;

Nyasha was something unique and necessary for me. I did not like to spend too long without talking to her about the things that worry me because she would, I knew, pluck out the heart of the problem with her multi-directional mind and present it to me in ways that made sense, but not only that, in ways that also implied that problems existed not to be worried over but to extend us into our search for solutions (151).

As quoted supra, it is clear that, Nyasha is one of the people who have been very contributory in the development of Tambu’s personality. She is conscious of the gender-discrimination women go through because of the education she has acquired in England. Tambu comments that “Nyasha reads widely to discover new things and probably she decides to know why women are subjected the way they are into hysteric disorders”. (143)

In addition, Nyasha’s resistance against her father, signifies not only the fight for freedom for the girl child; it is also an existentialist fight for her right and personality. In a discussion with Tambu, Nyasha says “...Do you see what they’ve done? They’ve taken you away...they’ve deprived you of you,...they’ve trapped us. But I won’t be trapped. (200-201). She tears her history book which endorses male

dominance as she screams, “...their history, fucking liars, their bloody lies” (201). Reiterating “... if you want to be sure you are adjusting the right thing. You can’t go on all the time being whatever’s necessary. You’ve got to have some conviction, and I am convinced I don’t want to be anyone’s underdog. It is not right for anyone to be that (118). This propaganda Nyasha shares with Tambu forms the basis towards her own resistance where she will be free and not treated like an “underdog”

Furthermore, Nyasha confronts the claws of patriarchy when she begins to defy her father’s bigotry by talking back at the father as Babamukuru commands her, “I expect you to do as I say” (13), “Didn’t you hear me tell you I don’t want to hear you answer back?” (84). This resistance is sustained when she comes back late at night after a party and Babamukuru interrogates “...can you tell me why you are coming back so late?” (113), as the argument gets intense, Babamukuru strikes Nyasha, who retaliates by punching him in the eye saying, “I told you not to hit me, said Nyasha, punching him in the eye....They went down on the floor, Babamukuru alternately punching...Nyasha, screaming and wriggling and doing what damage she could.” (115-117) With this, Babamukuru laments saying “...she has dared challenge me...we cannot have two men in this house”(115). This demonstrates the extent at which Nyasha can go to resist for a change even at the detriment of her health. After that incident in a discussion with Tambu, she declares, “Really, I can’t. He makes me so angry. I can’t just shut up when he puts on his God act. I’m just not made that way. Why not? Why can’t I just take it like everybody does? I ought to take it, but really, I can’t? (197). It should be noted also that, Nyasha’s retaliation towards his father is as a result of numerous suppressed anger that has been in accumulation. This is in line with post-traumatic stress disorder, which is the manifestation of the suppressed internal experiences of a hysteric victim. Nyasha’s resistance though not fully attained leaves a scar in the mind of his father and acts as a threat to patriarchy.

Tambu’s closeness with Nyasha spurs up her strength so much that they both miss each other while apart as Tambu says “I felt Nyasha needed me but... I had to go back to school” (202). Also, Nyasha’s resistance is caused by the dosages of Englishness living in England. This in turn leads to Tambu’s transformation from a submissive seeker of economic power, who is ready to sell her identity in exchange for a little space of belonging in Babamukuru’s world, into a nonconformist. As the narration states, she can “no longer ...accept Sacred Heart and what it represented as a sunrise on my horizon” (203). This was indeed a liberating journey because, through it, Tambu begins to grow from her

quest for economic power to the quest for freedom and self-definition of her personality. It can be asserted that, Tambu's story is a prototype of a girl's desire to be free from a condition of an androcentric based society. This explains why the narrative ends with Tambu narrating her new personality as a new beginning of making her own choices that are no longer directed by social values. She "it was a painful process for me, that process of expansion" (204).

Okereke and Egbung in an article pen that, "The story of Tambu articulates the challenges confronting the girl child in the process of growing up in traditional and colonial Africa... To survive, she must work out her own strategies to negotiate the cultural, gender and generational challenges and impositions on her..."(265) This explains why, for Tambu to succeed, she employs different stratagems that work in diverse situations to ensure her survival. Tambu's resistance to earn her fees to carry on her education helps her to effectively negotiate her survival of gender discrimination. It should be noted that, she employs different resisting stratagems as with Babamukuru where she employs submission as a survival strategy.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we set out to demonstrate the interconnections between the female character, Tambu, her personality traits and how she struggles to resist and debunk the stereotypical social constructs which have been the hinge on which her live turn. Using the Trauma Literary theory and the Social Representation theory, this paper present a society where a woman is capable of bringing change by resisting and challenging her fears, breaking silence and speaking out for her voice and choice to be heard. Overall, the narrative ends on an optimistic note that with persistence and a stubborn spirit of resistance, all things can be possible as epitomised through Tambu. It is remarkable that Tambu's resistances against the patriarchal bigotry leave a landmark because she survives and is psychologically stable to tell her story as she states in the end that "...the story I have told here, is my own story..." (204). Her ability to tell her own story, connotes victory in her resistances for freedom.

At the end of the novel Tambu has attained some freedom through her personal struggle. It is also important to note that Tambu in *Nervous Conditions* tells the story of the different strands of the female story. She narrates her story with agony, struggle and resistance certainly when the she can no longer endure; she has no choice than to resist. As such, Tambu's journey is marked by the pursuit for self-definition/personality and freedom. We can also ascertain that any society which attempts to side-line the female gender is doomed to stagnation. This is in

line as Helen Chukwuma in *Journal of Women's Studies in Africa: The Legacy of Flora Nwapa*, postulates that "negative and nihilistic norms must give way to the pressing winds of change. Culture is dynamic and no society can progress with about half of its population in subjugation" (158).

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