

**THE OPPRESSION OF WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF
SEMBENE OUSMANE AND TSITSI DANGAREMBGA**

by

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Declaration

I, **Mphiko Benjamin Lesibana**, declare that this mini-dissertation is my own personal effort. I have taken reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and, to the best of my knowledge, there is neither plagiarism nor deliberate falsification of data as sources have been acknowledged. Any failure to provide full, proper citations should be attributed to inadvertent human error.

Signed.....

Date.....

Dedication

This mini-dissertation is dedicated to my wife, **Gerrie**, our children, **Seoka, Mankwafi** and **Malešane** and my sisters for providing me with unfailing support throughout my years of study and through the process of writing this work. It is also dedicated to the memories of my late parents, **Rosina** and **France Mphiko** and my late uncles-in-law, **Dan** and **Simon Maifo**, who, throughout their lives, gave me an appreciation for the importance of studying.

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Abstract

The primary aim of this study is to examine the oppression and repression of African women through the collusion of indigenous African patriarchy and colonial, imperialist values. The selected novels are *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and *God's Bits of Wood* (1960) by Tsitsi Dangarembga and Sembene Ousmane, respectively. The study focuses on the roles played by both African and European values in the class, gender and racial oppression of African women. Using the theoretical frameworks of Marxism and Feminism, the study evaluates issues of women's oppression, repression and marginalisation. The selected literary texts are closely analysed with a view to exploring and establishing the nature and form of African women's multiple oppressions through the connivance between African patriarchy and European colonial hegemonic norms. Lastly, the study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the topical issue of African women's oppression.

Keywords: Colonial values; African patriarchy; Hegemonic norms; Oppression; Repression; Marginalisation; Collaboration; Women and the girl child.

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CHAPTER 1

GENERAL ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The nineteenth-century conquest and colonisation of Africa by Europeans has had a significant impact on the cultural, economic, social and political praxis of the African people. The entrenchment and persistence of European neo-colonialism and imperialism and the concomitant impact on Africa's cultural, economic, social and political polity are worth researching. This is even more pressing because Africa and her people continue to be affected by the repercussions of European neo-colonialism and imperialism. In order to fully appreciate the persistence of this phenomenon, one has to read historical texts and present-day media coverage of the continent and her people. The media reportage of Africa is clouded with endemic economic deprivation, social disintegration, religious conflict, humanitarian disasters, the oppression and degradation of the poor and the vulnerable, particularly women and children. For instance, the topical religious and politically motivated abduction of schoolgirls in Nigeria.

The above-mentioned negative, stereotypical view of Africa as a "dark continent" was recently echoed by Salim who, in his 2014 Thabo Mbeki Annual Lecture, pointed out that post-colonial Africa is still haunted by undemocratic regimes, instabilities, internal conflicts, corruption, abject poverty, ignorance, disease, human misery and destruction. Most importantly, Salim condemned the continuing exclusion of women from public decision-making processes. He bemoaned the patriarchal nature of many African societies and urged African leaders to move towards what he calls an "inclusive economy". According to Salim:

This move towards inclusive economy must go hand in hand with the efforts of uplifting the status and appreciating the role of our women in economic and political leadership. The women of Africa have been the most resilient and dynamic force. They constitute more than 50% of the entire population. They have played a crucial role in the struggle for independence and liberation wars. In conflict situations, they bear a disproportionate burden of suffering. They have played and continue to play a pivotal role in all facets of economic and social development; but in most of our countries their full potential has yet to be utilised, and their role in decision-making continues to be, by and large, sadly marginal (<http://www.youtube.Com/watch%3f>. Dr Salim, 24 May, 2014).

Modern challenges, including women's marginalisation and socio-economic inequalities that continue to bedevil Africa and her people, can be traced back to the scourge of European conquest and colonisation. In order to fully appreciate the nature, form and content of these challenges and women's degradation, in particular, a socio-historical and cultural study of post-colonial writers has to be conducted. The next section discusses pertinent background information on European colonisation of Africa, its implications and ripple effects.

1.2 Background to the Study

Background to the study discussed in this section deals with: (a) the British and French colonial policies; (b) the entrenchment and maintenance of colonialism; (c) the triple oppression of racism, sexism and race, and (d) African males' collusion with colonial oppression.

1.2.1 The British and French Colonial Policies

The British colonial system was called indirect rule and the French colonial system was direct and assimilationist. Colonisation of Africa meant the Anglicisation and Frenchification of Africans; that is, to make Africans ape the English and the French in all respects, including manners and character (Mogoboya, 2011: 27). The colonial system and its consequences are best expressed by Ngugi, (cited in Cook & Okenimkpe, 1997: 216):

This control takes the dual forms both of the deliberate destruction of the people's culture, (their art, dances, religion, history, geography, education, orature and language) and the superimposition on the colonised people of the coloniser's culture and language (Cook & Okenimkpe 1997: 216).

The colonial system is closely linked to imperialism, capitalism and racism. As Ngugi sees it, colonialism manipulates Africans in order to divide, rule and exploit them (*Ibid.*215). It destroys the entire fabric of society, particularly culture, rendering Africans ashamed of their systems of belief, history, names, language, art, lore, dance, songs and even the colour of their skin. In order to entrench their hegemony over Africans, European colonisers have resorted to more sophisticated control measures, as shown in the next section.

1.2.2 The Entrenchment and Maintenance of Colonialism

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989:167) describe hegemony as the domination of a people by consent using subtle and inclusive power over the economy and state apparatuses such as education and the media. Hegemony refers to the capacity of the coloniser to influence the thought of the colonised. Marxist feminist critics such as Gramsci and Althusser (cited in Booker, 1996:82) maintain that hegemony is maintained through the process of interpellation or the hailing of the subject. Interpellation is the process through which individuals are formed as subjects by powerful forces working in the interest of the prevailing ideology to maintain its dominance over the general population without resorting to violence or force. The process of interpellation occurs in subtle ways through the working of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA), such as the family, the law, education, politics, trade unions, communications and culture. The Ideological State Apparatuses are supplemented by the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA) such as the police and the soldiers for coercion in the event of resistance. The colonial ideologues' capacity for cold, calculating violence is a historical fact that is explored in the selected literary works in Chapters 3 and 4 of this study.

Both Marxist and feminist critics have observed that there is a particular exclusion of women from political and public decision-making, while socialist feminists have asserted that there is a patriarchal ideology which bolsters the patriarchal state and excludes women from public and political participation (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2006: 77-78). Through the use of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA), the oppressed and exploited are conditioned and socialised into accepting their suffering as universal, trans-historical, legitimate, normal and natural. Besides mental colonisation, the colonialists have adopted a multi-pronged strategy to entrench their domination of Africans. Suffice it to say that the colonialists' multi-pronged strategy will be treated in details in subsequent chapters of the study. Unbeknown to themselves, Africans adopted beliefs and behavioural patterns which were anathemas to Africa's united, anti-colonial pact. The self-defeatist beliefs and behavioural patterns included, among others the PHD (Pull Him/Her Down) syndrome, xenophobia, rampant bourgeois materialism and sanctimonious attitudes towards fellow Africans (Muendane, 2006: 89-90). The butt of these shenanigans would be the weak and the poor, particularly women and girl children, as shown in the next section.

1.2.3 The Triple Oppression of Racism, Sexism and Class

Women in Africa must not only liberate themselves from the influences of colonial rule; they are also fighting the effects of patriarchal traditions in the history of their culture. Klaus Viehmann (1995: 1), in the article “Three into One: The Triple Oppression of Racism, Sexism and Class” praises feminist comrades and blacks, especially black women, who put greater stress upon the significance of the triple oppression of capital, patriarchy and racism as a political notion.

According to Mbatha (1998: 29) the definition of patriarchal relationships should be placed in a wider political and economic framework. Hence, black Marxist feminists maintain that a connection exists between various types of oppression, especially classism, racism and sexism. These feminists assert that black women experience multiple oppressions; that is, racial, gender and class oppression. Given the fact that African women suffer as a colonised people, feminists have argued that “the personal is the political” (Schacht & Ewing, 1998:14). Women, indeed, are the most exploited and oppressed section of the entire working class: exploited as workers at home and also by the backward elements in their socially constructed stereotypical, discriminatory cultures. It is not surprising that, faced with these indivisible multiple oppressions or the patriarchal domination of women which transcends borders, people and cultures, African women see the need to implant “the spirit of sisterhood” among themselves (Nkealah, 2006: 136 –139). In their interesting inversion of the feminist slogan “the personal is the political”, Schacht and Ewing (1998: 14) argue that the better slogan would be “the political is the personal”. The pain of colonial-capitalist patriarchy is that what happens outside immediate social networks impacts on family life. African males’ compradorial competition in the public sphere influences their familial interactions with women and children at home. The implications of this inverted slogan will be examined in the close textual analysis of the selected novels in Chapters 3 and 4. It is noteworthy that, as shown in the next section, the “triple oppression” suffered by women seems to be bolstered and perpetuated by African males’ collusion with European colonial oppression.

1.2.4 African Males’ Collusion with Colonial Oppression

Research on the concept “African male collusion with European oppression” seems to be sketchy, hence the need for this study. The cross-culturally ubiquitous nature of patriarchy seems to be confirmed by Booker (1996:151) who demonstrates historical

complicity with racism, imperialism and the general cultural domination of other countries by Western Europe. Indigenous African patriarchy as a mode of production must have acquiesced with a capitalist mode of production.

In her lecture on “Issues of Gender and Development from an African Feminist Perspective”, Patricia McFadden (2000:www.world.org.africa.patricia.email) argues that the intersection between race, class, gender and age, on the one hand, and power, privilege and troubled relations with the state, on the other hand, needs a radical feminist reappraisal. In this lecture, McFadden exposes the compradorial role played by African men in maintaining the very colonial relationships they claimed to oppose and transform. Her analysis of the relationship between coloniality, development and power reveals that African males have colluded with colonial patriarchy in the social, political and economic disempowerment of African women. McFadden also insists on the adoption of the radical feminist slogan “the personal is the political” and condemnation of those who regard the slogan as Western and unAfrican.

According to Abodunrin (2008:107), Armah and Fanon regard the Western educated African elite as the obstacle towards Africa’s decolonisation process. Brainwashed and blinded by “plain mental laziness”, the educated African elite work against the re-Africanisation and decolonisation of Africa in many ways, among others, (a) cultural-religious self-denigration; (b) an artificial high-brow taste and (c) contempt for anything that is not Western oriented. The Western educated African elite, which is predominantly male, works against the re-Africanisation and decolonisation of Africa in the following ways:

First there is the ideological conviction, nurtured in ignorance, that African values are inferior to Western values. Secondly, Africans are materially poor compared to Westerners... Western education does not teach habits of solidarity with the poor. In plain words, the Western educational experience is tacitly structured to make the elite African incapable of democratic co-operation in any undertaking involving poor people. The former is trained to be a boss or a so-called leader-*he* makes a lousy comrade and one of the reasons is that *he* also sees poverty as primitive (Armah, cited in Abodunrin, 2008: 107-108).

The hidden curriculum would lead to the enslavement of the male Africans’ mind, alienation, socialisation, stereotyping and contempt of his own people. This would, inevitably, culminate in the unconsciously collusive perpetuation of class, racial and gender inequalities. This is clarified in the textual analysis of Dangarembga’s *Nervous*

Conditions (1988) and Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* (1960) in Chapters 3 and 4 of the study, respectively.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The primary focus of this study is the oppression, repression and marginalisation of African women and the girl child as depicted in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and *God's Bits of Wood* (1960). The nineteenth-century colonisation of Africa by Europeans was not an event but a process; its economic, cultural, social and political repercussions are still with us. The persistence of European neo-colonialism and imperialism finds expression in myriad ways, inter alia, political instability, corruption, economic deprivation, social disintegration, the oppression and dehumanisation of the poor and the vulnerable, especially women and the girl child. From an Eco-feminist perspective, the Europeans' quest for the control and domination of nature, women and non-Europeans has resulted in the displacement or dislocation of Africa and her people (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1989: 66). Notwithstanding the Afrocentric, post-colonial critiques and the liberation of the continent from colonialism, African women and girl children continue to suffer under the yoke of multiple oppressions. In spite of attempts to attain gender equity and equality, women and girl children continue to suffer under the triple oppression of racism, patriarchy and capitalism. There is a need for research on the persistent marginalisation, commodification, alienation and reification of women and children borne of the apparent collusion between indigenous African patriarchy and colonial-capitalist patriarchy.

The racist, patriarchal and capitalist oppression of African women translates into political, social, economic exclusion and repression. Consequently, the decolonisation process has been treated, both in theory and in practice, from what one might call a Euro-androcentric or male perspective. In other words, even African males seem to find it convenient to collude with European colonialists in the oppression and exploitation of African women. Any attempt to challenge the triple evils of patriarchy, racism and capitalism from a Marxist-feminist perspective is discouraged and silenced. This self-serving rejection of anti-patriarchal theory and practice is expressed in spurious arguments such as "feminism is a Western ideology" (Nkealah, 2006: 137). Asante, (cited in McLaren, 1998: 386- 397) rejects Marxism and its committed aesthetic because it is characterised by controversial ungodliness or God-consciousness which is alien to the African culture and lacks the spiritual element. These flimsy arguments,

as Nkealah argues, seem to work more to the advantage of men than women. The truth is that African political and economic philosophers have succeeded in the Africanisation or appropriation of classical Marxism-Leninism through concepts such as African socialist humanism, *Ujamaa* or familyhood and Ubuntu (Britannica Encyclopaedia, vol. 17: 804; Vol 27: 400). These philosophies are deeply spiritual as they are based on African traditions such as communal, egalitarian theories and practices, respect and comprehension of the divine. The above arguments have resulted in the dearth of Marxist-feminist research on the compradorial, collaborationist role played by African men in the oppression of African women.

1.4 Research Questions

The above problematic situation gives rise to the following research questions:

- What is the role of African men in the entrenchment and perpetuation of the triple oppression of African women?

Subsumed under the above question are the following sub-questions:

- How do Ousmane and Dangarembga, in the selected novels, treat the collaborationist role played by African men in the oppression of their fellow African womenfolk and the girl child?
- How do African women react to this racist, sexist and colonial-capitalist oppression?
- How can both African men and women adopt positive coping mechanisms in order to establish African societies free from racism, sexism and neo-colonialism?

1.5 Delimitation of the Study

Ousmane and Dangarembga have written several novels, treating a variety of issues and themes. This study is based on Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* (1960). In line with the rubric of the research topic, the main focus is on the oppression of African women by African men in connivance with European colonisers. Nevertheless, this demarcation does not preclude references to other literary works by these selected authors as well as relevant literary appreciation of those works. In other words, reference can be made to, *inter alia*, (a) pertinent

biographical details and (b) the selected authors' aesthetics in order to highlight and support the researcher's arguments and propositions.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms and Concepts

1.6.1 Eco-feminism

Eco-feminism is a portmanteau term coined from ecology and feminism; it means ecological feminism. According to Ashcroft *et al.*, (1989: 66-68), Eco-feminism is a sub-theme of feminism which stresses the indissoluble interconnectedness, both physical and conceptual, of the earth itself and all life on it. This theory is against the Western binary rationality which is characterised by the justification of the destruction and domination of women, non-Europeans and their lands. Eco-feminism is opposed to environmental destruction of plants, animals and other subject peoples in the name of jingoistic Western capitalism masquerading as progress or civilisation. For purposes of this study, Eco-feminism refers to the critique of European colonialism and the resultant physical, psychological and spiritual displacement of Africans, particularly women and the girl child.

1.6.2 Patriarchy

According to Booker (1996:484) patriarchy literally means rule by the father. It is the tendency for societies to be dominated by men and masculine values through structures like the law, employment, education, the family, religion and certain cultural practices.

1.6.3 Commodification

Commodification refers to the process through which goods, services, ideas and human beings are reduced to the status of commodities in a capitalist society (Booker, 1996: 476). For purposes of this study, this concept refers to the treatment of African women by men.

1.6.4 Reification

Reification is the process through which goods, services, ideas, activities and human beings are reduced to the status of objects stripped of all mystery or spiritual

significance (Booker, 1996: 486). For purposes of this study, this concept refers to the treatment of African women by men.

1.6.5 Comprador

Comprador is a Portuguese word originally used to refer to a local merchant acting as a middleman between foreign producers and a local market (Ashcroft *et al.* 1989: 47). Marxists use this word to refer to the local bourgeoisie who owe their privileged power and position to foreign capital monopolies and hence maintain a vested interest in colonial-capitalist subjugation and occupation of Africa. For purposes of this study, compradors are African men who connive with European colonisers in the oppression of their fellow African women and the girl child.

1.7 Purpose of the Study

1.7.1 Aim of the study

The primary aim of this study is to examine the class, gender and racial oppression of African women through the collusion of indigenous African patriarchy and colonial, imperialist values.

1.7.2 Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are:

- To explore the role of African males in the perpetuation of racism, patriarchy and colonialism.
- To analyse African women's reaction to African males' collaboration with colonial oppression.
- To suggest alternatives to dysfunctional coping mechanisms for both African men and women.
- To make recommendations on how to create egalitarian African communities.

1.8 Research Design and Methodology

The descriptive and exegetic or interpretative forms of the qualitative research method are used. The data collection methods and techniques used in this study are the following:

1.8.1 Examination of Primary Sources

The selected novels by and Tsitsi Dangarembga namely, *God's Bits of Wood* (1960) and *Nervous Conditions* (1988), respectively, are closely examined.

1.8.2 The study of Secondary Sources

Critical texts on Ousmane and Dangarembga, particularly those relevant to female oppression, are studied. Marxist and feminist critical theories, in both printed and electronic forms, are consulted.

Information from the above-mentioned sources is critically interpreted and collated with a view to (a) addressing research questions outlined in section 1.4 above and (b) encouraging further research on female oppression. This study is predicated on the premise that some constructs which society holds as natural and given, for instance, racism and sexism, are made by culture in history. Consequently, the descriptive and exegetic or interpretive forms of the qualitative method are used. Firstly, the primary sources, which are the selected novels by Ousmane and Dangarembga, are examined. Secondly, the close intensive analysis of the selected novels is done against the backdrop of relevant Marxist and feminist critical theories in order to contextualise the research topic. Lastly, this is followed by the researcher's concluding remarks and recommendations.

1.9 The Rationale of the Study

This study was prompted by the researcher's observation that despite the independence or liberation of Africa from colonialism, the abuse, repression and oppression of African women and children are still continuing unabated. African societies, South Africa, Senegal and Zimbabwe included, seem to be steeped in and pervaded with post-colonial Afro-European patriarchy, racism and class oppression of the poor and the vulnerable, particularly women and the girl child. Despite their

pontifical assertions about women's emancipation, the so-called erstwhile African freedom fighters, liberators, community leaders and politicians are still preoccupied with the patriarchal, stereotypical views on women's role and position in society. This impression is confirmed by the fact that, to this day, we have had only two female presidents in the entire continent, namely, Joyce Banda of Malawi and Ellen Jonsón Sirleaf of Liberia. Former President Joyce has also added her voice to the feminist agenda: "I know that women in Africa still face many challenges due to HIV and AIDS, conflicts, and harmful cultural practices, among other issues. However, I firmly believe that you and I will tirelessly work together to make sure that women's rights on the continent get better" (Lupick, 2012: www.ipsnews.net). The rationale of this study is to explore these continuing multiple oppressions of women and to challenge all stereotypical beliefs and behavioural patterns, with a view to ameliorating and redressing the apparent imbalances and inequalities.

1.10 Literature Review on Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* and Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*

The significance of this study lies in the apparent dearth of Marxist-feminist appreciation of literary texts. The collusive role of African men in the oppression, degradation and repression of their fellow womenfolk has not been intensively subjected to the rigours of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist-feminist criticism. This knowledge gap seems to be confirmed by the selected authors' differences in popularity ratings and critical reception. Perhaps this dichotomy can be attributable to these authors' glaring differences in terms of their: (a) religious beliefs; (b) ideological orientations; (c) educational backgrounds; (d) literary aesthetics, and (e) existential experiences as an African man and African woman living under colonialism. The implications of these differences are clarified in Chapter 2 of the study. Hereunder follows a brief overview of literary criticism on Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and Ousmane's *Gods' Bits of Wood* (1960).

1.10.1 Sembene Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* (1960)

According to Harrow (1994: 49-50) Sembene Ousmane's work represents the literature of *térmoignage*, that is, a literature that bears witness to individual lives and to social, cultural and historical realities. This literature is characterised by (a) the biographical and autobiographical elements; (b) social and historical realism, and (c) a subtle

mixture of the conflicts and fusions between African and European cultures. In Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* (1960) we find almost all of the above characteristics. Ousmane's historical realism is confirmed by the fact that *God's Bits of Wood* (1960) is an artistic reconstruction and re-evaluation of the 1947-1948 strike in which workers on the railway from Dakar in Senegal to Bamako in Mali withdraw their labour. At the heart of the strike is the French colonialists' preservation of benefits for whites at the expense of African workers, namely, (a) higher salaries; (b) medical and vacation benefits; (c) pensions; (d) family allowances and (e) the recognition of African workers' unions. As Jones (2000:124-125) points out, Ousmane's novel is a mixture of historical facts and fiction because the epic women's march found in the novel never occurred as Senegal was a Muslim country that forbade women's participation in politics. Given the fact that the young Sembene Ousmane took part in this all-men strike (Harrow, 1994: 49-50), his dramatically detailed inclusion of women in the novel is a political-feminist statement: any struggle for the liberation and development of African societies without women's participation is both incomplete and counter-productive.

African males' paralysis and petrification, contrasted with women's ingenious revolutionary commitment, is suggestive of African males' collusion with colonial oppression. There is a need to identify and scrutinise these men, analyse their internecine bickering, staleness and paralysis, which, the researcher surmises, amount to complicity in the triple oppression suffered by these women. The impression of these men's collaboration with colonial oppression is also suggested by Case, (cited in Gadjigo, Faulkingham, Cassirer & Sander,1993:9), who writes that Ousmane uses male characters primarily to convey certain messages through their clothing, gestures and social context. The character portrayal of the absent Mandela-like messiah and leader of the strike is a case in point, as it will be shown during the subsequent textual analysis of this novel. Similarly Pfaff, (cited in Gadjigo *et al.*,1993:19-20), also observes that Ousmane regards life as a series of ambiguities, paradoxes and incoherences which are best exposed and denounced through biting sarcasm, satire and comedy. This is particularly true of the male characters in this novel. These male characters' collusive, self-defeatist thoughts, convictions and pro-colonial behavioural patterns are treated in detail in Chapters 3 and 4 of the study.

Jones (2000: 121-122) argues that Sembene Ousmane is skeptical about the concept of worker unity among the striking railway workers. These men's supposedly anti-colonial activities and interactions are undermined by what Onoge, (cited in

Gugelberger, 1985: 42), calls “intra-elite squabbles” and inter-union tensions. Here we have men who, despite their pontifications about African people’s liberation, are pre-occupied with dog-eat-dog competition for power, prostitutes, positions and possessions. These men’s bickering centers around four issues, namely (a) mutual jealousy; (b) the role of women in the strike; (c) the language issue and (d) romantic rivalry. Ousmane reserves his scathing lambasts for these male “crosstitutes” rather than female prostitutes. He exposes the collusive hypocrisy inherent in these men’s treatment of women as sex objects which, by implication, corroborates the French managers’ racist references to African women as “whores and concubines”. These courageous women unflinchingly fight what Ogun-dipe-Leslie, (cited in Da Silva, 2004: 135-136), calls “mountains” African women are carrying on their backs: (a) patriarchy; (b) colonialist and neo-colonialist oppression from outside; (c) traditional structures; (d) poverty and ignorance introduced by male-dominated systems; (e) racist ideology and (f) the socialisation or the exteriorisation of feelings of inferiority.

Ousmane’s historical reconstruction of the 1947-1948 strike in this novel is a glorification of strong-willed, courageous women and a castigation of some spineless, chicken-livered African men. Despite the Muslim-induced Senegalese “culture of silence” (Nkealah, 2006: 28), which excludes them from political and public decision-making, these powerful women discuss and, eventually, take part in the strike. These women’s discussion of and participation in the strike is a rejection of social taboos, restrictions and tyrannies of African patriarchal custom and practice encouraged by colonialists in order to divide, rule and exploit Africans. These women’s discussion of and participation in the strike is indicative of their raised consciousness as equal partners and comrades in the struggle against the triple oppression of race, class and gender. In order to appreciate these women’s raised consciousness, we need to identify them, celebrate them, compare and contrast their sisterly solidarity, ingenuity and concerted anti-colonial war effort with their male compatriots’ internecine tinkering, staleness and collusion with colonial-capitalist oppression. These differences are discussed in detail in Chapter 2 of the study. Hopefully, this will compensate for the apparent dearth of research on Ousmane’s depiction of Marxist-feminist issues in his literary works.

1.10.2 Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988)

The Zimbabwean Dangarembga, unlike the Senegalese Ousmane, is a popular, well-read and extensively researched writer. Notwithstanding this, Dangarembga's literary works have not been thoroughly subjected to the rigours of Marxist-Leninist-feminist analysis. Perhaps this can be attributable to the Cold War and the ill-informed, self-serving suppression and labelling of Marxism-Leninism as an agnostic literary theory. Hereunder is a brief overview of literature on Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988).

In her novel, *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Tsitsi Dangarembga depicts women who are fighting the effects of multiple oppressions in pre-independence colonial Rhodesia, present-day Zimbabwe. Seen through the eyes of the narrator-protagonist, Tambu, these women are Mainini, who is Tambu's mother, Maiguru, Nyasha and Lucia. Pauline Ada Uwakweh (1995: 2) identifies three categories of female characters in the novel. Uwakweh presents Tambu and Lucia as escaped females; Mainini and aunt Maiguru as entrapped females, and Nyasha as the rebellious female.

Caroline Rooney, (cited in Gurnah, 1995: 135), points out that although *Nervous Conditions* (1988) is set in the Rhodesian war of liberation, the author makes little references to this, choosing to address issues of women's emancipation from a patriarchal family and society. Given the focus of the novel on family interactions, it is Maiguru and her daughter Nyasha, who bear the brunt because of their constant contact with patriarchy personified, Babamukuru, their husband and father, respectively. In her *Writing Madness*, Flora Veit-wild (2006: 142) indicates that in order to preserve and expand their rule, the colonialists have to produce a class of subjects on whom they can rely, who are capable of helping to administer the colony and spread the colonial ideas. These are the Christianised, educated elite; preferably male preachers, teachers, interpreters and administrators. Despite obtaining higher education overseas, when both Babamukuru and Maiguru return home, they have an identity crisis.

Babamukuru's corruption or nepotism and its effects on social life are evidenced by his connivance with a white man, Mr Baker, to secure a prestigious scholarship for his son, Chido. Again, he does this at the expense of Nyasha. These young women, as Gurnah (1995: 4) puts it, are oppressed by a discourse of imperialism and by a native

patriarchal construction of women's subjecthood. As women, they are required to be the passive signifiers of cultural integrity, and education can only seduce them into wrongdoing and cultural treachery. Undeniably, there is the ubiquitous triple oppression or patriarchal-colonial subjection of women in the selected literary works. This patriarchal subjugation of women is sustained through androcentric, male-dominated structures like the family, education, religion, cultural proscriptions and practices. This multiple oppression of women, besides taking different forms like nepotism, elitism and misogyny, can manifest itself in myriad ways. It can manifest itself through victimisation, discrimination, prejudice, forced conversion and stereotypes. This is clarified in the textual analysis of these novels in Chapters 3 and 4 of the study.

1.11 Theoretical Approach

This section focuses on the theoretical grounding of the study because literary theory is to literary criticism what cement is to bricks in construction. Literary theory solidifies and consolidates literary criticism. To this effect, the fundamental features of two literary theories, namely, Marxism and Feminism will be discussed. These theories and their fundamental features will be treated separately under the following headings: (1) definition of the theory, (2) assumptions of the theory and (3) methodology or approach to literary analysis. It is noteworthy that these theories are treated separately out of convenience; that is, this is not intended to compartmentalise them for, as it will be shown, sometimes there are overlaps and intersections between these theories.

1.11.1 Marxist Literary Theory

1.11.1.1 Definition

According to Bressler (1994: 115), Marxist literary theory is based on the ideas and ideals of socialism or communism which were propounded by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in their texts, *The Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital*. In these texts, Marx and Engels declare that the capitalists or the bourgeoisie have enslaved the proletariat or the working class through economic control and the production of goods. Marx and Engels assert that the proletariat must revolt and strip the bourgeoisie of their economic and political power, place the ownership of all properties in the hands of the government or dictatorship of the proletariat, which will fairly and equitably distribute the people's wealth, from one according to his or her abilities, to all according to their

needs. Marxist thought, as Rivkin and Ryan (2004: 216) observe, is preoccupied with the establishment of a classless, egalitarian society which is free from capitalist individualism, egocentricity and greed. Marxism claims to offer humanity an opportunity and a plan or programme of action for changing the world from a place of bigotry, hatred and conflict resulting from class struggle to a classless society where opportunity, wealth and education are accessible for all people (Bressler, 1994: 116).

Inspired by the above Marxist-Leninist philosophy, scholars and literary critics have effected what Rivkin and Ryan (2004: 316) call the importation or re-entry of politics into literature. Cultural critics and literary theorists, such as Terry Eagleton, Fredrick Jameson, Mikhail Bakhtin, including the African literary giant, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, have taken up the pen or the word processor as a weapon in class struggle. Davis and Schleifer (1989: 411) point out the highly partisan and polemical tone in Eagleton's insistence that literary criticism should always demonstrate and elucidate the effect of ideology. Eagleton (cited in Davis & Schleifer, 1989: 412) urges us to think crudely; that is, we must not get so involved with the complexities of theoretical argument that we lose sight of class conflict, exploitation and oppression.

Similarly, other Marxist literary theorists such as Bakhtin, Frederick, Jameson and Besley maintain that artistic form is largely influenced by extra-artistic reality (Davis & Schleifer, 1989: 413). These literary critics argue that in literary texts they recognise not knowledge but ideology itself, a world view which is actually the articulation of the dominant bourgeois class. Hence, they propose a sociological poetics or approach. This approach views works of art or literature as the products of historical forces that can be analysed by looking at the material conditions in which they were formed. Marxist literary criticism, then, shares with feminist criticism a desire to challenge the power structure in contemporary society. For Marxists, the issue is not gender but economic power, leading to political power. Marxist literary criticism, like Feminism, is sometimes called the political or cultural criticism. Marxism demands that criticism should be more overtly political, that it should not simply interpret but change the world. It insists on the need for political commitment and social responsibility for both the creative writer and the literary critic (Davis & Schleifer, 1989: 312).

1.11.1.2 Assumptions of Marxist Literary Criticism

In contrast to Formalist approaches which isolate the literary work from its historical context, Rivkin and Ryan (2004: 400) indicate that Marxism begins with the assumption that literature can only be understood if its historical, social, economic and cultural contexts are taken into account. Literature can work to expose wrongs in a society or it can cover up or paper over troubling fissures and make a class-divided society seem unified and content. It achieves this by representing class differences in such a way that they seem legitimate and natural. As it will be shown when treating methodology or approach to criticism in the next section, it is the responsibility of the Marxist literary critic to expose these cover-ups or subtle disguises.

Another assumption of Marxism is that ultimate reality is material, not spiritual (Bressler, 1994: 118). In order to understand ourselves and our world, we must stop trying to find answers by looking solely to religion or philosophy; instead we must begin by analysing all aspects of our activities within society and culture. According to Marxism, we all are situated historically and socially; our social and historical context determines or shapes our lives. This is as true of literature as it is of human beings. Rivkin and Ryan (2004: 300) argue that, according to Marx, literature is not the expression of universal or eternal ideas. It is, in the first instance, a social phenomenon, and as such, it cannot be studied independently of the social relations, the economic forms and the political realities of the time in which it is written. The economic base of a society, as maintained in the relations of production, determines the society's superstructure, that is, its arts and ideology (Davis & Schleifer, 1989: 377). The central tenet or principle of Marxist literary criticism is that literature and art are social practices that cannot be separated from other kinds of social practices, in such a way as to make them subject to special and distinct laws. Notwithstanding the fact that they have quite specific features as practices, they cannot be separated from the general social process. In the words of Balibar and Macherey, (cited in Davis & Schleifer, 1989: 370-371), literature "does not fall from the heavens, the product of a mysterious creation, but is the product of social practice ...Neither is it an imaginary activity, albeit it produces imaginary effects; it is, inescapably, part of a material process."

Our society, Marxism declares, is characterised by dialectical materialism, that is, the theory that political and historical events are due to a series of ongoing conflicts between social classes caused by man's material needs (Bressler, 1994:115). Through

the process of hegemony and the bourgeois monopoly of the means of production and interpretation, the capitalist ideology preponderates over the proletarian aspirations. This results in false consciousness. It is false-consciousness because (a) the predominant ideology has been defined and established by the bourgeoisie, and (b) the ideology represents a set of false assumptions or illusions used by the elite to dominate the working classes and to maintain social stability. Reflectionism, a theory associated with vulgar Marxism, states that the superstructure of a society mirrors its economic base and by extension, that a text reflects the society that has produced it. Given the fact that Marxism focuses on the clash or conflict between the dominant and repressed classes in any age, it also encourages art to imitate what is often termed an “objective reality”. However, contemporary Marxism is much broader in its focus and views art as simultaneously reflective and autonomous to the age in which it was produced. In short, Marxist literary criticism argues that literature reflects unproblematically the values and ideals of the class in dominance (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004: 200). As shown in the section that follows, consciousness-raising is one of the aims of Marxist literary production and criticism.

1.11.1.3 Methodology of Marxist Approaches to Literary Criticism

The above assumptions have implications for both literary production and criticism which are pertinent to the Marxist literary perspective. The Marxist critic, according to Ashcroft *et al.* (1989: 131), must show political and social commitment to the struggle of the working classes. This insistence on political commitment is reminiscent of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's position, because (a) he is concerned with the sociological implications of the use of English in terms of the control of production, distribution and readership which this implies as with any formal idea of language as the “bearer of culture” and (b) he also stresses the importance of the material conditions of the text.

The critic must be overtly and forthrightly political, partisan and polemical. The Marxist theory of dialectical materialism forbids the critic to treat literature as a source in itself, apart from the working class's needs as interpreted by the Communist Party. The critic, Davis and Schleifer (1989: 417) note, must have insight into the forces that govern consciousness and action; armed with this knowledge, the critic's main obligation is not to the texts but rather to the masses of the people whose consciousness must be raised and advanced. With this utilitarian view, the function of criticism is taken to be

continuous with that of the socialist state itself, namely, furtherance of the social revolution.

Bressler (1994: 121) maintains that a proper critique, that is, one that agrees with Marxist beliefs, begins with the acknowledgement that a text cannot exist isolated from the economic, social, political and cultural context in which it evolved. The Marxist critic must move beyond conventional literary themes such as plot, style and characterisation and must uncover the author's world and his or her worldview. The critic must explore and expose the ways in which the text reveals or conceals ideological oppression of an economically dominant bourgeois class over the poor subordinate working class. Such an ideological and political investigation should expose class conflict, with the dominant class and its accompanying ideology being imposed either consciously or unconsciously upon the proletariat. The critic should uncover, condemn and denounce anti-proletarian ideology and show how this destructive ideology entraps the working classes and oppresses them (Bressler, 1994: 122). The critic can start by showing how an author's text reflects his or her ideology through an examination of the fictional world's settings, society and characters. An investigation of the author's social class or the analysis of the history and culture of the times as reflected in the text can reveal how the author either correctly or incorrectly pictures the historical period. Rivkin and Ryan (2004: 214) argue that Shakespeare's history plays were successful because they addressed, accepted and furthered the values and ideals of monarchical English culture. Shakespeare's plays celebrate kingship, perhaps, not necessarily because he was a conservative, but because the material context of literary production places limits on what can and cannot be said or expressed at a particular historical moment.

The Marxist approach, in the words of Bressler (2004:122), seeks

to expose the dominant class, show how its ideology controls and oppresses all actions of the working class, and finally highlights those elements of society most affected by such oppression. Such an analysis, hopes the Marxist critic, will lead to action, to social change, to revolution, and to the rise of socialism.

Like Marxism, Feminism also expresses the desire to change *the status quo* or challenge the power structure in contemporary society, as indicated above. The issue at stake in feminist literary criticism is gender, as shown in the second part of this section.

1.11.2 Feminist Literary Theory

1.11.2.1 Definition

According to Bressler (1994: 103) the centre of feminism is the assertion that men, either consciously or unconsciously, have oppressed women allowing them little or no voice in the political, economic and economic issues of society. Feminist critics contend that men have suppressed the female, and defined what it means to be feminine. Men, feminists believe, have devoiced, devalued and trivialised what it means to be a woman. In effect, men have made women the insignificant “other”. Inspired by the Women’s Liberation Movement, feminism’s goal is to change this degrading view of women. Feminism intends to raise all women’s consciousness so that they realise that they are not an insignificant other, but that, instead, each woman is a valuable person possessing the same privileges and rights as every man. Women, feminist critics declare, must define themselves and assert their own voices in the arenas of politics, education, society and the arts as human beings and not second-class citizens.

Davis and Schleifer (1989: 450-453, 615) indicate that feminism addresses wider social and cultural questions, such as (a) the objectification of women or society’s prevailing emphasis on women as objects of sexual desire; (b) the advancement of women’s participation in political decision making, including all areas of public life and (c) agitation against mass media presentation of women that seems biased, stereotypical or discriminatory. From a literary point of view, the goals of feminist criticism are: (a) to resist sexism and misogyny in literature; (b) to develop and uncover a female tradition of writing in the canon of female writers such as Virginia Woolf, Elanie Showalter and Alice Walker; (c) to rediscover old texts written by women, including lesbian or gay writings; (d) to increase awareness of the sexual politics of language and style through discourse analysis; (e) to interpret the symbolism of women’s writing so that it will not be lost or ignored by the male point of view, and (f) to analyse women writers and their writings gynocentrically or from a female perspective using Showalter’s model of gynocriticism (Bressler, 1994: 104-106).

Feminism, like Marxism is not a homogenous theory; hence Rivkin and Ryan (2004: 765) write that feminism has become “feminisms”. This view is supported by Schacht and Ewing (1998: 8) who state that there is no one feminism but rather an extensive assortment of feminisms; there are, among others, liberal feminists, radical feminists,

cultural feminists, multi-racial feminists, womanists, radical lesbian separatist feminists, black feminists, socialist feminist men and radical feminist men. The conflictual relationship amongst these “feminisms” and their adherents has also affected African writers, as shown in the next chapter. For instance, there is a conflict between liberal and radical feminists. The former are essentialists who believe in an identity with a uniquely female essence existing above and beyond cultural conditioning. They uphold the essentialist view that gender reflects a natural difference between men and women that is psychological, linguistic and biological. The radical feminists, on the other hand, believe in a departure from the way women had been made by patriarchy. Radical feminists uphold a constructionist view that gender is made by culture in history. The first and second waves of feminism are concerned with the politics of women’s authorship and the representation of women’s condition within literature. The third wave is identified with radical feminism and regards women’s literature as colonised. It considers gender as part of the deconstruction of existing relations of power and as a concrete political investment, as shown in the next section.

1.11.2.2 Assumptions of Feminist Literary Criticism

Landry and MacLean (1993: 40) assert that many societies are characterised by the domination of capitalism-plus-patriarchy; that is, a social system in which the rich, powerful male acts as the primary authority figure, central to social organisation and where fathers hold authority over women, children and property. Patriarchy implies the institution of male rule and privilege and entails female subordination. Feminism condemns patriarchy as an unjust social system that is oppressive to women. Patriarchy has manifested itself in the social, legal, political and economic organisation of a range of different cultures. Many societies are androcentric, that is, the male view is the central reference point. Feminists insist on gynecentrism, that is, the practice of placing female human beings or the feminine point view at the centre of one’s world view. The needs, desires and perceptions of women have primacy in this system, where the female view is the reference point or lens through which matters are analysed. Ideologically, gynecentrism prioritises females hierarchically as overriding focus and at the exclusion of all else, particularly stereotypical, androcentric perceptions. Similarly, McArthur (1992: 401) states that feminism considers women to be oppressed and alienated by a male-dominated society in which the use of language is anti-female.

Modern culture is subjugated by “phallogocentrism”, a neologism coined by Jacques Derrida to refer to the privileging of the masculine (phallus) in the construction of meaning. Phallogocentrism is characterised by the philosophy of determinate knowledge which is apodictic, that is, based on facts or ideas that are considered to be true from one’s perspective or another. In line with deconstruction, critics such as Derrida, Cixous and Clement believe in indeterminate knowledge. This knowledge is aporetic or based on contradictory facts or ideas called *aporia* that make it impossible to determine matters of truth with any degree of certitude. In a phallogocentric culture, language is ordered around an absolute word (*logos*) which is masculine or phallic; and the feminine is systemically denigrated, disqualified, excluded and silenced (Davis & Schleifer, 1989: 125-126).

The French feminist thinkers of the school of “*écriture féminine*” or women’s writing, for example, Catherine Clement and Helene Cixous also share Derrida’s feminist condemnation of phallogocentrism (Landry & MacLean, 1993: 69-86). The concept “*écriture féminine*” or women’s writing is a philosophy that promotes women’s experiences to the point that it strengthens their work. This concept was first used by Cixous in her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” in which she asserts that “woman must write herself,” write about women and bring women to writing. This concept places experience before language and privileges the anti-linear, cyclical writing which is often frowned upon by patriarchal society. Proponents of women’s writing deny or disparage - man or woman, culture or nature, positive or negative-, the dual, hierarchical oppositions set up by the traditional phallogocentric philosophy of determinateness. In this philosophy, death is always at work as the premise of woman’s abasement, woman who has been colonised by phallogocentric thinking. The crumbling of this way of thinking should take place through a Derridean-inspired anti-phallogocentric philosophy of indeterminateness. According to Derrida (cited in Booker, 1996: 57) women’s inferior position in society is created in and through phallogocentricism rather than existing prior to and independently of language.

Adopting Lacan’s psychoanalytical approach, Helene Cixous, (cited in Booker, 1996: 91), urges women to celebrate themselves through what she calls *jouissance*. The concept *jouissance* refers to woman’s enjoyment of her own body and female sexuality. The female body, female sexuality, female sexual pleasure and feminine *jouissance* are unrepresentable within the phallogocentric symbolic order. The female desire, what women want is repressed and misrepresented in a phallogocentric society;

hence, its expression is a vital location for destructing that control. Feminists advise that there is a need to understand semiotics or semiotic studies (Landry & MacLean, 1993: 138-141). Semiotics or semiology is the study of signs and sign processes like designation, analogy, indication, likeness, metaphor, signification, symbolism and communication. Semiology can be divided into three branches, namely, (a) semantics; (b) syntactics, and (c) pragmatics. In the same manner that the bourgeoisie has used language to promote their class interests (as Marxists have alleged), feminists also believe that men have always manipulated language to entrench patriarchy, maintain the status quo and to impose their values upon women. Literary theorists and semioticians, such as Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, advise us to use semiotic methods of analysis to reveal different levels of meaning and hidden motivation in literary texts.

Lacan and Showalter (cited in Booker, 1996: 91-96) observe that (a) gender identity is determined not by biological nature but by linguistic construct and (b) gynocritically considered, texts are not endowed with transcendental or constative meanings; rather, reading is historically and socially situated. There are people who are androgynous, that is, they display a combination of masculine and feminine characteristics in their sexual identity and lifestyle. These people do not fit clearly into the typical masculine and feminine roles of their society. Feminists state that these people are more flexible and more mentally healthy than either masculine or feminine individuals. Feminists advocate for androgynous relationships and culture; they demand relationships and culture that lack rigid gender roles wherein people are free to display characteristics or partake in activities traditionally associated with the other sex. Some feminists use the concept of androgyny to challenge stereotypical roles of women prescribed by patriarchal societies.

Radical feminism focuses on the literary practices of patriarchy as a system of power that organises society into a complex of relationships based on an assumption that male supremacy oppresses women. Radical feminism aims to challenge and overthrow patriarchy by opposing standard gender roles and oppression of women and calls for a radical re-ordering of society. They maintain that due to patriarchy, women have come to be seen as the “other” to male norm and as such have been systematically oppressed and marginalised. Like Marxists who see history as the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, feminists also see history as the struggle between oppressed women and men. Eliminating patriarchy and other

systems which perpetuate the domination of one group over another will also liberate everyone from an unjust society. Like the Marxists, they believe that the only way to deal with patriarchy and oppression of all kind is through revolution. Believing that “the personal is the political” and “sisterhood is powerful”, Nkealah (2006: 136), radical feminists are associated with the Second Wave feminism and are more than a movement of ideology and theory. They believe in and do take direct action through protests and demonstrations. Influenced by Marxism, these feminists are opposed to the triple oppression of women by virtue of their class, gender and race.

Radical feminism has been compared to Marxism in that it describes a great history of struggle between two oppressed forces. Much like the Marxist struggle between classes, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, radical feminism upholds a historical struggle between women and men. Both Marxists and radical feminists seek a total and radical change in social relations and consider themselves to be on the political left. The radical Marxist feminists regard women as reserve labour force for capitalism. Women serve the ends of capitalist domination in their roles as administrators of family consumption. Like the Marxists, feminists believe that capitalism and patriarchal ideologies ensure the socialisation of individuals according to already given stereotyped lines of sex categories and roles. To radical Marxist feminists, the reader should also be alert to the triple evils of sexism, racism and capitalism. These ideologies promote false consciousness which works to misrepresent women and their lives. Hence, Marxist-feminists detest the triple oppression of women: class, gender and race (Viehmann, 1995: 1-5). These similarities in assumption also find expression in methodological similarities, as shown in the next section.

1.11.2.3 Methodology of Feminist Approaches to Literary Criticism

As intimated above, sometimes there are overlaps and intersections between Marxist and feminist approaches to literary criticism. The feminist critics, like their Marxist counterparts, must show political and social commitment to the struggles of women. Feminist critics must begin by debunking the myth of male superiority by exposing stereotypes of women found throughout the literary canon. Women, feminist critics postulate, cannot be simply depicted and classified as either saints or whores, angels or demons, brainless housewives or eccentric spinsters. Such characterisations must be identified and challenged; such abuse of women by male authors must be

acknowledged as men have demeaned, devalued, disqualified, silenced and demoralised women (Bressler, 1994: 108).

Like the Marxists, feminist critics must be openly political, polemical and partisan because the personal is the political. Like Marxism, feminism forbids the critic to treat literature as a cause in itself apart from women's needs and aspirations as articulated by the Women's Liberation Movement. The critic, Davis and Schleifer, (1989: 204) write, must have insight into the sexual ideology in literature. Armed with this knowledge, the critic's obligation is not to the texts but rather to men and women whose consciousness must be raised and advanced. With this utilitarian view, the function of criticism is taken to be continuous with that of the feminist project itself, namely, furtherance of the social revolution in which women can establish their own society free from patriarchal interference. The feminist literary critic is a cultural revolutionary whose aim is to free the text from its ideological burden and create what Bem, (cited in Baron & Byrne, 2000: 188-195), calls cultural-psychological androgyny.

Since patriarchy is a social construction, feminist critics maintain that it can be overcome by revealing and critically analysing its manifestation in art and in real life. In literary criticism, androcentricity must be rejected. Feminist readers should understand and apply semiotics in order to uncover and reject male manipulations of language to perpetuate patriarchy. Feminist critics plead for a reorientation in order to understand literature from a female viewpoint. This reorientation takes the form of self-consciously appreciating literature from the specific viewpoint of a woman (Bressler, 1994: 108). The pre-eminence of women should be seen as absolute in broader social contexts, interpersonally, culturally, historically and politically. In their writing and criticism, women must celebrate and cherish their bodies and sexuality while revealing repression as well as misrepresentation of female sexuality and women as human beings. The male-dominated media erroneously blame the Women's Liberation Movement for problems faced by women. This backlash must be resisted at all costs. Feminists must challenge and dismiss such media reports as illusory, constructed by the media without reliable evidence.

Bressler (1994: 108-109) states that feminist critics suggest the re-reading of canonised works of male authors from a woman's point of view. Such an analysis is possible through gynocriticism, that is, a uniquely female consciousness based on female experience rather than the traditional male theories of reading, writing and

critiquing. Gynocriticism, as a female model of literary analysis, offers four areas of investigation, namely, (a) images of the female body as represented in a text; (b) female language; (c) the female psyche and its relationship to the writing process, and (d) analysis of cultural forces such as the importance and value of women's roles in a given society. Lastly, feminists assert that female authors must be republished and reevaluated.

1.12 Ethical Considerations

According to Goodwin (1995: 27-52), ethical considerations do not only apply to research involving human or animal subjects. The code of ethics in research also applies to scientific fraud which is caused by the lack of academic honesty (Goodwin, 1995: 49-50, 380-381). Scientific fraud and academic dishonesty centre on the falsification of data and plagiarism. In this study, deliberate falsification of data and plagiarism is avoided. Any failure to provide full, proper citations should be attributed to inadvertent human error.

1.13 Structure of the Study

For the structure of this study, the researcher is greatly indebted to Mogoboya's PhD thesis, *African Identity in Es'kia Mphahlele's Autobiographical and Fictional Novels: A Literary Investigation* (Mogoboya, 2011). The study, following the adaptation of Mogoboya's work, consists of five Chapters with headings, as outlined below:

Chapter 1: General orientation of the study

This chapter contains the general orientation of the study, the rationale of the study, the purpose of the study, the literature review, the theoretical approach, the problem statement, ethical considerations, the significance of the study, the research design and methodology.

Chapter 2: The concept of "commitment" in African Literature

This chapter treats the concept of commitment in African literature together with the selected authors' aesthetics.

Chapter 3: Oppression of women in Sembene Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood*

In this chapter, a close textual analysis of Sembene Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* is conducted.

Chapter 4: Oppression of women in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*

In this chapter, a close textual analysis of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* is conducted.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This last chapter contains the conclusion and recommendations.

1.14 Significance of the Study

This research project sheds light on the entrenchment and persistence of neo-colonial racist, capitalist and patriarchal oppression of African women. The integrated Marxist-feminist appreciation of literary text clarifies the dynamics of indigenous African patriarchy's collaboration with colonial patriarchy, racism and capitalism. The eclectic application of Marxist, sociological and psycho-analytical tenets in literary appreciation is, in itself, a celebration of the development and capacity of feminism to borrow from different fields of knowledge in order to advance the all-important feminist project. This approach uncovers the subtle complicity of African males in the alienation, reification and commodification of the poor and the vulnerable, particularly women and the girl child.

This study hopes to achieve consciousness-raising on the part of both men and women. The patriarchal African policy-makers might realise the counter-productive reality that African women are oppressed in three ways; that is, they are oppressed as women, oppressed as blacks and oppressed as workers. This study may benefit academics, community leaders and those interested in women's human rights. Psychologically considered, this study should provide a launching pad for the further research on what Corey (2005: 339) calls feminist therapy through literary analysis. This may also assist women in challenging societal gender role stereotypes and men in accepting their vulnerabilities and sexist tendencies.

1.15 Conclusion

There are areas of overlaps and intersections between Marxist and feminist literary theories, as indicated above. Despite the fact that Marxism is pre-occupied with class and feminism with gender, these literary theories have common denominators namely, (a) political and social commitment to the struggles of the proletariat and women; (b) the need to effect conscientisation and consciousness-raising; (c) changing and challenging the status quo, and (d) the creation of alternative societies free from class, gender and racial oppression. Marxist and feminist literary theorists agree that texts do not have transcendental, eternally valid and universal meanings since writing and reading are historically and socially situated. Lastly, these classical Western literary theories have been appropriated by some post-colonial African writers, as shown in Chapter 2. In the next chapter, the role of the African writer, with special emphasis on the concept of “commitment” is discussed.

CHAPTER 2

THE CONCEPT OF “COMMITMENT” IN AFRICAN LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the concept of commitment in post-colonial African writings. Given the fact that this is, fundamentally, a feminist study, the discussion of the concept of commitment focuses on (a) points of agreement among African writers; (b) the categorisation of African women writers; (c) the aesthetics of Sembene Ousmane and Tsitsi Dangarembga and how their aesthetics is reflected in their literary works. First, a brief discussion of commitment amongst African male writers.

2.2 African Male Writers and the Concept of “Commitment”

The concept of commitment in Africa literature is so broad and fraught with controversies and contradictions that do not fall within the scope and nature of this research. This impression is confirmed by several literary scholars, critics and African writers themselves. Abodunrin (2008: 251) argues that some African writers and critics suffer from an overdose of possessive exclusivity; Mogoboya (2011:53) remarks that African writers are faced with an “identity crisis”, and lastly, there are examples of acrimoniously polemical exchanges amongst African writers themselves. Ngugi, the radical Marxist ideologue who, in his “decolonisation of the mind” polemic rejects the use of English, sarcastically teases Achebe as the so-called “Achebe-cum-teacher” who, in his works, has left many questions unanswered (Cook & Okinempke, 1997: 197). The Bolekaja critics or troika of Chinweizua, Jemie and Madubuike accuse Soyinka and other African writers of divorcing the African tradition in his use of imported imagery and inaccessible diction (Abodunrin, 2008:251). Soyinka, in self-defence, accuses the troika of “leftocracy” and “tigritude”. It is not surprising that the always moderate, pragmatic and penetrative Achebe, (cited in Abodunrin, 2008: 38), justifiably regrets the self-debasement “inherent in the recrimination between capitalist and communist aesthetics in our time.”

The above mutual “recriminations” amongst African writers and critics are both self-defeatist and regrettable. The Marxist ideologues and African traditional purists and their insinuations that African literary giants such as Achebe and Soyinka are less committed, reveal their incapacity to appreciate the truth that the historical facts of colonialism inevitably lead to syncreticity, appropriation and the hybridisation of culture

(Abodunrin; 2008: 251). Despite their mutual accusations and counter-accusations, these African writers believe in the concept of commitment.

The concept of “commitment”, in African literary expressions, means the adoption of what Simatei (2005: 85) calls liberation aesthetics and Afrocentricity. Many African writers, including Achebe, Soyinka, the Marxism-inspired Ngugi and Ousmane, agree with Asante (1992: 10) that the African writer is the member and voice of the African people who have suffered at the hands of colonialists and imperialists. As African writers whose people have suffered multiple oppressions, they should adopt Afrocentricity, a cultural configuration characterised by the following aspects: (a) a celebration of African centeredness and agency and artistic commitment that eliminate pejoratives about Africans or other people and (b) a defence of African cultural elements as historically valid in the context of art, music and literature. The African writer should adopt an Afrocentric aesthetic, that is, Afrocentric awareness and consciousness toward victory and deliverance from European cultural, spiritual and literary oppression and domination (Ibid.). As indicated in the Chapter 1, this control and domination lead to the deliberate destruction of African people’s culture (their dances, art, religion, geography, history, education, orature and language) and the superimposition on the colonised people of the European colonisers’ culture and language (Cook & Okenimpke, 1997: 216).

Despite their ideological and religious differences, African writers such as Es’kia Mphahlele, Wole Soyinka and Ayi Kwei Armah, agree with Achebe that the decolonisation of African culture means that literature should be didactic, regenerate, revitalise and reclaim the African heritage, culture and values. Commenting on the educative role of the African writer, Achebe argues that:

The writer cannot be excused from the task of re-education and re-generation that must be done. In fact, he should march right in front; for he is after all, as Ezekiel Mphahlele says in his *African Image*, the sensitive point in his community...Perhaps what I write is applied art... the writer must teach readers that their past with its imperfections was not one night of savagery from which the first European acting on God’s behalf delivered them (cited in Ashcroft et al. 1989: 125:126).

As a committed African writer, Soyinka also maintains that one of the social functions of literature is the visionary reconstruction of the past for purposes of social direction (Owomoyela, 1993: 115). Es’kia Mphahlele, in his *African Image*, (cited in Mogoboya, 2011: 55) also agrees that African writers should be “a sensitive point” in their communities, committed to changing and challenging the status quo. What

distinguishes writers such as Achebe, Soyinka and Mphahlele from Ngugi's radical, Marxism-inspired rejection of English is their capacity to adopt and practise what Abodunrin (2008: 38) calls the poetics of transgression using the coloniser's language. Unlike Ngugi, the above authors, realising the multiplicity of languages on the African continent, see European languages like English and French, as offering Africans the communal languages with which to present a nationalistic front against white oppression (Owomoyela, 1993: 356). These authors have opted to borrow from alien cultures and languages in order to "write back" to the enemy and disarm it. They rightly agree that if Africans are to free themselves from foreign domination, they must adopt the eclectic approach and acknowledge the importance of positive contribution from the oppressors' culture and other cultures. After all, the very act of writing is a "political act" for the African writers (Abodunrin, 2008: 204). Given the feminist bent of this study, the reader is referred to Rafapa (2006: 1- 377) and Mogoboya (2004: 1 -66; 2011: 1- 209) for more extensive, insightful information on the pioneers of African literature such as Ngugi and Mphahlele.

Majority of African women writers such as Buchi Emecheta, Ellen Kuzwayo and Mariama Ba have also appropriated European languages in pursuit of their feminist agenda. These African women writers have written fictionalised autobiographies, which articulate their lived experiences, aspirations and frustrations under the yoke of the triple oppression of class, gender and race. Similarly, their very act of writing in European languages in male-dominated societies is a political-feminist act or statement, as it is argued in the next section.

2.3 African Women Writers and the Concept of "Commitment"

The above discussion of commitment in African literature is dominated by male voices. This is not surprising, given the socio-politico-cultural context in which the African women writers' voices were silenced and repressed. This preponderance of what Harrow (1994:11) calls the sons and "fathers" of African literature over the daughters and "mothers" of African literature is suggestive of the collusion between colonial-capitalist patriarchy and indigenous African patriarchy, both in real life and in literature. The truth is, gifted and committed women writers such as Zaynab Alkali of Nigeria, Ellen Kuzwayo of South African, Mariama Ba of Senegal, Tsitsi Dangarembga of Zimbabwe, Nawal El Saadawi and Alifa Rifaat of Egypt, have written in a political-cultural climate affected by contemporaneous colonialism and compradorial indigenous African patriarchy. It is, therefore, not surprising that these African women

writers' aesthetics and literary works reveal what Nkealah (2006: 137) calls "political and moral commitment to the cause of women's rights or gender equality".

The development pattern of African women writers' commitment to the gender project is, albeit with slightly different paradigms, similar to that of women writers in Western Europe and America. Alexander (1989: 1-2), in her background to contemporary Western feminism, indicates that the two world wars had an effect on sexist stereotypical perceptions in that women efficiently and effectively contributed to European national war effort. Their capacity to do the so-called "men's" work could no longer be denied or questioned in the national interest, so much so that childcare facilities were introduced. Typical of patriarchal hypocrisy, the return of peace became the excuse for a return to "normality" and women were forced to go back to the kitchen in order to make room for men in the workplace. Another example of patriarchy in America is that, women who had participated in the black Americans' civil rights struggle and anti-Vietnam War campaigns were "bitterly disillusioned by the realisation that the democratic instincts of their male colleagues did not extend to accepting the case for women's equal rights" (*Ibid.* 2). The women's discovery of this male blindness to reason and justice has contributed to the upsurge of women's liberation movement and feminist writing. Similarly, despite African women's participation in and contribution to the anti-colonial liberation struggle, they continue to suffer the collaborationist triple oppression of race, gender and class, both in literature and in real life. This has contributed to the upsurge of feminism and the late emergence of politically and socially committed African women writers and activists.

The African women writers' social and political commitment to the feminist project is vividly expressed through interviews. In a book aptly titled *In their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk*, James (1990: 1) offers an insightful discussion of African women writers' aesthetics in the light of the two major facts of their lives, (a) being born an African and (b) being born a woman. As shown in the next section, African women writers can be divided into two categories, namely the radical Marxist feminists and the liberal or conservative feminists; first, the radical African women feminists.

2.3.1 The Radical Marxist Feminists

In her article "The Female Writer and her Commitment", (cited in James, 1990: 14), the articulate Marxism-inspired Nigerian writer, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, asserts that the female African writer should be committed in three ways: as a writer, as a woman and as a Third World person. In her aesthetics, Ogundipe-Leslie is preoccupied with (a) the

development of Africa and (b) the condition of the woman in Africa (*Ibid.* 65). In her own words:

The male-dominated society reacts in the usual sexist fashion by denying that there is any oppression of women in Africa; glorifying an unknown pre-colonial past where our African mothers were totally happy; accusing conscious women activists of being victims of western ideas and copycats of white women; claiming that “the family” is more important than the fate of the individual woman; brushing aside women’s concerns with the hypocrisy that national “development” is a greater priority now than women’s liberation; asserting that women anyhow do not need to be liberated because they have never been in bondage. So you have a compounding of historical and sociological falsification, all to the end of frightening women into quietude. The most vocal and courageous who continue to talk and act socially and politically are stigmatised (Ogundipe-Leslie, in James, 1990: 67-68).

As an African Marxist-socialist feminist, Ogundipe-Leslie is also involved in “consciousness-raising and feminist research and activism” (*Ibid.* 66).

In an interview (cited in James, 1990: 92-101), the Kenyan Marxist woman writer, Micere Githae Mugo, is concerned with the fate of Africa since independence and uses her writing as a revolutionary weapon. Githae Mugo is a close colleague of Ngugi’s, co-author of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and an admirer of Ousmane because of their similar ideological affiliation. In her own words, Githae Mugo says:

I have grown a lot in terms of ideological orientation and my complete commitment to the transition of our African societies, and the so-called Third World, from capitalism to socialism. The role of the progressive, who has aligned herself with the suffering majority, is to create a consciousness by the kind of poems, novels and drama she writes; to ensure that our people see themselves in the pages of these books. A writer has to develop a special sensitivity and a specified ideological position, in order to be able to show people in which direction the imagination is going... By her class position, the African woman occupies the lowest rung of the ladder. But on top of that, most of the women in Africa have grown under patriarchy, in which the male principle is promoted and the female principle is repressed. So we are talking about a continent where women face at least two levels of oppression (James, 1990:93-98).

Githae Mugo’s role as a writer is to “conscientise” her people, to encourage them, especially women and children, to struggle through what she calls the “theatre of consciousness-raising” (*Ibid.*100).

Another radical, revolutionary Marxist African woman writer, who raises the feminist flag within a patriarchal fundamentalist Muslim culture, is the Egyptian Nawal El Saadawi. According to Nkealah (2009: 30), El Saadawi emerges as a revolutionary

because she advocates a radical transformation of the social order, so much so that women can choose to break away from men once their individuality is threatened. Her writings tackle topics such as discriminatory family laws, prostitution and female genital mutilation (FGM). Her literary works and real-life activism focus on the intersecting forms of oppression namely, class, patriarchy and colonialism. In an interview conducted by Anna Louie Sussman (2011: <http://www.thenation>), El Saadawi argues that women's class, patriarchal and colonial oppression cannot be taken by words or articles alone:

I don't think that people in power can be convinced by words or articles. They will never give it (power) up by choice. Even a husband in the house, no-power has to be taken with power...within a household, the individual woman must have power. It is not easy-it means political rights, economic independence, knowledge (Sussman, 2011:<http://www.thenation>).

El Saadawi laughingly and shamelessly announces that “that is why I am proud to say I have divorced three husbands”, especially when they insisted that she chooses between “marriage and writing” (ibid.). El Saadawi, perhaps more than any other African woman writer, has paid dearly for her vociferous radical Marxist feminist convictions; she has been imprisoned several times, expelled from universities, almost assassinated and exiled from Egypt. Her well-published suffering under the yoke of capitalism and Muslim fundamentalism in collaboration with indigenous African patriarchy is, perhaps, the cause of some African women writers' refusal to be identified with radical Marxist feminism, as shown in the next section.

2.3.2 Liberal or Conservative Feminists

Like their male counterparts, African women writers have different religious and ideological orientations; hence, we have what Nkealah (2009: 30) calls liberal or conservative feminists. The information gleaned from their biographies and interviews suggests that their feminist agenda is tempered with or moderated by strong religious-capitalist orientations or the fear factor. Compared to the radical Marxist African women feminists discussed above, women writers such as Mariama Ba of Senegal, Ama Ata Aidoo of Ghana, Alifa Rifaat of Egypt, Miriam Tlali of South Africa and the Nigerian writers Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa and Zaynab Alkali, fall under the liberal or conservative camp. These African women writers have embraced nego-feminism or African womanism, as described above. What these writers advocate is not a radical, revolutionary eradication of culture, but its modification and adaptation to international human rights standards which would liberate, permit and empower women to function

freely within a limitless space, without trespassing on forbidden enclaves, such as lesbianism and prostitution (Nkealah , 2006:139).

Unlike the radical revolutionary Marxist feminists, these writers advocate for meaningful union between men and women. To quote few examples, Mariam Ba encourages dialogue between men and women and separation only when the relationship is irredeemable; Alkali recommends partnership between men and women in both the good and the bad times; Rifaat exposes the Muslim oppression of women without rebelling against Islamic teachings and argues that mutually satisfying consummation of marriage brings the couple closer to Allah. These women's appeal for mutually enriching men-women relationships is what Nkealah (2009: 29) calls the 'Rifaatian' approach to gender politics. These writers' liberal feminism can be illustrated with hand-picked examples. Buchi Emecheta was asked in an interview with Adeola James: "What is the source of this energy and inspiration?" Her response was: "I am very religious... I think this has helped me a lot spiritually because whenever I am going to do a chapter I commit to God... to help me treat it responsibly" (James,1990: 43). Similarly, Flora Nwapa derives strength and inspiration "from God" who gives her the physical strength and opportunities that she has (*Ibid.* 116). Ama Ata Aidoo was asked; "can one read sexual warfare into your own writings?" Her response was: "I don't believe in sexual warfare and I don't think we are here to wage war against one another at all" (James, 1990: 18).

Despite their religious and ideological differences, the majority of African women writers embrace Ogunjipe-Leslie's aesthetics; they agree with her that an African woman writer should be committed in three ways: as a woman, as a writer and as an African or Third World person (*Ibid.* 40). These writers agree that (a) the African female writer should play a socially educative role and (b) the African female writer has a moral prerogative to point the way to others and educate the spirit (*Ibid.*70). These writers support what one might call the Afrocentric aesthetics; that is, the aesthetics of feminism from an Afrocentric perspective. This impression is best illustrated through a brief discussion of their views and opinions. For example, Buchi Emecheta was asked in an interview with Joyce Boss: "What can we, as your readers, look forward to from you in the future?" Her response was: "I will always be using Africa as my base and seeing everything through the eyes of women" (Boss, 1987: escholarship.org/uc/item). She vows to write in order to reach, educate and liberate women from the situation of powerlessness without inciting them to violence. In her own words, Buchi

Emecheta argues that “I don’t think killing is quite right. Once a person is born, he or she has the same rights that I do” (*Ibid.* 97).

Majority of African women writers admire and acknowledge the “fathers” of African literature as their role models and inspiration. Notwithstanding this, these women writers have reservations about the literary depiction of female characters and the frustrations women writers have to contend with. Flora Nwapa, the Nigerian who has the honour of being a pioneer as the first African woman writer to publish a novel, is representative of the majority of female writers in her admission that “Achebe has inspired all of us” (James, 1990: 116). She bemoans the fact that African women suffer multiple oppressions; as an African woman, “you are oppressed at home; you are oppressed at work. Your husband oppresses you, your employer oppresses you and then your society piles upon you double, if not treble suffering” (James, 1990: 114).

Flora Nwapa feels heartened by Emecheta who, despite great setbacks, has continued to write. When Emecheta started to write, her husband burnt her manuscript; he insinuated that she could not write because “she was just a second class citizen in England” (*Ibid.*116). This act of patriarchal repression of her creativity was an inspiration for her novel, *Second Class Citizen*. To women such as Emecheta, therefore, literature is just not a piece of writing which only entertains; it can also be cathartic. As Ogundokun (2014: 72) puts it, literature can also perform other functions such as teaching moral lessons and healing the souls of men, women and children.

Rebecca Njau, the Kenyan writer, also insists that “African literature must communicate. Art for art’s sake is a luxury a country like us can hardly afford”. (James, 1990: 106). She also takes issue with the sexist, stereotypical depiction of women in some male writers’ works; for instance, women are seen as most concerned about beauty and dresses or wallowing in a brothel. (*Ibid.*107). Asenath Odaga, another Kenyan woman writer, is also concerned about certain kinds of images of African people, especially images of women (*Ibid.*127) in both Western and African literary works. When Odaga was asked in an interview with Adeola James: “Do you see any differences in the ways African male and female writers handle theme, character and situation in their writings?” Her response was: “The male has always been dominant in Africa; this is their world, the society is theirs. What I do not like is the way men writers handle female characters in their books, in a way that makes them stupid or lazy or sensual. Women are depicted far worse than men. They are either prostitutes...are shown as being over-sexed and perverted” (James, 1990: 129-133).

Besides personal constraints these writers have to overcome, African women writers have to contend with public cultural, political and economic impediments. Notwithstanding these writers' admiration of the "fathers" of African literature such as Achebe, Ngugi and Soyinka, they have to contend with the politics of publishing and lack of exposure. For example, Ama Ata Aidoo was asked in an interview with Adeola James: "Why is it that in the field of literature as in other fields, the African woman's voice is muted, if not completely disregarded?" Her response was:

The question of the woman writer's voice being muted has to do with the position of women in society generally. Women writers are just receiving the writer's version of the general neglect and disregard that woman in the larger society receive...You know that the assessment of a writer's work is in the hands of critics and it is the critics who put people on the pedestals or sweep them under the carpet, or put them in a cupboard, lock the door and throw the key away. I feel that, wittingly or unwittingly, people may be doing this to African women writers; literally locking us out, because either they don't care or they actively hate us (James, 1990: 11-12).

Besides lack of exposure and failure to prescribe African women's writings in schools and colleges, these writers encounter publishing problems. For example, the Kenyan aspirant writer, Joyce Ochieng, was asked in an interview with Adeola James: "You know that there are more men writers in Africa than women. Have you ever wondered why this is so?" Her response was: "I know the reason. Isn't the main reason that the men are the ones in publishing? If you go to someone's office today and he wants to date you before he looks at your manuscript, you feel frustrated. This won't be the case with male writers" (James, 1990: 121). Even the seasoned women writers such as Buchi Emecheta and Ama Ata Aidoo have, in their early writing careers, complained of indifference, disregard, neglect, head-nodding, censorship and exploitation by publishers; so much so that they have mooted the possibility of establishing their own publishing houses and the Association of African Women Writers (James, 1990: 23-26).

In spite of the above constraints, majority of African women writers continue to write in the colonial languages such as English and French. Their preference for colonial languages over their African vernaculars is reminiscent of the language debate amongst the "fathers" of African literature, as discussed earlier. The reasons some of these women authors choose colonial languages are reflected in their interviews. For example, Ama Ata Aidoo argues that she has "a little exception to the use of vernacular"; she prefers "to write in English in order to reach a wider audience" and "to communicate with other people" (James, 1990: 10). Although her home language is

Gikuyu, Rebecca Njau chooses to write in “clear”, “simple” English in order “to reach a bigger audience” (*Ibid*). Like their male counterparts, some African women writers use both English and vernacular translations; for instance, Asenath Odaga says “I have not neglected people from my group who do not speak English because I also write in Luo (*Ibid*.125). Although many of her works were written in Arabic, El Saadawi’s works have been translated into European languages in order to achieve what she calls “glocal” sisterhood solidarity: “I always say we need global and local solidarity - what we call “glocal” (Sussman, 2011:<http://www.thenation>).

The remarkable exception to the above trend is the Tanzanian woman playwright, Penina Muhando, who writes only in Kiswahili in order to expose the political leaders’ hypocrisy and lip-service to the principle of *Ujamaa* or socialist principles and familyhood. Unlike Ngugi, who has translated his *Devil on the Cross* as well as *Wizard of the Crow* from Gikuyu to English in order to reach a wider audience, Muhando has paid the price for her decision as she suffers from the inevitable isolation and restriction in readership (James, 1990: 74-80). All in all, the majority of African women writers have succeeded in their artistic credo: the appropriation of the European languages to bear the burden of their African experience and to foster the spirit of sisterhood among women. By writing their own stories, their lived experiences and gendered real-life experiences, these African women have succeeded in challenging what Nkealah (2006:28) calls “the culture of silence” imposed on them by African patriarchy in collaboration with colonial patriarchy. Notwithstanding the odds stacked against them, these women’s undoubted capacity to write is a political-feminist statement intended to subvert the established, misogynistic, stereotypical norms within many African societies: “the very act of writing in itself challenges the patriarchal idea ‘that the order of language is a masculine order dominated by the phallus’ and therefore, ‘those who do not possess the phallus- women- remain marginal to language” (Nkealah, 2009:30).

Armed with what Emecheta calls the “Big E-Education”, (Boss,1987: 99), these women have effectively used the barrel of the pen as a weapon for “writing back” to both the empire and compradorial African patriarchy. The next section deals with the selected authors who, in their unique, different aesthetics and literary productions, have also contributed to the Afrogynocentric feminist project.

2.4 Sembene Ousmane's Aesthetics

Ousmane's artistic reconstruction of the 1947 strike indicates his historical realism. He asserts the artist's right to comment on history and claims an obligation to present the truth omitted by official historical records. According to Gadjigo *et al.*, (cited in Jones, 2000: 119), Ousmane believes that "the artist is here to reveal a certain number of historical facts that others would like to keep hidden ... Wolof society has always had people whose role it was to give voice, bring back to memory and project towards something".

Ousmane equates himself to the revered African griot whose role included (a) witnessing and recoding events; (b) predicting the future; (c) teaching; (d) guiding, and (e) inspiring African villagers. "The conception of my work", Ousmane declares, "is derived from this (the griot's teaching): to remain as close as possible to reality and to the people" (Case, 1993: 1). As Ousmane himself argues, the artist is a social critic. The artist should serve as a spokesperson for his or her people, expressing their fears and aspirations and serving as a reflective mirror for their experience. The artist must in many ways be the mouth and ears of his people. In the modern sense, this corresponds to the role of the griot in traditional African culture. The artist is like a mirror. His work reflects and synthesises the problems, the struggles and hopes of his people (Pfaff, cited in Gadjigo *et al.*, 1993: 14-21).

Ousmane's social and political commitment is revealed in his interviews. For example, he was asked in an interview with Reginald Woolery: "How can one help to make a new Africa?" His response was:

The artist is the expression of the whole community...the mouth for people who cannot speak, the eyes of people who cannot see, the ears of people who cannot hear, and the legs of people who cannot walk. You and me, we are nothing without our communities...No artist is somebody without the community... but, nobody gave us an order to do this, but we have to do it. Nobody will do it in your place...without my community, my society, I am nothing. I'm accountable to my community (Woolery, 1993: *bombmagazine*).

In *God's Bits of Wood* (1960), the role of the griot is assigned to old, but powerful intellectually and spiritually gifted women such as Ramatoulaye and Maimouna. This is not surprising because, as Case (1993:2) puts it, Ousmane's "major ideological principle that characterises his work is the recognition of the rights of women in society and the affirmation of their economic, social and cultural role in the dynamic

determination of the destinies of African peoples". It is evident that it is through the discourse and actions of his female characters that the author's ideological themes and messages are conveyed, as shown in the textual analysis of *God's Bits of Wood* (1960) (Chapter 3).

Given the colonial-capitalist, white male-dominated publishing houses of his times, Ousmane had publishing problems, just like the other African women writers discussed above. The publishers' rejection of his work was based on the spurious "alleged inadequacies of the style and structure which they could never specifically identify" (Case, 1993: 8). The truth is Ousmane's work was, and still is, downgraded because of his Afrocentric, revolutionary, Marxist-feminist aesthetics. His radical social commitment is revealed in his interviews. For instance, in an interview conducted by Reginald Woolery, Ousmane angrily declares:

My life is not turning around Europe. I take my decisions from Africa. African solutions can only come from Africa. I use Marxist dialectics to try and understand the walk of an individual within the community. This culture is ours but they [Europeans] try to tell us they are the reference, the source of it all. Europe has nothing to teach us. Europe knows absolutely nothing. They think that by killing us, they will kill our culture. They will try to kill us but we should also not be ashamed to kill them, without concession (Woolery, 1993: bombmagazine).

The above is one of Ousmane's many blatantly blunt, angry anti-colonial, revolutionary outbursts. Raw, unaffected by formal indoctrination since he was expelled from primary school for striking back at a French teacher who had struck him, Ousmane has formed and expressed his own Marxist-feminist ideology in a unique manner. Socio-psychoanalytically considered, perhaps, it is this incident that prematurely ended his scholastic career that has presaged his efforts to (a) reclaim from colonial and neo-colonial misrepresentation the reality of an African past and present and (b) to proclaim the dignity, power and independence of African cultural forms for the continent's future (Pfaff, cited in Gadjigo *et al.*, 1993: 14-21).

Ousmane's commitment to the Afrogynocentric, Marxist-feminist aesthetic is further revealed in his language choice, literary style and film adaptation of his works. African writers, as indicated above, have always faced the dilemma of choosing between European oppressors' languages and African languages in the production of their literary works. This is evidenced in the heated Ngugi versus Achebe controversy, the leading spirits of the two divides on the issue of languages. To Ngugi, who renounced

the English language and began writing in his native Gikuyu language, the refusal to use African languages is tantamount to compradorial lack of commitment to the decolonisation of Africa (Malan, 2009: 184). Unlike Ngugi, who outrightly rejects the English language, Achebe argues that the oppressors have taught him the language, which is a “profit” for he knows how to curse them. Through the processes of abrogation and appropriation, Achebe argues that “the new English is fashioned out; the English language is seized and made to bear the burden “of one’s own cultural experiences” (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1989:126).

Similarly, Ousmane’s commitment has confronted him with the same dilemma. According to Killam (2004: 62), Ousmane writes in French for the same reasons Chinua Achebe and others write in English. The use of French is chosen for a practical purpose; for instance, the multiplicity of languages in Senegal, to reach the widest possible audience, including the colonial oppressors themselves. Ousmane’s introduction of the oral tradition, local idioms and many characters in *God’s Bits of Wood* (1960) is not symptomatic of stylistic “inadequacies”, as some of his colonial imperialist detractors have alleged; in fact, this is a very deliberate flouting of received Eurocentric notions of formal elegance and characterisation.

In order to conscientise the exploited masses, including women and children, Ousmane has opted for (a) the translation of his work to native Wolof; (b) the usage of simple, accessible language and (c) the film adaptation of his works such as *God’s Bits of Wood*, *Xala* and *Ceddo*. In his words, Ousmane uses his films and writings “to give voice to the inner screams” of his people (Bahri, 2013: [http:// www. English.evory.edu.html](http://www.English.evory.edu.html)). Ousmane is rightly honoured as “the father of African film” whose pioneer writings and films have contributed to the consciousness-raising that strives for the establishment of non-sexism, equity and justice in African societies (*Ibid.*).

In the light of the above exposition of Ousmane’s aesthetics, one finds it difficult to accept some critics’ misinterpretation and condemnation of his work as stylistically inadequate and philosophically agnostic; for instance, in his analysis of *God’s Bits of Wood* (1960), Killam (2004: 64) praises Bakayoko, the union leader as “a charismatic, mythic figure, an epic hero.” Killam’s conclusion that it is Bakayoko’s impassioned speeches “that lead to the French authorities’ collapse and agreeing to all of the

strikers' demands" is, in the researcher's opinion, a misreading and misinterpretation that is contrary to the letter and spirit of Ousmane's Marxist-feminist aesthetics.

As argued in Chapter 3, a discerning, close textual analysis of Ousmane's novel reveals the opposite of Killam's conclusions. In keeping with the letter and spirit of his aesthetics, ideology, and philosophy, Ousmane's novel reveals (a) an all-men African leadership without vision, unity and clarity of purpose; (b) the African elite's collaboration with colonial-capitalist patriarchy; (c) African males' rampant materialism and vain-gloriousness; (d) African males' religious bigotry and hypocrisy; (e) African males' failure to appreciate the fact that women and children's rights are human rights, and (f) African males' incapacity to recognise the indispensability of women and children in the decolonisation, reconstruction and development of Africa. The above impressions are confirmed by Bakayoko's attitude towards his wife and the omniscient narrator's words that "the strike has been a training school" and the women's march had "altered and matured him" (238).

As if to dispel the erroneous association of African humanist socialism with agnosticism, Ousmane respectfully depicts Old Fa Keita, an old, devout Muslim leader and practitioner who maintains his faith while in prison and prays for his own racist torturers. Jones (2008: 5) correctly points out that it is not the Muslim religion, but morally corrupt religious leaders that have inspired Ousmane's contempt for these holier-than-thou religious bigots and charlatans. Ousmane's satirical lambast is aimed at the African compradorial defectors who have entered into a pact with hypocritical colonialists in the oppression of their own people, particularly women and children.

As indicated in Chapter 3, Ousmane's writings are a reflection of his radical Marxist-feminist aesthetics. In *God's Bits of Wood* (1960) Ousmane uses his "Marxist dialectics" to express the indivisibility of race, class and gender oppression of women and children. This view is supported by Ousmane's ideological ally and friend, Ngugi, who asserts that "there is no way you can isolate any sensitivity in today's world which has not been affected by the interplay of race, class and gender" (Gadjigo *et al.*, 1993: 64). Given their close relationship, Ngugi feels confident and best qualified to review Ousmane's literary works:

If you take the 400-500 years of imperialist domination... the gender question was also very much central to that. So there is no way to ignore it (the gender question), because it is impossible to ignore the interplay of those three:

race, class, and gender. And in this case they are so close to Sembene Ousmane's work, whether you are talking *God's Bits of Wood*, or *The Last of the Empire*, what is interesting is the way the various conflicts among the various characters are very much rooted in those issues of class, race and gender (Gadjigo *et al.*, 1993: 64).

Thus, Ousmane exposes the "inner screams" and "suffering" of African women who are prematurely aged because they are piled with children, abandoned and exploited by their own African menfolk in cahoots with colonial racists and sexists. Ousmane's faithfulness to his aesthetics is revealed in his creation of powerful, politically conscious women such as Penda and Ramatoulaye who have learnt to say "no" to oppression. His work is intended to achieve consciousness-raising and to create a "new breed" of men and women who will, side by side, contribute to Africa's decolonisation, reconciliation and development. His commitment to the anti-hegemonic discourse, to reclaim and proclaim Africa's cultural dignity and power is revealed in the female characters' demand for: (a) the dismantling of the collaborationist colonial-patriarchal regime; (b) the destruction of class, gender and racial oppression; (c) the right to self-determination and empowerment; (d) the recognition of their sexuality and reproductive rights; (e) acceptance of their right to personal and public decision-making; (f) recognition of their cultural art forms and indigenous languages; (g) acknowledgement of their right to mutual love, respect, dignity and support from their husbands and (h) the inauguration of a free, egalitarian and humanitarian dispensation. The depiction of these women's heroic struggles is highlighted through contrast with male characters' collaborationist internecine bickering and power struggles for positions, possessions and prostitutes. It should be emphasised that Ousmane has lived his life as an activist fighting for the above mentioned women's rights and freedoms.

To conclude, the most important message or lesson of Ousmane's literary works is insightfully articulated by Case (1993: 10):

It is only through the positive transformation of gender relations, the acknowledgement and respect of the human rights of women, their affirmation of and seizing of their economic and social rights, that meaningful, revolutionary change will be engendered in society.

Ousmane's commitment to the feminist project, as revealed in his ideological convictions, literary canon and real-life activism will, hopefully, convince anti-male feminists that: indeed, a man can commit gender-class suicide and be a feminist, both in theory and in practice. The only blemish in his conceptualisation of feminism is his

advocacy of machiavellian, the-end-justifies-the-means revolutionary violence, as argued in the final chapter of this study.

2.5 Tsitsi Dangarembga's Aesthetics

There are glaring differences between Ousmane and Dangarembga in their opposition to and treatment of woman's race, class and gender oppression. Perhaps this can be attributable to their differences in (a) gender; (b) educational qualifications; (c) class background; (d) lived experiences and (e) religious-ideological orientations. Unlike Ousmane, the Senegalese school dropout autodidact, Muslim-cum-Marxist, World War II ex-soldier from a proletarian background, the Zimbabwean Dangarembga is a well-educated Christian woman from a middle-class background. These biographical realities have, inevitable, shaped her aesthetics and literary productions. Like a Christian scholar of psychology that she is, Dangarembga refuses to be "categorised" and labelled as a committed feminist: "I really came to writing just for fun, just for pleasure, I used to read a lot and I enjoyed it and that is how I came to writing" (George & Scott, 1993: 310). Nkealah (2006: 137) must have had the likes of Dangarembga, amongst others, when she wondered "why some women refuse to be identified as feminist writers". Despite her cagey ambivalence, Dangarembga has produced works that have contributed to the Afrocentric feminist agenda. Her gradual conscientisation to the feminist agenda is reflected in her objection to the fact that "the writers in Zimbabwe were also like the character in the literature they produced, basically men at the time... the situation would not be remedied unless some women sat down and wrote something" (George & Scott, 1993: 309). In order to remedy the situation, she wrote her first novel, *Nervous Conditions* (1988). This novel is a depiction of the triple oppression of race, class and gender suffered by women and girl children in pre-independence Zimbabwe. George and Scott (1993: 1) conclude that her decision to focus on the lives of these women highlights that which is often effaced in post-colonial African literature: the representation of African women and girl children as worthy subjects of literature.

Like her sister writers and Ousmane discussed above, Dangarembga also takes issue with the misogynistic, stereotypical presentation of women and the politics of publishing. Besides the presentation of women as whores and witches, Dangarembga also protests against the depiction of women as beautiful but brainless brunettes who are always concerned with their beauty. In an interview with Christopher Joon-Hai Lee,

Dangarembga argues that there is nothing wrong with the presentation of women who are “concerned with their beauty”; but it is disconcerting when their concern is presented as “pathological or obsessive” (Lee, 1989: powermoney.org.za). In another interview with Madeleine Thien, Dangarembga reveals that *Nervous Conditions* (1988) was rejected by publishers. She bitterly reveals that when she tried to have this novel published in Zimbabwe she was “not successful because most of the publishing houses at that time had young, black men editors who would never give it respect” (Thien, 1988: brickmag.com.interview-tsitsi). Furthermore, Dangarembga was asked by Rosemary Marangoly George and Hellen Scott: “Have you confronted particular constraints that have to do with publishing?” Her response was:

Actually, I really don't like to talk about it that much because in my case, and in the case of many women in Zimbabwe it has proved almost very difficult to be published here. It seems to be very difficult for men to accept the things that women write and want to write about: and the men are the publishers. And so there is definitely gender politics at work there as well as a greater economic politics (George & Scott, 1993: 311).

After four years, her book was finally published outside Zimbabwe by the pro-feminist Women's Press in 1988. In order to tackle the “pressures they face” (Lee, 1989: powermoney.org.za.), Dangarembga, together with other women writers and filmmakers, have established structures such as the Zimbabwe Women's Word Circle and Zimbabwe Women Writers and Filmmakers Organisation. Like the other writers discussed above, Dangarembga advises women to establish their own publishing and film production houses through which they can (a) portray women in leading roles; (b) critique how women are presented, and (c) project their own voices and narratives. Like Ousmane, Dangarembga opted for the film adaptation of her works such as *Neria* and *Nervous Conditions*.

Despite her refusal to be “categorised” or labelled as a feminist, Dangarembga can be classified as a moderate, liberal feminist. She is, in many respects, the exact opposite of the radical, revolutionary Marxist-feminists such as El Saadawi and Ousmane, as discussed above. This classification is confirmed by her aesthetics, literary productions and biographical details. Dangarembga admits that she is conscious of the existence of patriarchy but, in her own words, her conceptualisation of feminism “is not as militant as [one] might find in feminisms in other parts of the world” (*Ibid.*). Both as a person and an artist, Dangarembga is a woman of moderation. When asked in an interview with Christopher J. Lee: “Has the changing political situation impacted you as an artist?”

Her response was: "I am much more aware of the responsibility one has to produce literature that brings some kind of positive spirit into the community. Everyone has their rage, but I think you have to mould it and work it until you get to something that's more positively human" (*Ibid.*). In literature, as in real life, Dangarembga's remarkable attributes are self-composure and the pacifist belief that war and violence are morally unjustified and that all disputes can be settled by peaceful means. This is confirmed by (a) her "guided, controlled" (*Ibid.*) treatment of the intertwined triple oppression of women in her literary works and (b) her capacity to share "a room of [her] own" with her children and supportive editor husband. "My husband and I have a production house", Dangarembga happily tells Lee (*Ibid.*) how, as a family, they have found solutions to their artistic constraints.

Tsitsi Dangarembga is a nego-feminist and African womanist who has successfully appropriated radical Western feminism and her medium of artistic expression. In order to fully appreciate the differences between Dangarembga's feminism, on the one hand, and the feminism of El Saadawi and Ousmane, on the other hand, one needs to remember these writers' statements discussed above. El Saadawi's women in "*Woman at Zero Point*" are ready to divorce or kill their husbands in order to "seize power"; and Ousmane's women are also free "to the point of creating separate women's communities" or "kill without conciliation". This is not the case with Dangarembga and her female characters. As an African feminist, Dangarembga is aware of the "multiple oppressions" that also affect men, so much so that she sympathises with them. This awareness means that men are equally in a "nervous condition" caused by alienation and indoctrination borne of imperial-colonial "settler culture and education" (Rooney, 2007: <https://kar.kent.ac.uk.>).

Dangarembga's conceptualisation of African feminism or womanism is:

an effort by African women to be fully involved, as equal partners [with their men], in both the struggle for the freedom and fulfilment of African people in the face of racism, colonialism, and oppression and the worldwide struggle by women against social, cultural and political marginalisation (Killan & Rowe, 2006: 96).

In her summary of the concerns of African women writers, Da Silva (2004:137), concludes that: (a) genuine African feminism recognises the necessity of a common struggle with African men in order to reconstruct Africa; (b) the feminist movement is not antagonistic to men but it challenges them to be aware of certain silent aspects of women's subjugation; (c) African feminism should recognise that there are/were some

inequalities in African societies and colonialism introduced others, and (d) African societies, past and present, should be analysed with the aim of retaining what is of value to African women and rejecting those aspects that work to their detriment.

Dangarembga's sober adaptation of Western feminism, as indicated above, is an affirmation of African women's peculiar identity, practical needs, hopes, fears and aspirations. Her sober pragmatism is also revealed in her self-confessed admiration of Achebe and his language choice. When asked to mention the writer who is "important" to her, her spontaneous answer was, "well, Chinua Achebe, of course" (Rooney, 2007: <https://kar.kent.ac.uk>). In order to fully appreciate Dangarembga's brand of feminism and decision on language, compare this spontaneous admiration for Achebe with the acrimonious, ideologically loaded Achebe-versus-Ngugi recriminations and counter-recriminations, as discussed above. Like her literary hero, Dangarembga chooses to write in English for obvious, practical reasons: (a) English allows her to reach many readers in multi-lingual Zimbabwe; (b) English facilitates mutual communication in an even more multi-lingual African continent, and (c) English allows her to reach an international audience. The advantage of using English is that it puts African feminism on the international agenda which, in turn, solicits what El Saadawi calls "glocal" support, as discussed above. This is attested by the comments made by Alice Walker, the mother of Western womanism, in her review of Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*:

It introduces quite a new voice that in its self-assurance sounds, at times, very old. [It is] as if the African sisters, mothers and cousins of antiquity were, at last beginning to reassert themselves in these perilous times and to speak. It is an expression of liberation not to be missed (George & Scott, 1993: 309).

Despite the international solidarity gained by using English, Dangarembga insists that the foreign feminist theories and the medium of expression still need "fixing, interrogating and refashioning" (*Ibid.*316). To this end, she preserves the best that is in her African language and culture such as the morality and symbolism of the oral tradition and folklores. Hence, she warns critics to guard against reading culturally inappropriate things, such as prostitution and Alice Walker's lesbianism, into her writings. Thus, Dangarembga's moderation and conservatism are revealed in her observation of what Nkealah (2006: 13) calls "forbidden [cultural] enclaves". This is in direct contrast to Ousmane's amoral, utilitarian attitude to Penda's prostitution, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Dangarembga's insistence that Western feminisms need to be fixed, interrogated and refashioned also finds expressions in her literary works. Unlike Ousmane, El Saadawi and Ngugi who advocate violent, radical opposition to women's multiple oppressions, Dangarembga resorts to the philosophy of unhu or humanism. When asked in an interview with Madeleine Thien: "Can you describe unhu?" Her response was:

This is a very interesting concept. In South Africa, Ubuntu is exactly the same kind of philosophy, which is "I am because you are" or "I am because we are". This is the kind of philosophy that used to bind villages and communities together until other forces interrupted those communities. So now I feel that this idea of "I am because you are" – meaning there is no great differences between you and me, so if you need something I can give it to you because I know you're just like me, and when I need it you will also give it to me-has been disconnected from its material, physical base because of the way the world has progressed (Thien, 1988: brickmag.com/interview-tsitsi).

Dangarembga's writings question and satirise African males' departure from this philosophical concept, particularly in their treatment of women and children.

In line with her "double consciousness" of multi oppressions, Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) exposes the collaborationist oppression of African women and children by (a) traditional indigenous African culture through domestic violence, repression, polygamy, forced loveless marriage and maternity and (b) certain practices introduced by colonialism, for example, land dispossession, the economic exploitation of women in rural areas and the systematic attempt to under-educate women and girl children (Killan & Rowe, 2006: 97). True to her moderate aesthetics, Dangarembga achieves this without resorting to the revolutionary anger and radicalism of Ousmane, El Saadawi or Ngugi. Dangarembga's reluctance to write seditious agitpropaganda which tends to undermine artistic standards, is revealed in her insistence that the writer has to guard against the beast of "rage and anger" which might lead to the "horrors of war". (Rooney, 2007: <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/>). This is best articulated in her own words:

I am aware of the impact that narratives can have on people, and very conscious that I need to guide the work so it has a positive impact. I wanted anything I wrote to have a positive effect in terms of opening up spaces for dialogue and negotiations (Rooney, 2007: <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/>).

In sync with her aesthetics, *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and its sequel, *The Book of Not* (2006), are written in the tradition of a Bildungsroman and a fictionalised autobiography with one aim in mind: to have a positive impact or and to open up spaces for dialogue and negotiations between patriarchal, colonial and racial oppressors and their victims,

particularly African women and children. In her own words, Dangarembga's writings have a strong pacifist, "anti-war message" (Rooney, 2007: <https://kar.kent.ac.uk>). This is poignantly revealed in Tambu, the protagonist who, "each time she lets herself rebel against something, she holds herself back" (Ibid.). Instead of resorting to violence like the Amazon women in Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* (1960), Tambu invokes the spirit of Ubuntu and liberation through education. In fact, Dangarembga's novels, and her heroine's capacity to write and narrate the story, are a political-feminist statement in a world where the voice of women and the girl child has always been repressed and silenced. This is confirmed by Tambu herself when, at the end of *Nervous Conditions* (1988), she says:

Quietly, unobtrusively and extremely fitfully, something in my mind began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed, bringing me to this time when I can set down this story...The story I have told here, is my own story, the story of four women whom I loved, and *our men* [own italics], this story is how it all began (208).

Despite the humiliation and degradation, Tambu and the other women have suffered at the hands of collaborationist African patriarchs, the latter are still forgivingly and generously embraced. This is in line with the writer's moderate feminism of negotiation. The magnanimity and long-suffering in the hearts of Dangarembga's women and girl children is discussed in Chapter 4.

2.6 Conclusion

Despite the religio-ideological differences amongst African writers and the concomitant recriminations, African writers agree on the following: (a) social commitment to the liberation and decolonisation of Africa; (b) the adoption of an Afrocentric liberation aesthetic; (c) the imperative to produce literary works that contribute to the reconstruction and development of Africa, and (d) the production of writings that contribute to the promotion of the human rights of African women and the girl child. In the next two chapters, the contributions of Dangarembga and Ousmane to the feminist agenda are evaluated through the textual analysis of their selected novels, *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and *God's Bits of Wood* (1960), respectively. The next chapter focuses on the textual analysis of Ousmane's novel.

CHAPTER 3

OPPRESSION OF WOMEN IN SEMBENE OUSMANE'S *GOD'S BITS OF WOOD*

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the textual analysis of Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* (1960). The textual analysis is intended to (a) explore and establish the role of African males in the entrenchment and maintenance of women's gender, class and racial oppression and (b) establish women's reaction to this triple oppression.

3.2 African Males' Collusion with Colonialism

As indicated in Chapter 1, *God's Bits of Wood* (1960) is an artistic reconstruction and re-evaluation of the 1947-1948 strike in which workers on the railway from Dakar in Senegal to Bamako in Mali withdraw their labour. At the heart of the strike is the French colonialists' preservation of benefits for whites at the expense of African workers, namely, (a) higher salaries; (b) medical and vacation benefits; (c) pensions; (d) family allowances, and (e) the recognition of African workers' unions. In order to enforce French colonial policies in Senegal, the French regional director, Dejean, and his henchmen resort to what the Marxist-feminist philosopher, Louis Althusser, calls the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) and the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) of the police and military (Booker, 1996: 82). In other words, Dejean's multi-pronged strategy to divide, rule and exploit Africans involves using institutions such as churches, the family, culture, religion and business to convince the Senegalese people and the proletarians to accept the ideology of the colonial-capitalist oppressors. Majority of male characters in this novel, wittingly or unwittingly, fall for Dejean's subtle, unscrupulous colonial machinations. Regrettably, it is the poor and the vulnerable, particularly women and children, who bear the brunt of these divisive, compradorial shenanigans, as it will be shown subsequently. Given the fact that this novel has many characters, a hand-picked sample of apposite characters representative of African male collusion with colonial patriarchy will be discussed.

3.2.1 Bakayoko, the Union and Strike Leader

Bakayoko is the leader and "soul of the strike" (188) and, if he is serious about the inclusion of women in the social, economic and political arena, he should be exemplary. He is, undoubtedly, against the racial colonial oppression of his fellow

Senegalese, but his attitude to and interaction with African women smack of implied collusion with colonial patriarchy. He is a subtle misogynist, an abuser and underminer of his fellow African women. Bakayoko, out of his hypocritical, self-serving rejection of polygamy never commits himself to a woman. Instead, he accepts Assitan as his wife. Assitan, it is noteworthy, was first married to his brother, Sadibou, who was killed in the previous strike. Bakayoko's acceptance of this Muslim custom of arranged, forced marriages and the objectification of women is an evasive, cunning self-exoneration from any commitment to Assitan and his stepdaughter, Ad'jibid'ji.

Bakayoko's abandonment of Assitan and her child by her first husband is not indicative of his commitment to women's rights and the workers' struggle. After all, he is a virtually absent, self-doubting leader who hates and suspects his own comrades. The truth is Bakayoko "marries" Assitan because he knows and exploits her ignorance and custom-induced subservience. Bakayoko is cold and uncaring to his family members. Assitan sends him a telegram, written by his comrade, Tiémeko, since she is completely illiterate. When he reads that his mother is dead and his stepdaughter is hurt during a police raid, he rejects his uncle's advice to go home because his "family needs him" (190). It is not surprising that after he had sneaked out of his uncle's house for fear of being sold out and rejecting his advice, the old man murmurs, "Sometimes I wonder if you have a heart" (87).

Bakayoko's heartless abandonment of his family runs contrary to the truth that even the most committed freedom fighters, such as Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu, have bemoaned their failure to pay their last respects to their loved ones. After all, sympathy, charity and pastoral loving and caring should begin at home. The truth is, Bakayoko refuses to go home because he will be meeting his prostitute paramour, Penda. He ignores Assitan's telegram because custom-induced frigidity, docility and repression have rendered her powerless, and he knows it. Bakayoko has pragmatically and politically convenient reasons to mourn his mother's death. Besides supporting his traumatised family, the funeral would be an effective platform for further agitation since it is the result of racist, colonial police brutality. His failure to delegate his comrades to prepare for women's arrival is indicative of a Type A personality, suffering from the anger-hostility-aggression (AHA) syndrome (Sue, Sue & Sue, 2003: 215). This behavioural pattern is counter-productive because it involves, inter alia, irritability, hostility, aggressiveness, competitiveness, constant striving for personal achievement and the cult of the individual. Hence, his condemnable, unconscious contribution to

self-defeatist internecine bickering and incapacity to love and ameliorate the suffering of his fellow African women, as it will be shown later.

Even after the strike, Bakayoko never shares the victory with Assitan. He only talks to her adopted daughter and hurries to the union office with the words “tell your mother where I have gone. You can come over later” (238). His cold attitude to and relationship with his wife are revealed in the following narratorial comment:

By the ancient rules of Africa, Assitan was a perfect wife: docile, submissive, and hard-working; she never spoke one word louder than another. She knew nothing of her husband’s activities...Her parents of course, had arranged everything, without even consulting her. She was as submissive to Ibrahim as she had been to his brother but that was his lot as a man, as a master. Her own lot as a woman was to accept things as they were and to remain silent, as she had been taught to...This wall that has always been between them was difficult to tear down. It had been built a long time ago, on the first day of the union that custom had forced on them. Months had gone by then before Bakayoko could bring himself to the accomplishment of his conjugal duties. But Assitan had been brought up according to all the ancient rules and customs. She lived on the margins of her husband’s existence: a life of work, of silence and of patience. It would have been hard to know whether Bakayoko ever felt remorse for his infidelities to her, for this man’s thoughts were secrets from the world (106, 238).

Bakayoko’s egocentric callousness and cold-heartedness towards his wife and stepdaughter are also echoed by Maimouna, the blind woman who is one of the leading spirits of women’s struggle for gender equity. Maimouna is also a victim of the so-called African freedom fighters’ patriarchy. Taking advantage of her blindness, Samba N’Doulougou, the unionist “walking newspaper”, as he is called by his comrades, impregnates Maimouna and abandons her with twins. Even when one of the twins is killed during the strike, N’Doulougou remains aloof and fails to help her support his own biological child. Worse still, Samba is neither exposed nor disciplined by Bakayoko and the union leadership for this unpardonably barbaric brutalisation of Maimouna and her child. It comes as divine retribution when he is also killed by the police. When Penda, the prostitute, persuades her that “all men are dogs” (141), Maimouna philosophically comments on the former’s licentious relationship with Bakayoko:

That man (Bakayoko) will occupy your heart, and then pass through it, leaving nothing but bitterness. He will destroy everything. The ones like Bakayoko will always be our bane. They do with us as they will... I haven’t always been blind. After I lost my sight, my ears replaced my eyes. I have learned to know what people are thinking, and to understand what is said between the words that are spoken, and I tell you this: in Bakayoko’s heart there is no room for anyone. He is blinder to his neighbour than I am (197-198).

3.2.2 Beaugosse and Intra-union Squabbles

The mutual hatred and jealousy between Bakayoko and Beaugosse, one of the strike committee leaders, is so intense that even before they meet, the streak of tribalism fuelled by colonialism, tears them apart. At the slightest mention of Bakayoko's name, Beaugosse is so consumed by the tribalistic, romantic "jealousy he [feels] towards him" (178). He tells N'Deye Touti, the educated woman involved in the love triangle, that Bakayoko "is beginning to get on my nerves" (61). To Beaugosse, the strike is mere "stupidity" because it is led and organised by a person who thinks that he is "some kind of prophet" (39). Bakayoko also confesses to one of the union leaders that Beaugosse hates him and that he [Bakayoko] "doesn't like him either" (209). When Beaugosse speaks French in one of the strike meetings, Bakayoko, out of jealous bickering over educational qualifications, tells Beaugosse to "keep your French to yourself" (188). Bakayoko, in one of his letters to the men's strike committee, warns them that "nothing is more damaging to our cause than a worker who plays at being an intellectual and patronises his own comrades" (71). Angered by Bakayoko's indirect insinuation, Beaugosse storms out of the meeting and defects to join the French colonial camp. Beaugosse is rightly condemned as the "black toubab" (37) or black Whiteman because he is completely French-fried. His complete assimilation and mental colonisation are evident in (a) his rejection of women's participation in the march; (b) his promiscuous involvement with white prostitutes in exchange for food during the strike; (c) his insistence to use French during all-African meetings; (d) his French-like "style" (35) or arrogant demeanour, and (e) his eventual defection to and promotional employment in the French railway company.

Lahbib, who is called the "brain" of the strike, is always engaged in leadership bickerings with Bakayoko and Beaugosse. He knows that the real cause of the mutual hatred between Bakayoko and Beaugosse is their romantic rivalry over the Western-educated, assimilated girl, N'deye Touti, and other prostitutes. When Penda, the prostitute-cum-leader is killed by the police, Lahbib writes to Bakayoko:

She was a brave girl. I know that you know her better than I. I don't know of anything we can do for her now, but if you should know of something I do not, tell me. And now, come home. Bakory told me once that you had no heart and sometimes I think he is right (228).

Bakayoko's reaction to bereavement is significant as it reveals his nature as (a) a man; (b) a son; (c) a husband; (d) a father and (e) a politician. His reaction to Assitan's

telegram informing him of his mother's murder and A'djibidji's assault by the police is: "We must fight for the living and not give our time to thinking of the dead" (190). With Penda's death "Bakayoko felt very much alone, and he thought about Penda. He might have made her his second wife, and now he finds himself wondering about the nature of the feelings that had drawn him to this girl" (228). In fact, Bakayoko refuses to go home in order to checkmate Beaugosse in their romantic rivalry and vendetta. This is a revelation of these men's indecisive, ambivalent attitudes towards polygamy, forced marriages, adultery and fornication. This is a revelation of these men's wishy-washy, self-serving opinions about the relationship between male and female comrades-in-arms in Africa. This is a revelation of a classic case of women and girl children being used as pawns and objects of sexual gratification by fellow African freedom fighters. It is not surprising that the French colonial-capitalist racists such as Isnard and Dejean insinuate that these polygamous African "men-children or half-savages" demand pay rises and family allowances in order to solicit more "whores and buy more wives and concubines" (165). These colonial-capitalist racists are conscious of this indigenous African patriarchy, and they manipulate it in order to divide, rule and exploit Africans, men and women alike.

These men's internecine wrangling and collusion bear testimony to the words of Armah and Fanon, (cited in Abodunrin, 2008: 107). These Western-educated African elites are working against the re-Africanisation and decolonisation of Africa in many ways which are, among others, (a) their cultural-religious self-denigration; (b) an artificial highbrow taste and (c) contempt for anything that is not Western oriented. The African elite's trivialisation of Africa's decolonisation provides a clear affirmation that:

Western education does not teach habits of solidarity with the poor. In plain words, the Western educational experience is tacitly structured to make the elite African incapable of democratic co-operation in any undertaking involving poor people. The former is trained to be a boss or a so-called leader; he makes a lousy comrade and one reason is that he also sees poverty as primitive (Abodunrin, 2008:107-108).

The hidden curriculum leads to the enslavement of the male African's mind, alienation, stereotyping and contempt toward his own people, particularly the poor, women and children. This, in turn, leads to the perpetuation and entrenchment of class, racial and gender inequalities.

3.2.3 Diara

Diara is the collaborationist ticket-collector employed in the railway industry. The railway system or train is symbolic of French colonial penetration, industrialisation and exploitation of Senegal. It is responsible for the creation of what Marxist critics call the proletarian class. This, in turn, creates the material conditions and realities, which in turn, cause the strike. The strike, in turn, creates material conditions and the consequent process of learning new coping strategies and consciousness-raising, particularly in the case of women and children. Diara, the ticket-collector, is a compradorial strike-breaker who is tried and almost killed for informing on other workers and women who support the strike. Tiémeko, Bakayoko's comrade and confidant, borrows Marxist-feminist literature from the latter in order to conduct the revolutionary strike. It is noteworthy that it is Tiémeko, the militant unionist, who first insists on the observation but not the participation of "some" few women in the trial of Diara by the workers' tribunal. Given the strike leaders' dabbling with Marxist revolutionary theories, Tiémeko revealingly admits that "the strike is like a school, for all of us" (85).

Tiémeko, who is assigned the task of dealing with, "renegades" (78), disguises as a policeman to bring Diara, his own uncle, to people's justice. Diara is accused of "dynfa"- a Bambara word which means treason or "betrayal of one's own people" (78). Diara is not just a strike-breaker; he is also on trial for what could be construed as treason against the community, including women and children. Indeed, the charges laid against him indicate the dual nature of his offence. He is both a strike-breaker and a traitor who has "gone back to work and has informed on the women who are supporting [the strike] so valiantly...and has forced them to get off trains whenever they have tried to use them. That is why I [Tiémeko,] wanted *some of the women to be here today, although there were a lot of people who didn't agree with the idea,*" [my italics], (91). It should be pointed out that "a lot of people" who reject women's participation in public political decision-making include both the patriarchal African elite and the colonial oppressors. The latter encourage indigenous African patriarchy out of the self-confessed fear of the potentially all-conquering anti-colonial pact between African men and their brave womenfolk.

Diara's treacherous, collaborationist defection is confirmed by one of the strikers:

Diara has behaved badly toward all of us... Yes, as God is my witness, he has done wrong. I am sure of that as I am that someday I will be alone in my

grave... But you, Diara, you are one of our elders; you should have guided us and helped us. Instead, you took the side of our enemies, and after you had betrayed us you spied on our women. We are not ashamed to admit that it is the women who are supporting us now, and you have betrayed them too (93).

His compradorial collusion with the French colonial oppressors is further corroborated by four women. They narrate how Diara, under the guard and protection of “toubabs” (92) or white soldiers and policeman, Diara stopped the train and kicked them out of the train “right in the middle of the bush” (92). Sira, one of Diara’s victims, justifiably condemns Diara: “I tell you, he is nothing but a slave of the toubabs! Tiémeko is right - he should be crucified in the market place!” (92). It is only through the intervention of Fa Keita, the veteran “Old One”, that Diara receives a light sentence. He is saved from “the rough form of justice” (81) or kangaroo beating which Tiémeko’s commando group had administered on the first two strike-breakers. Killing Diara, the Old Fa Keita argues, will make them “imitate the hirelings of your masters, [and] you will become like them, hirelings and barbarians” (95). Diara, the self-out collaborator and defector, has brought shame to himself and his family. Saido, who is Diara’s son, helps his exhausted deservedly mortified father. As he muses upon his father’s trial, the omniscient narrator comments: “He was conscious that, from this day forward, his father could be reviled and insulted by anyone, perhaps even beaten, and he would have no defence. And he knew that wherever he himself went, people would look at him and say: ‘Your father is a traitor’ (96).

Besides Diara, there are other compradorial African patriarchs who have entered into cahoots with French colonial racists and capitalists. There are other women who, despite the fact that they support the workers’ anti-colonial-capitalist strike, so “valiantly”, still continue to suffer under the yoke of the collaborationist indigenous African patriarchy. The “triple oppression” of Senegalese women in this novel finds expression in the thoughts, words and actions of the wealthy, philistine El Hadji Mabigue and the obsequious, sanctimonious Imam or Muslim priest, as it will be confirmed in the next section.

3.2.4 El Hadji Mabigue and the Imam

El Hadji Mabigue and the Imam’s character traits are discussed simultaneously because (a) together they form a compradorial unholy alliance against their own people and (b) they are friends because whenever there is a strike-related meeting, El Hadji accompanies the Imam, holding “an umbrella carefully above his master’s head” (214).

These two men epitomise collusion with colonial-capitalist oppression and the concomitant triple oppression of women. It is through these characters that Ousmane exposes the French colonialists' introduction and encouragement of divisive praxis such as rampant materialism, individualism, religious intolerance, misogyny and sexism. These two men are collaborators who are rewarded with positions of power, possessions and promotions. As indicated in Chapter 2, these are collaborationists who, unbeknown to themselves (a) are alienated from themselves and their own people and (b) have adopted beliefs and behavioural patterns which are anathemas to Africa's united, anti-colonial pact. The butt of their collusive shenanigans is the weak, the poor and the vulnerable, particularly women and children.

The Imam and El Hadji are compradorial partners in a nefarious, mephistophelian agenda intended to entrench and maintain the triple oppression of women and children. The Imam, like his collaborationist friend, is a tool of French imperialism. This is revealed during his effort to mediate between Ramatouloye and the police and during his strike-related speeches and sermons (Jones, 2000: 5). While El Hadji Mabigue, the vainglorious turncoat businessman, relies on the power of his purse to pull the strings, the Imam uses his pulpit to bolster capitalism, racism and plutocratic, indigenous patriarchy. His pulpit is used to entrench the exploitative colonial domination and government of the Senegalese people, by the rich colonial and African patriarchs, for the rich colonial and African patriarchs. It is not surprising that El Hadji, as a wealthy businessman, kowtows to the Imam in order to pass as a sincere, devout Muslim. He uses the Imam's religious title and affiliation as a façade to hide his own egocentric, compradorial business and political activities. El Hadji Mabigue's cold, callous egotism, as evidenced by his ill-treatment of his own sister, is discussed later.

The compradorial role played by religious leaders in the ilk of the Imam is glaringly demonstrated by the omniscient narrator in this novel:

A campaign to demoralise and undermine the unity of the strikers-and particularly of their wives-had been undertaken by the men who were their spiritual guides, the imams and priests of other sects. After the prayers and religious services all over the city, there would be a sermon whose theme was always the same: By ourselves, we are incapable of creating any sort of useful object, not even a needle; and yet you want to strike against the toubabs [whites] who have brought us all these things! It is madness! You would do better to be thanking God for having brought them among us and bettering our lives with the benefits of their civilisation and their science (206).

This self-serving self-abnegation from a bourgeois African patriarch and priest plays into the hands of the French colonialists' intention to exploit Africans under the guise of religion. Monsieur Dejean, the company director, his colleagues and family members are all obsessed with their stereotypical view of Africans as ungrateful, "savages", "half-savages" and "children" who owe their very existence to white civilisation. The sanctimonious, polygamous Imam also endorses this colonial stereotype for self-aggrandisement.

In one of his strike-related speeches at the Thiers racecourse, the Imam "repeats the theme of all his recent sermons" (216). He warns people against what he calls communist "evil influences from abroad" (216) and praises the collaborationist governor and his deputy. In order to emphasise his words, he concludes by "reading the first two verses of the *Qur'an*" (216). It is noteworthy that Ousmane simply refers to "the first two verses of the *Qur'an*" without quoting them in the novel. According to *The Holy Qur'an*, Fatiha or opening chapter, the first two verses read as follows:

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.
All Praise is due to Allah, Lord of the Universe.
The most Gracious, the most Merciful.
Owner of the Day of Judgement.
You alone do we worship, and to you alone we turn for help.
Guide us to the straight path;
The Path of those on whom you have bestowed your grace, not (the way) of those who have earned your anger, nor of those who went astray (*The Holy Qur'an*, Fatiha 1, 14-15).

The author's deliberate exclusion of these two verses is, perhaps, an ironic, sarcastic indictment on the Imam. These verses, conspicuous by their absence, are a crystal clear revelation of the Imam's spiritual hollowness, philistinism and charlatanism. In fact, he is the one who has gone "astray" because his thoughts, words and deeds are a violation of the pillars of Islam, as it will be shown below. His unconsciously collusive misapplication of the Muslim scripture is a transparent insinuation that the strikers and their wives are unbelievers or sinful infidels. This impression is confirmed by the Imam's accusatory outburst over the corpse of Houdia M'Baye. Houdia M'Baye is a victim of police brutality killed during women's strike in solidarity with Ramatouloye. Instead of performing funeral rituals and expressing his sympathetic, patriotic condolences, lo and behold, the Imam blames the women for M'baye's death! Accompanied by his accomplice, EL Hadji, the Imam breaks into an ironical eschatological fire and brimstone sermon to the poor traumatised women:

This is your work, women! You burn the homes of innocent people, and you obstruct the law-you are behaving like infidels! It is you who are responsible for the death of this mother, and you will answer for it before the Almighty. What has happened, to make you abandon your homes and your children and roam the streets like this? It is time you understand that your husbands are just the instruments of a band of infidels who are using them for their own purpose. It is the communists who are really directing this strike. God has decided that we should live side by side with the French toubabs, and the French are teaching us things we have not known and showing us how to make the things we need. It is not up to us to rebel against the will of God, even when the reasons for that will are a mystery to us (124).

Using their financial muscle and the power of the pulpit, El Hadji and the Imam, respectively, are a glaring example of the collusive interplay of class, gender and racial oppression of the poor and the vulnerable. As argued above, those who bear the brunt are always women and children.

In collaboration with the French colonialists, El Hadji and the Imam belong to the petty-bourgeois class of African co-administrators and social elite who are at the top of the economic base. In Marxist-feminist parlance, as explained by Bressler (1994: 119), they form part of the super-structure or a multitude of socio-political educational institutions and religious beliefs and values that the French colonialists use to keep the poor proletarians, women and children, in a state of ideological powerlessness and subservience. This Marxist-feminist impression is confirmed by their nefariously pro-colonial, sexist philosophies, practices and positions, as depicted in this novel.

To conclude, Sembene Ousmane's characterisation of male characters in this novel reveals compradorial men who, in the words of Case (cited in Gadjigo *et al.*, 1993: 9), are "intellectually and socially incapable of meaningful social and economic revolt" and "undertaking the struggle on behalf of the [African] women". In the next section, the women's reaction to these African men's collaboration with colonialism is examined.

3.3 Women's Reaction to Triple Oppression

The courageous women's reaction to African males' collusion with colonial-patriarchal oppression is not through the African male strike leaders' visionary leadership and encouragement. After all, "some" of the few women Tiémeko, invited to attend Diara's trial were not as self-assertive as the cream of women's leaders we find in this novel. From a Marxist-feminist- perspective, the material conditions in which these women live, inevitably and logically, lead to widespread solidarity borne of what Nkealah (2006:

136-139) calls the “spirit of sisterhood”. This argument will be supported by sampling only a few women from this battalion of committed revolutionary leaders and activists.

3.3.1 Penda

Penda is the quintessence of women’s struggle against the triple oppression of women in this novel. One cannot help agreeing which Case, (cited in Gadjigo *et al.*, 1993: 6-8) that Penda is the main protagonist of *God’s Bits of Wood* (1960). It is through Penda and her courage that the reader can appreciate the dramatic irony in Bakayoko’s words that “the time when we could be beaten by dividing us against ourselves is past” (187). The truth, as indicated above, is that these men and their comrades are divided.

The all-male union leadership is divided on the role of women in public decision-making and women’s participation in the strike. Matters come to a head when Penda establishes “the committee of women” (160) to co-ordinate the women’s march from Thiers to Dakar. Even Bakayoko, the leader of the strike, has limited, wishy-washy faith in “women’s right to be heard” (187). Penda takes him by surprise when she speaks “in the name of all women” (187). Her announcement is followed by “confused murmuring that linked astonishment and misgiving, remonstrance and protest” (187). In his heart of hearts, Bakayoko disapproves of this because “it was the first time in living memory that a woman had spoken in public in Thiers” (187). It is not surprising that her announcement is followed by “arguments” (187). During the all-male delegation’s discussion of Penda’s announcement, Bakayoko half-heartedly endorses the march, to the chagrin of his romantic rival, Beaugosse. Bakayoko, who is “speaking to Beaugosse for the first time” (188) is opposed by Beaugosse. In one of the characteristic internecine intra-elite bickering, Beaugosse retorts:

I’ve never gone to Dakar on foot, but I don’t think it is anything for women to try. Besides, there is no water there; when I left, Arione and all the other men were scouring the city for a cask or even a bottle of water which is what the women should be doing. Instead of that, they have been battling troops in the streets and starting fires (188).

Beaugosse rejection of women’s participation in the march echoes the Imam’s stereotypical opinions on the role and position of women in society, as quoted above. Consumed by the cult of the individual, the quest for personal glory, self-interest, mutual jealousy, competition for power, promotion and prostitutes, these men are implicit collaborationists with sexist, racist and colonial-capitalists oppression.

Unlike men's counter-productive, self-defeatist collusion, as indicated above, "the spirit of sisterhood" and solidarity characterise women's struggle against chauvinistic colonial exploitation, plutocratic African patriarchy and racism, courtesy of courageous women's leadership. Like the many powerful women leaders in this novel, Penda's gradual conscientisation is borne of the material conditions she finds herself in. She is a quintessential embodiment of radical Marxist-feminist philosophy, both in theory and in practice. Penda's articulation of and violent confrontation with women's triple oppression reveal her as a perfect epitome of feminist activism. In keeping with Marxist-feminist criticism, she gradually awakens to the dialectical materialism of class conflicts and contradictions in her society. The strike enables her to appreciate the superstructural ideology, social and political institutions that are used by colonial-capitalists and African patriarchs to reduce women to subservience. Unlike the men, who are always bickering and dabbling in petty politicking, Penda is conscious of the oppression of women by virtue of their race, class and gender. As it will be indicated below, she is also conscious of the intertwined, collusive nature of women's racial, class and gender oppression.

Penda is not a Western-educated woman in the mould of collaborators such as Beaugosse, El Hadji and the Imam. She is an ordinary woman who, with extraordinary, revolutionary ingenuity and creativity, subverts Dejean's agenda to use "hunger" as an ally to break the strike. Penda not only insists on the formation of the women's committee, she publicly urges men to allow their women to join the strike: "Men, you must allow your wives to come with us" (187). Penda sends a clarion call for women to join the strike and march from Theirs to Dakar because she has developed a sense of class consciousness. She is beginning to be fully conscious of the patriarchal exclusion of women from public social, political, economic and cultural decision-making. Her insistence on women's participation in the strike is suggestive of her consciousness of the collusive interrelations between a patriarchal mode of production and capitalism. In other words, she is gradually becoming aware of the collusion between colonial-capitalist patriarchy and indigenous African patriarchy.

In both her personal life and public activism, Penda's powerfulness and progressiveness are exemplified by her courageous interactions with men, irrespective of their class, creed or race. Her consciousness of women as a class and the collusive nature of multiple oppressions of women is revealed in her conviction that "men are all dogs" (141). In other words, she is conscious of the fact that African women suffer

multiple oppressions because African men have, wittingly or unwittingly, entered into cahoots with French colonial-capitalist oppressors. Her conviction that “men are all dogs” (141) is expressed as a condemnation of the impregnation and subsequent abandonment of a blind woman, Maimouna, by one of the African union leaders called Samba N’Doulougou. Maimouna’s blindness and vulnerability is exploited by an African political leader who abandons her with twins; hence she is stigmatised as “the mother of children without a father” (22). To add insult to injury, Bachirou, a cowardly African bureaucratic office worker who sides with the French managers against the strike, is implicated in the death of one of Maimouna’s twins. Again, Bachirou is neither exposed nor disciplined by the union leadership for this deplorable crime.

Bachirou’s complicity in the death of Maimouna’s child is symbolic of some of these African men’s capacity and readiness to sacrifice their own women and children for self-preservation. It is symbolic of these African men’s propensity and willingness to connive with European colonial oppressors as long as it is convenient and profitable to them. Even at this moment of bereavement, Samba fails to assume the responsibility of maintaining this brutalised, traumatised woman and his own biological child. Instead it is Penda who, in the spirit of revolutionary sisterhood and solidarity, provides food and shelter for Maimouna and her child. With raised consciousness, Penda assumes the new role as a champion of the defenceless and the downtrodden, particularly women and children.

Penda’s new role is symbolically represented in her new attire. Penda’s new attire is symbolic of her new-found position of power and authority because she is now a magdalen or reformed prostitute whose miniskirt is now replaced by military accoutrement and belt around her waist. In her new role as a revolutionary commander, she orders the tired, disillusioned men and women to march on to Dakar with the words: “what a blind woman [Maimouna] can do, the rest of you should be able to do” (202). Her exceptional leadership and organisational skills are revealed in her capacity to exploit indigenous African mythology and folklore. Despite the local myth that counting people as if they were “god’s bits of wood” [the title of the novel] brings misfortune, she counts the women, thus urging and rallying them to go “back to the road” (196) and continue with the march.

Penda, it is noteworthy, is prostitute who is called a “whore” (143), condemned and rejected by some men and women alike; but she is equally praised and celebrated by

some. She is praised and celebrated by some, including the omniscient narrator, for (a) her anti-patriarchal “resolute independence”(138); (b) her unprecedented capacity to publicly slap a man who makes unwelcome advances at her, and (c) her condemnation of abusive men as “dogs”(141). Most importantly, it seems, she is celebrated and glorified by the author, Ousmane himself, for her readiness to pay the highest price in her struggle against the triple oppression of women. This impression is confirmed by Ousmane who is reported to have said: “It does not matter to me whether Penda is a prostitute or not, it is what she does for society that interests me” (Gadjigo *et al.*, 1993:69). Admittedly, Nkealah (2006:139) justifiably argues that “certain kinds of interactions could not only offend culture-sensitive readers, but would, in fact, be seen as an attack on the fabric of society itself”. Ousmane’s amoral position on Penda’ prostitution is not surprising for, as indicated above, he is an “angry young man” consumed by his utilitarian, revolutionary Marxist-feminist aesthetics. This issue is re-visited in the last Chapter dealing with conclusions and recommendations.

Despite her moral imperfections, Penda is a courageous, penetrative African woman freedom fighter and guerrilla who is conscious of the subtle indivisibility of and interplay between racism, sexism and colonial-capitalist oppression. She does not only meet French colonial fire with fire, she also resists indigenous African patriarchy and implements a conscientisation programme for women and children, as shown in the next section.

3.3.2 Ramatoulaye

Ramatoulaye is an epitome of the feminist slogan “the personal is the political”. The private conflict between Ramatoulaye and her wealthy brother, El Hadji Mabigue, begins in the family and spills over into public, political-ideological confrontation. Ramatoulaye’s gradual conscientisation to women’s multiple oppressions is occasioned by the fact that El Hadji has ingeniously disinherited her because she is an “illegitimate” child. When the colonial regime resorts to “hunger as an ally” tactics, El Hadji refuses to share food with his own sister, Ramatoulaye, and close relatives. As a rich Muslim businessman, El Hadji should be generous in accordance with one of the five pillars of Islam which is the obligatory religious alms-giving to the needy. Contrary to the prescripts of his own religion, El Hadji insists he can only give credit to Ramatoulaye, the starving women and children on one condition: they must stop supporting the strikers. It is this collaboration between indigenous African patriarchy

and French colonial, capitalist oppression that effects consciousness-raising in Ramatoulaye and other women in this novel.

It is with this raised consciousness of the triple oppression of women that Ramatoulaye, the compound matriarch, is determined to protect all women and children from what she calls “dishonours”. Her endeavours to protect and provide for women and children are also rejected by the Moor shopkeeper, Hadrame, who also insists she must first convince the strikers to go back to work if she is to receive credit. Hence, Ramatoulaye unflinchingly accuses him of collaborating with the French colonial oppressors: “you and he [her brother, Mabigue] are on the side of the toubabs” (43). Ramatoulaye’s material conditions, both private and public, bring forth “a new breed” of a woman who is prepared to resist gender, class and racial oppression of women. Armed with this new consciousness and angered by her brother, she publicly lambastes him with a point-blank philippic attack: “You are in league with them [the French colonialists] Mabigue and you are a fornicator as well” (47). El Hadji Mabigue is guilty of (a) selling out his own people; (b) cheating his wives, and (c) disinheriting Ramatoulaye by falsely claiming that she, his very own blood sister, is an illegitimate child.

El Hadji Mabigue’ self-defense is a parrot-like echo of his fellow comprador’s pro-colonial sermons. Like the Imam, Mabigue argues that colonial oppression and patriarchy are “the will of heaven”. He argues that God has assigned a rank, a place and certain role to everyman; it is “blasphemous to think of changing His design” (45). Armed with this new-found consciousness, Ramatoulaye has Mabigue’s pet ram, Vendredi, castrated, killed and served to the starving women, children and strike leaders in Dakar. The killing and castration of Vendredi is symbolic in the sense that, like the phallus, it represents male power. Ramatoulaye’s courageous act, then, is a harbinger of things to come: the demise of African men’s egoistic collusion with colonial-capitalist oppression of African women and children. When Mabigue resorts to State Repressive Apparatus in the form of the police, Ramatoulaye resists imprisonment because of her newfound conviction and fearlessness. Her resistance is emboldened by the power of sisterly solidarity, so much so that this leads to a violent strike.

In short, Ramatoulaye is a strong, courageous and deeply religious woman. Unlike the collaborationist bickering, philistinism and hypocrisy of the so-called freedom fighters and Muslim priests, as indicated above, she leads by example. She fearlessly and

honestly accepts her role as the provider, protector and leader of women and children or “god’s bits of wood”, as she fondly calls them.

This conclusion finds expression in her philosophical reflections following the violent solidarity strike:

I knew that God was with me and I knew that it is possible to die of hunger, and that Houdia M’baye had milk. God knows all these things, too ...I told my brother Mabigue this morning that I would kill Vendredi, but God is my witness that it was not because of that I did it. It was because we were hungry - we were all too hungry for it to go on. The men know it, too, but they go away in the morning and don’t come back until the night has come and they do not see ... Being the head of a family is a heavy burden- too heavy for a woman. We must have help ...When you know that the life and the spirit of others depend on your life and your spirit, you have no right to be afraid- even when you are terribly afraid. In the cruel times we are living through we must find our own strength, somehow, and force ourselves to be hard (69).

Unlike the collaboration, bickering, hypocrisy and philistinism among the so-called Muslim priests and strike leaders, as indicated above, we have here a woman who leads by example. In Ramatoulaye, we have a woman who is fearlessly and honestly committed to her role as the leader, provider and protector of women and children or “god’s bits of woods”, as they are sympathetically called in the title and content of this novel.

When Mame Sophia and other women object to Penda’s leadership because “honest women” cannot be led by “a prostitute” (210), it is Ramatoulaye who stands up in defence of Penda. She insists that these women “be quite” (211) because their internecine clattering is a “Pull her Down” syndrome which is inimical to the power of sisterly solidarity that all these women so desperately need. Despite Penda’s moral imperfections, Ramatoulaye recognises and protects her exceptional leadership qualities. It is under Penda’s unparalleled leadership that the women of Thiers participate in a long anti-colonial protest march “that’s more than men could do” (211). It is under Penda’s unequalled leadership that women are conscientised and given organisational skills. This is revealed in their capacity to articulate their aspirations for

They [women] marched in well-ordered ranks, ten abreast, and without any masculine escort, now. They carried banners and pennants printed with slogans, some of them reading, **even bullets could not stop us; we demand family allowances ... for equal work, equal pay- old age pensioners-proper housing** (214).

Ramatoulaye protects Penda because it is under her unmatched leadership that the French colonial oppressions are eventually forced to accede to the strikers' demands. Ramatoulaye capacity, in both her personal and public spheres, to inspire and maintain this spirit of women's gender, class consciousness and solidarity is in direct contrast to the Union leaders' collaborationist bickering, backstabbing and competition for power, positions, possessions and prostitutes, as indicated above. Even N'Deye Touti, the assimilated girl who "knew far more about Europe than she did about Africa" (58) and despises her own people for "lack of civilisation"(57), is bought into line. It is under Ramatoulaye's unrivalled leadership, persistent re-orientation and re-education that N'Deye becomes psychologically decolonised. Eventually, she achieves a new, enlightened class consciousness as an African woman who is also subjected to racial, class and gender oppression. In fact, she makes a complete about-turn, so much so that she recants her "Frenchified" anti-polygamous stance and agrees to be Bakayoko's second wife.

3.3.3 Maimouna

Maimouna, as partially discussed above, is one of the several women in the novel who suffer multiple oppressions borne of African men's collaboration with French colonial-capitalist-patriarchy. Maimouna is a blind woman who lives in Thiers, a city characterised by abject poverty, squalor and corruption caused by the colonialists' industrialisation of Senegal. Worse still, her vulnerability is exploited by African men. She is impregnated, left with twins and deserted by one of the strike leaders, Samba.

In a Muslim society, where women are excluded from public decision-making, Maimouna takes part in the strike discussion and joins the epic women's march to Dakar. It is during the strike that Bachirou, one of the timid, spineless collaborators, is panicked into causing a stampede that leads to the death of one of Maimouna's twins. During the strike, the poor blind Maimouna is beaten, pushed and trampled "until her body was bruised and stiff in every joint". She is assaulted by French soldiers and loses her small business and her child in the process. Despite this, her selfless suffering is not recognised by the African union leaders. The non-recognition of her heroic dedication, commitment and suffering is confirmed by the fact that union leaders, such as Lahbib and Doudou, refuse to mention the names of women and children fatalities. According to the union leaders' official strike report, (a) it is only men who have taken up arms against the French colonial soldiers and policemen; (b) there are no women casualties and fatalities; (c) Maimouna is not injured, and (c) most insensitively,

Maimouna's child is not killed during the strike. Bruised, brutalised, bereaved, impregnated and abandoned by her fellow African men who are supposed to protect and support her, Maimouna soldiers on regardless.

Despite her blindness, Maimouna is intellectually bright, spiritually pure, morally upright and courageous. She draws her strength and inspiration from her cultural folklore, music and dance. She sings songs about a feminist legend Goumba N'Diaye who, before she also lost her sight, could measure her strength against that of men. Maimouna's revolutionary songs and sloganeering, her capacity to draw from the oral tradition despite her blindness and persistent belief that they shall overcome, is reminiscent of the African griots and prophetess. It is through her that the author, Ousmane, articulates his aesthetics, as discussed in the previous chapter. The role of the griot is no longer a male preserve. Maimouna might be an old, poor, blind and illiterate woman; but she succeeds where the bickering young, able-bodied, educated male collaborators have failed. Despite her blindness, advanced age, frailty and infirmity, she is more creative, resourceful and committed than the compradorial Diaras and Beaugosses of this world. She embodies and expresses the Senegalese people's cultural-political resilience, aspirations and accomplishments. Like the author, she teaches and inspires her people to reclaim and redefine their history, culture and tradition. Like the author, she teaches that the Senegalese people will never be truly free unless and until the recognition of women and children as equal partners is achieved.

Maimouna is an intuitive, visionary woman who is blessed with amazing extrasensory perceptive power and perspicacity. Maimouna's survival is attributable to her visionary philosophy, deep spirituality and the strong sense of sisterly solidarity amongst women. Subsequent to her neglect and desertion by Samba, equally strong women such as Penda, N'Diayene and Rama ensure her personal safety and help her nurse her baby who is aptly named Strike. Her resilience as a woman, a mother and a revolutionary is revealed in her prophetic faith that liberation is certain: "she still had milk and had begun to nurse the baby who had been called Strike. I am nourishing one of the great trees of tomorrow", she reassures herself (221).

Maimouna's resilient optimism and will to survive is made even more poignant by the experiences of many other women who break down. In one heart-rending scene, a poor starving woman is trying to breast-feed her equally sick, starving child:

Her breast was now nothing more than a slack and empty parcel of flesh. The baby seized it with his tiny fists, sucking greedily, his eyes closed, his head jerking awkwardly back and forth. The breast was already so riddled with scars and pricks that it seemed to have been stuck with pins, and he hurt her. She moved him from one arm to the other and put his mouth to her other breast, but she knew that it would serve no purpose, her milk was exhausted (55).

This is the pain, the suffering, the burden of forced motherhood abandoned mothers and children have to bear. Sickly, weakened by multiple childbirths and prematurely ageing, these women are deserted by polygamous Muslim men who dump them for young, under age virgins. But, as we know from another novel by Ousmane, *Xala*, these men's desertion of their old wives for young women is vainglorious machismo for, like El Hadji, they suffer from "xala" or the deserved curse: impotence or lack of libido.

3.4 Conclusion

The castration of Mabigüe's pet ram in the novel is symbolic of these men's impotence and incapacity to lead the anti-colonial struggle. This impotence is symbolic of their incapacity to love and to protect their very own womenfolk who are already burdened with colonial-capitalist racism and exploitation. This impotence is a figurative indictment of these patriarchs' selfish capacity to collude with European colonisers in the oppression of their own womenfolk and girl children. This impotence is an artistic indictment of their incapacity to achieve Africa's economic and political development which, as argued above, is incomplete without the active participation of women and children. The women's participation in and contribution to the anti-colonial liberation struggle is celebrated by the omniscient narrator's leitmotiv in this novel:

The men began to understand that if the times were bringing forth a new breed of men, they were also bringing forth a new breed of women (37).

In the next chapter, the study examines yet another supercilious African patriarch who is equally complicit in the oppression of his fellow African womenfolk. Albeit in a less covert manner than the men described above, he also collaborates with British colonisers in the oppression of his African wife, girl child and other extended family members.

CHAPTER 4

OPPRESSION OF WOMEN IN TSITSI DANGAREMBGA'S *NERVOUS CONDITIONS*

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the textual analysis of Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988). The textual analysis is intended to (a) explore and establish the role of African men in the entrenchment and maintenance of women's gender, class and racial oppression and (b) establish women's reaction to this triple oppression.

4.2 African Male Collusion with Colonialism

Unlike Ousmane's historical realism, as indicated in the previous chapter, Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) is a fictionalised account of the class, gender and racial oppression of women in pre-independence Rhodesia, present-day Zimbabwe. Unlike Ousmane's depiction of large-scale oppression of many women by many men, Dangarembga focuses on the bourgeois family interactions and sufferings of women and girl children under the yoke of a compradorial Christian, Western-educated patriarch, aptly called Babamukuru or Big Father. Given the fact that Babamukuru is the only key collaborationist pater familias in this novel, he is discussed in detail in this analysis.

4.2.1 Babamukuru, the Head of the Family

Babamukuru, as the wealthy, Western educated, culture-sanctioned and self-professed pater familias, is responsible for the multiple oppressions suffered by women in this novel.

Morris, (cited in Nkealah, 2006: 136) explains patriarchy and states:

It is important to recognise that the focus of feminist studies is this institutionalised male dominance, operating through structures like the law, education, employment, religion, the family and cultural practices. None of these is to be explained simplistically in terms of conscious intent, ill-will or conspiracy of individual men or even group of men. These self-sustaining structures of power, by means of which women's interests are always ultimately subordinated to male interest, constitute the social order known as 'patriarchy', a designation which applies to almost all human societies, past and present (Morris, cited in Nkealah, 2006: 136).

Undeniably, there is the ubiquitous triple oppression or patriarchal subjection of women in Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel. This patriarchal subjection of women is sustained through androcentric, male-dominated structures like the family, education, religion, cultural proscriptions and practices. This multiple oppression of woman, besides taking different manifestations such as nepotism, elitism and misogyny, can manifest itself in myriad ways. In this novel, it manifests itself through Babamukuru's collaborationist stereotypical words and behaviour, his cold calculating victimisation, discrimination, prejudice, forced conversion of women and girl children.

Babamukuru, as revealed through the omniscient narrator Tambu, is a patriarch who should be condemned for (a) his role in the entrenchment and maintenance of British colonialism, and (b) his collusion with the colonial-capitalist triple oppression of African women and children. His domineering, intolerant character is aggravated by the fact that he regards himself as the "eldest child and son, as an early educated African, as headmaster, as husband and father, as provider to many—positions that enabled him to organise his immediate world and its contents as he wished (88)." In other words, he is a self-important tin god and, in his eyes, other people are mere objects subject to his whims. Having studied in apartheid South Africa and England, Babamukuru returns to the then Rhodesia as a co-administrator who is bent on executing his colonial masters' mandate. The mandate he has received from his colonial masters is to civilise the savages from the dark African continent. It is this Western education which causes his "nervous condition" and identity crisis. His wife admits that he has "bad nerves". Dangarembga must have had him in mind when she abstracted the title of this novel from Jean Paul Satre's quotation: "the condition of native is a nervous condition".

Babamukuru is a victim of the hidden curriculum which, as indicated in Chapter 1, leads to the enslavement of his mind, alienation and contempt for his own people. Like El Hadji and the Imam in the previous chapter, Babamukuru is a collaborator who, unbeknown to himself, is (a) alienated from himself and his own people and (b) has adopted habits and behavioural patterns which are anathemas to Africa's united, anti-colonial part. The butt of his collusive shenanigans is the weak and the poor, particularly women and the girl child. This self-proclaimed head of the Secqau clan and extended family, is reminiscent of Bakayoko in *God's Bits of Wood* (1960). Like Bakayoko who hides under the façade of revolutionary rhetoric, Babamukuru is a

subtle misogynist, an abuser and underminer of his fellow African women and girl children who hides behind the façade of educated bourgeois gentility and generosity.

As member of the Western-educated African elite, Babamukuru is an obstacle towards the African decolonisation process. Despite his high qualifications, he is indoctrinated to work against the re-Africanisation and decolonisation of Africa in many ways which are, among others, (a) cultural and religious self-denigration; (b) an artificial high-brow taste and (c) contempt for anything that is not Western oriented. To paraphrase Armah, (cited in Abodunrin, 2008:107-108), he is a lousy comrade who, out of ignorance, believes that African values are inferior to Western values. He is trained to be a boss or leader who is incapable of solidarity and democratic co-operation with the poor. There are many examples in this novel to support the above impression of Babamukuru. Like the dandy Frenchified Beaugosse in *God's Bits of Wood* (1960), Babamukuru is rewarded with positions of power, possessions and promotions. He is regarded by the missionary authorities as a gifted "good African" (109) for carrying out the British colonialists' "civilising mission" so "imperiously" and, most revealingly, he is promoted to Headmaster of the mission school and Director of the Church's Manicaland Region.

Beside the above kudos, he also owns what Tambu, the protagonist-narrator, sarcastically calls a "palace", "castle" or "mansion"; he also owns two cars and is "the only African who is allowed to stay in a white house" in which the "Englishness" reigns supreme. Like Beaugosse and the Imam who speak flamboyant French to bamboozle their people, Babamukuru gives didactic, moralistic English speeches in a "peremptory", "imperious" tone to enforce his decrees. His "stentorian tone", the freezing Tambu narrates, "brook no disobedience" (114). To quote one of the many examples; in the following extract, Babamukuru insists that Tambu attends her parents' second Christian wedding intended to annul what, in his Christian opinion, is their first heathen marriage:

I tried to explain why I could not go, but it was useless... 'I do everything I can for you, but you disobey me. You are not a good girl' ... Babamukuru could not leave me alone. 'Tambudzai... I am telling you! If you do not go to the wedding, you are saying you no longer want to live here. I am the head of this house. Anyone who defies my authority is an evil thing in this house, bent on destroying what I have made (169).

Given his self-appointed role as “the closest thing a human being could get to God”, Babamukuru makes “arrangements” to boss it over men, women and children in his life. In one of his eccentric “arrangements” he brings together his male clan members, namely, Jeremia, who is Tambu’s father and Takesure, his distant cousin, to assist women in subsistence agricultural work. Instead of assisting the poor women, Jeremia and Takesure exploit Babamukuru’s self-serving megalomania to use and brutalise the very women they are supposed to assist. As the heads of the bourgeois and peasant families, Babamukuru, Takesure and Jeremia are guilty of subtle collaboration with British colonialism, patriarchy and class oppression of their fellow African womenfolk. Their suppression and neglect of their wives and daughters represent the abominable case of collaboration between British colonial patriarchy and indigenous African patriarch. The truth is that Takesure and Jeremia are Babamukuru’s good-for-nothing, obsequious and lascivious lackeys who have an “aversion to labour” (128). It is the mutual alliance between these African patriarchs, in collaboration with British colonial-capitalist patriarchy, which is responsible for the miseries, “afflictions” and “tribulations” suffered by women in this novel. Through their words and actions, both of omission and commission, these men are complicit in the triple oppression suffered by women and girl children, as shown in the next section.

4.3 Women’s Reaction to Triple Oppression

In *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Dangarembga depicts women who are fighting the effects of multiple oppressions in pre-colonial Rhodesia, present-day Zimbabwe. Seen through the eyes of the narrator-protagonist, Tambu, these women are Mainini, who is Tambu’s mother, Maiguru, Nyasha and Lucia. Pauline Ada Uwakweh (1995: 2), in her essay, “Debunking Patriarchy: The Liberational Quality of Voicing in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*”, identifies three categories of women characters in the novel: (a) the escaped females; (b) the entrapped females, and (c) the rebellious females. Uwakweh presents Tambu and Lucia as escaped females; Mainini, who is Tambu’s mother, and Maiguru as entrapped females, and Nyasha as the rebellious female. Owing to the fact that there are many women in this novel, only a sample of hand-picked women is discussed.

4.3.1 Mainini, Tambu’s mother

Mainini is, undoubtedly, one of the entrapped females. She is completely oppressed by her own peasant, rural background, ignorance and a discourse of imperialism as an

inferior “noble savage” and a native patriarchal construction of women’s subjecthood (Gurnah, 1995, 1). She has succumbed to both colonialism and indigenous African patriarchy. She believes that a white man’s education, the “Englishness”, as she calls it, can only seduce a girl or woman into filial or familial ingratitude, wrongdoings and cultural treachery. Through patriarchal repression and socialisation, Mainini is characterised by the unquestioning internalisation of patriarchal ideologies to the point that she reproduces these ideologies unconsciously and subconsciously. The above interpretation is confirmed by Baharvand and Zarrinjooee (2012: 7) who, in their article “The Formulation of a Hybrid Identity in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*” state that Mainini is the paragon of an ideal wife in Rhodesia.

Mainini, indeed, does represent the conventional image of an African woman who works both at home and in the fields. She toils and moils as an unpaid labourer and woman whose land has been dispossessed by British colonialists, to maintain a family, including her good-for-nothing husband, Jeremiah. She has, hopelessly, succumbed to the male chauvinistic, stereotypical depiction of a woman as the decent, virtuous Angel of the house, a sexual object whose concern is nothing but the satisfaction of her lazy, spineless, and irresponsible husband’s desire. This is evident in her description of women’s role in society. Mainini, reminding her daughter, Tambudzai, of the real status of women in the colonised Rhodesia, tells her the following:

this business of womanhood is a heavy burden...how could it not be? Aren’t we the ones who bear the children? When it is like that you can’t just decide today I want to do this, tomorrow I want to do that, the next day I want to be educated! When there are sacrifices to be made you are the one 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. Aiwa! What will help you, my child, is to learn to carry your burdens with strength (16).

Cowed into submission by the “triple oppression” of racism, sexism and class, Mainini has resigned herself to patriarchy and the concomitant poverty, ignorance and silent submissiveness. She obsequiously hero-worships and kowtows before oppression incarnate, the African patriarchy, Babamukuru, and her lousy, irresponsible, self-indulgent husband, Jeremiah. She is so entrapped by patriarchy that she endorses the snobbish Nhamo’s preferential treatment because he is a boy and allows herself to participate in the humiliating “comic show” Babamukuru calls a Christian marriage.

Poor Mainini is, indeed, bound both by the laws of her patriarchal culture and the social stratification of colonialism. Because of her gender, she will never be seen as more

than a possession of the men in her family, even though it is through the fruits of her labour that her son is able to go to school and put food on the table. Despite all her sacrifices, she receives neither honour nor recognition from the male chauvinist pigs in her family. Because of her poverty, she will never reach an equal status with whites or the educated Africans in Rhodesia. Lastly, she is consumed with the fear of the attraction of the white men's ways and the "Englishness" which, in her eyes, is devouring her family one by one. Because of her subjugation and dehumanisation, she cannot make decisions about her aspirations, her own life and the lives of her children.

Mainini's hopeless and helpless submission to tripe oppression is reminiscent of Assitan in Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* (1960), as discussed in the previous chapter. Like Assitan, she is irredeemably socialised by both compradorial indigenous African patriarchy and colonialism. Like Assitan, she is conditioned by "the ancient rules and customs of Africa", on the one hand, and by colonialism, on the other, to be "a perfect wife: docile, submissive and hard-working...to accept things as they were, to remain silent, as she had been taught to" (GBW, 106). Typically and unwittingly, she orally transmits this to the young Tambu; hence, the regrettable perpetuation of class, gender and racial iniquities and inequalities in this peasant society.

4.3.2 Maiguru

Caroline Rooney,(cited in Gurnah,1995:135), points out that although *Nervous Conditions* (1988) is set in the Rhodesia war of liberation, the writer makes little reference to this, choosing to address issues of women's emancipation:

the war areas in the novel are within the patriarchal family. If *Nervous Conditions* is critically angled as a response to *Bones* or to *The Wretched of the Earth*, then it contrastingly deflects attention from national appeals to the question of inequities between families (the elite and non-elite) and especially to the question of the inequities and tyrannies within a 'model middle-class family'. If charity begins at home (and *Nervous Conditions* is about family charity), then so, perhaps, does war (Rooney, cited in Gurnah, 1995: 135).

Given the focus of the novel on family interactions, it is Maiguru and her daughter, Nyasha, who bear the brunt because of their constant contact with patriarchy personified, Babamukuru, their husband and father, respectively. In her *Writing Madness*, Flora Veit – wild (2006: 142) indicates that in order to preserve and expand their rule, the colonialists have to produce a class of subjects on whom they can rely, who are capable of helping to administer the colony and spread the colonial ideas.

These are the Christianised, educated elite; preferably male preachers, teachers, interpreters and administrators. Despite obtaining higher education overseas, when both Babamakuru and Maiguru return home, they have an identity crisis which alienates them from their fellow Africans. Though they have assimilated and internalised the ways of the white man to a large degree and have become the colonisers' "good Africans", they also suffer from "bad nerves" caused by the ambiguity of their situation. This is particularly true of Babamukuru, the African patriarch, head of the mission school and his wife, Maiguru.

Maiguru is educated, albeit accidentally, as education is the preserve for boys and men. She holds the same Masters qualification as her husband. Though educated, she is as trapped as Tambu's mother; she has a teaching job and enjoys a false sense of security in a suburban bourgeois family. Babamukuru is a domineering patriarch nonpareil. Despite her education, she is never consulted in family decision-making. She has no control of her finances as Babamukuru spends her salary on his own poor relatives and Christmas parties in order to extend his "authority" over the entire family, thus boosting his own inflated male ego and delusion of grandeur. Despite her Masters degree, Maiguru is defined by her domestic work, dishing for Babamukuru as an exploited, unpaid labourer. She engages in baby talk sycophantically calling him "daddy sweet and daddy pie", in spite of herself. Despite her education, she is voiceless at home. Regardless of being illiterate or educated, rural or urban, all women, including Maiguru, are supposed to be submissive at home. She is still subjected to the demands of her husband and the men of her community, including the worthless and promiscuous Jeremiah and Takesure.

Although she knows and understands the "European ways" because of her overseas exposure, many years of ingrained culture and patriarchy force her to keep silent and obedient. In fact, her education is seen as an oddity, so much so that people of her village assume she was simply taking care of her husband and family while they were living in England. During her abrupt departure from home following a quarrel with Babamukuru, Maiguru needs a man (her brother) to protect and give her a sense of value. She has learned and internalised the fact that women always need a man to accompany and protect them. Her insipid, feeble submissiveness to Babamukuru stirs the rebellious, non-conformist feminist in Nyasha who protests that Maiguru "always runs to men" who, like an object, thwart her resistance and return her home within a

week. Grounded at home as she can neither buy nor drive her own car, Nyasha angrily wishes that she must get a divorce to enjoy an alternative exposure.

Maiguru has no concept of independence. She tolerates Babamukuru's domination and oppression in order to keep him as her husband. She serves Babamukuru with slavish devotion and willingly sacrifices her freedom in exchange for security. Not only Maiguru but also the majority of females remain obedient servants of men in this novel. Nevertheless, there are some serious opponents of triple oppression among the females, as shown in the next section of the study.

4.3.3 Nyasha and Tambu

In this section, Nyasha and Tambu are discussed simultaneously because they represent what Nkealah (2006: 136) calls "the spirit of sisterhood" in African women. Despite the differences in their family backgrounds, they display the capacity to form a united front against the triple evils of racism, sexism and capitalist exploitation. Far from being a lesbian relationship, their potential for collaboration is mutually enriching and encouraging in the face of collusion between multiple oppressions, namely, indigenous African patriarchy and colonial-capitalist patriarchy. These courageous young women are treated simultaneously because, besides confronting personal oppressions head-on, they provide commentaries on the plight and suffering of their mothers (as indicated above) and offer a scathing critique of the confused, corrupt social structure they are a part of (Bahri, 1994: 2).

Unlike their parents, both Nyasha and Tambu have clear, well-articulated aspirations. Tambu, suffering under the yoke of poverty and squalor at the rural homestead, feels a "presence" (84) and aspires to be educated as a way of self-empowerment and self-actualisation. When Tambu insists "but I want to go to school", her father scornfully asks her "can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables" (15). This is a discriminatory and stereotypical view of women. In this patriarchal society, only boys have the right to receive education if the family can provide the fees because the boys are considered superior in all aspects. Hence, it is Nhamo, Tambu's elder brother, who is given the opportunity to attend school. Worse still, when Tambu sets up the project of selling mealies in order to finance her education, it is Nhamo who steals both the money and the mealies only to share them with his girlfriends. It is only Nhamo's death, which

might be seen as divine justice without being “callous”, that provides Tambu an opportunity to be educated. It is, therefore, pardonable when Tambu says: “I was not sorry when my brother died” (1).

Similarly, Nyasha is a precociously, self-assertive go-getter who has “an egalitarian nature” and had “taken seriously the lessons about oppression and discrimination that she had learnt first-hand in England” (64). As seen through the eyes of Tambu, we agree that she has a “vision”, a “conviction”, an “experimental disposition”, an “insistence on alternatives” and the “passion for transmuting the present into the possible” (p.181). Nyasha herself tells Tambu that she does not want to be “anyone’s underdog” (119). In one of her letters she tells Tambu that “I cannot help thinking that what antagonises is the fact that I am me-hardly I admit, the ideal daughter for a hallowed headmaster, a revered patriarch” (201) who puts up God-like acts. Of all the characters in this novel, it is only Nyasha who unflinchingly stands up against the patriarchal, phallogocentric culture, represented by her father, Babamukuru. She justifiably resists and rejects this culture in which language is ordered around an absolute word (logos) which is masculine (phallic) and the feminine is systematically denigrated, disqualified, excluded and silenced. Hence, Uwakweh (1995: 3), in her article “Debunking Patriarchy”, writes that:

Nyasha is the rebellious female. She has had the benefit of a British education and knows first-hand what kind of lives women in Europe lead. She is ever aware of the difference in the way Shona women are treated compared with the treatment of British women. Unlike her mother, Nyasha has no memories of traditions and customs to silence her voice. Instead she finds herself caught between two worlds. Her schoolmates shun her for white mannerisms and she has no Shona mannerisms to fall back on. Nyasha is truly a woman without a home, and as she struggles to make a place for herself in society, she finds that effort may just kill her (Uwakweh, 1995: 3).

Thus, it is the existentially different socio-economic and educational backgrounds and exposure that occasion these cousins’ different reactions and resistance to sexist, racial and colonial-capitalist oppression.

Nkealah (2006: 136) asserts that patriarchal subjection of women transcends borders, people and cultures. The ubiquitous nature of patriarchy in this novel is evidenced by Babamukuru’s confused, self-contradictory and corrupt behaviour. Despite his Christian beliefs and Western education, he himself is in a nervous condition because, we are told, he has “bad nerves”. As the self-proclaimed patriarch of the extended

family, he encourages Nhamo's snobbish, male chauvinistic attitude and laziness despite Tambu's complaint about the unfair division of labour (12). Despite Nhamo's hatred of productive labour and below average intelligence, he is permitted to receive education at the mission by virtue of being a boy. Tambu is denied this opportunity for she is regarded as an investment for a better bride's price. Similarly, Babamukuru's corruption or nepotism and its effects on social life are evidenced by his connivance with a white man, Mr. Baker, to secure a prestigious scholarship for his son, Chido. Again, he does this at the expense of Nyasha. These young women, as Gurnah (1995: 4) puts it, are oppressed by a discourse of imperialism and by a native patriarchal construction of women's subjecthood. As women, they are required to be the passive signifiers of cultural integrity, and education can only seduce them into wrongdoing and cultural treachery.

It is through the male chauvinistic pretence and hypocrisy of Babamukuru that Tambu herself becomes conscientised about the gender issues involving herself, Nyasha and the entire women in her life (Moyana, 1994: 34). According to the psycho-analytical theory of double bind, as described in Barlow and Durand (2001, 34: 241), repressive family interactions and dysfunctional communication patterns can result in eating disorders and schizophrenia. In this sense, Babamukuru's sanctimonious attitude may be responsible for the "nervous conditions" suffered by these women. When Nyasha goes for an outing she is accused of being a "whore" while his snobbish son, Chido, who is rarely at home, is allowed to frolic and to get totally assimilated into white people's culture as he associates with the children of Mr. Baker, Babamukuru's white collaborator in the multiple oppression of his own womenfolk. Nyasha is erroneously accused of being a prostitute because "no decent girl would stay out alone, with a boy, at that time of the night" (115).

Nervous Conditions (1988) abounds with examples to illustrate that Babamukuru does not consider women to be his equals, but second class citizens who should do what men like him say (Moyana 1994: 33). The examples of his patriarchal megalomania, as indicated above, contribute to the gradual conscientisation of Tambu about the gender issues. When Babamukuru confiscates D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* because it is a "dirty book", Nyasha rebelliously insists that "it is a good book", thus asserting her jouissance or female sexuality as an agent not a sexualised object. When Nyasha hits back, after he has erroneously accused her of being a "whore", Babamukuru vows to kill her for challenging him that way. Ironically, because of her

rural background and different understanding of how children should talk to their parents, Tambu finds herself not approving of Nyasha's behaviour.

Gradually, Tambu awakens to her uncle's oppression, pretence and hypocrisy. She realises that Babamukuru is a slave to public opinion; that he worries more about "what people would say" than what he is and what he should be or should do truthfully for his family, regardless of outsiders' opinions. The conscientised Tambu begins

feeling bad for her (Nyasha) and thinking how dreadfully familiar that scene had been, with Babamukuru condemning Nyasha to whoredom, making her a victim of her femaleness just as I had felt victimised at home in the days when Nhamo went to school and I grew my maize. The victimisation, I saw, was universal. It didn't depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition. Men took it everywhere with them...but what I didn't like was the way all the conflicts came back to femaleness. Femaleness as opposed to maleness (118).

Moyana (1994:34) rightly states that Nyasha is no whore, as the reader and the other characters in the novel know; she justifiably rebels against her father's false accusations, assumptions and orders. Unlike the other characters, including the obsequious lackeys such as Jeremiah and Takesure, she cannot simply take patriarchal instructions sheepishly, obediently and placidly. She is, indeed, an intelligent girl whose insight into social and political issues is very sharp. She analyses issues maturely and is the only character who understands the crippling, colonising effect of Christianity. She expresses her reservations to Tambu about going to the Sacred Heart with "are you sure this is the right place?" (197) and jokingly teases her, "have a good time, you African" (199). It is at the Sacred Heart where Tambu is subjected to blatant racism because the Sister crams them into a segregated small room because there are more "Africans" than usual. Again Nyasha criticises her father's solution to the irresolute, licentious Jeremiah's poverty when he (Babamukuru) suggests a Christian wedding instead of a cleansing ceremony. Tambu uses what Gurnah (1995: 139) calls "artful feminine wit and guile" to resist Babamukuru's patriarchal control of her life by refusing to attend the wedding. For her disobedience to patriarchal commandments, she is physically assaulted and subjected to more strenuous domestic labour without assistance.

Despite her role in the conscientisation and "escape" of her cousin, Nyasha is the one who is brutalised because she asserts human truth; she asserts her rights and herself (Moyana, 1994: 35). Like Nhamo who hurts Tambu until blood runs down her thigh,

Babamukuru assaults Nyasha so violently that her menstrual periods come nine days before the normal time. What seems to be implied in this atrocity is what Gurnah (1995: 137) calls “a second castration”, which is when a woman must be violently forced to remember that she is just a woman; something that both Nhamo and Babamukuru do insist on in this novel.

In spite of these atrocities and monstrosities, Nyasha and Tambu refuse to be subjected to patriarchy. Moyana (1994: 35) indicates that Nyasha’s hunger strike is a symbol of final resistance to her father’s maniacal oppression and rebellion against this ultimate symbol of patriarchal authority. The real cause of her breakdown is a combination of colonisation and the father’s desire to uphold his African traditions’ patriarchal, sexist values. Babamukuru’s alienation from himself and his people, and collaboration with colonial-capitalist patriarchy are responsible for Nyasha’s derangement. His responsibility for Nyasha’s psychosis is confirmed by Killam (2004: 104) who writes that:

When her (Tambu’s) cousin, Nyasha, has a nervous breakdown, Tambu sees the repressive nature of colonial authority. Nyasha’s breakdown, her anorexia and bulimia, indeed, stand as symptoms of the ills of this authority and are presented as a powerful indictment of her father’s self-serving anglophilia.

Her breakdown is an act of resistance to patriarchy. This is evidenced by her perspicuous, insightful analysis of the debilitating consequences of Africans’ mental, economic, political and cultural colonisation even in her moment of distress. There is, indeed, meaning and method in her madness: “It is bad enough when a country gets colonised, but when people do as well! That’s the end, really, that’s the end” (150). Thus, she penetratingly comments on the damages of assuming that British colonial ways are always progressive ways.

Given Nyasha’s “multi –directional mind” (153), she says that she does not hate her father and that “they [the British colonialists] want me to, but I won’t” (205). That is, Babamukuru is but a product of British colonialism; he “a good boy, a good munt, a good African” (204). Nyasha sympathetically suggests that it is not her father who should be hated but the British colonialists. The place for this war, she seems to suggest, is not only within the family, but against the white government with all its lies. Nyasha shreds her history books to pieces with her teeth; and her hunger strike can be seen as refusal to consume the British colonial lies, education and civilisation

(Gurnah, 1995: 138). During her mental breakdown, Nyasha is accused by a racist, white male psychiatrist of malingering. Like this white doctor, Babamukuru remains cold and insensitive to his daughter's suffering. Despite this, as Tambu says, "Babamukuru's moral excellence is diminished in this way by Nyasha's perspicacity" (162).

Tambu, through her mother's constant caution to be careful of the "Englishness" and Nyasha's sisterly solidarity, survives. She refuses to go the way of her brother; she goes "somewhere he (Babamukuru) could not reach" (136). As Moyana (1994: 30) puts it, Tambu consciously refuses to be compartmentalised into this gender apartheid from an early age, which is why she escapes. She escapes and survives to narrate and "write herself, write about women and bring women to writing" which, gynocentrically speaking, is in itself a politico-feminist liberating activity. Tambu's irrepressible quest for liberation through literary, artistic self-expression is continued in another bildungsroman by Tsitsi Dangarembga called *The Book of Not: A Sequel to Nervous Condition* (2006). Like its prequel, *The Book of Not* articulates Tambu's continuing search for self-knowledge in confronting patriarchal inequalities and prejudices head on.

4.4 Conclusion

Nervous Conditions (1988) is, undoubtedly, written in the Afrocentric, feminist tradition. It succeeds in the depiction of women from different backgrounds dealing with and resisting the triple oppression of racism, sexism and class. It clearly delineates the collusion between corrupt, indigenous African patriarchy and colonial-capitalist patriarchy in the domination of African women and the girl child. Most importantly, through the courageous struggles of these women and girl children, particularly Tambu and Nyasha, it leaves readers with the hope and optimism that women will gradually have a voice in the development and advancement of post-colonial African societies.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This chapter focuses on the researcher's reflections, conclusions and recommendations. It also outlines suggestions for further research in the field.

Colonisation of Africa had and continues to have a significant, irremissible impact on the cultural, economic and political praxis of the African people. The African continent and her people continue to be affected by the repercussions of European neo-colonialism and imperialism. This is attested by Salim who, in his 2014 Thabo Mbeki Annual Lecture, maintains that post-colonial Africa is still haunted by instabilities, corruption, internal conflict, abject poverty, human misery and destruction. Despite Africa's independence, this continent is still clouded by oppression and degradation of the poor and the vulnerable, particularly women and the girl child. Despite their pontifications about women's emancipation, the so-called erstwhile African freedom fighters, liberators, community leaders and politicians are still pre-occupied with the patriarchal, stereotypical views on women's role and position in society. Despite African women's participation in and contribution to the anti-colonial struggle, they continue to suffer multiple oppressions, both in literature and in real life. This has led to the upsurge of feminism and the emergence of politically and socially committed African women writers and cultural activists, as indicated in Chapter 2.

Theoretical grounding of this study in Chapter 1, the discussion of the concept of "commitment" in Chapter 2, and the close, textual analyses of selected novels in the last two chapters, reveal a gloomy picture of Africa's human rights culture. This is a continent wherein, despite the crucial role women have played in the struggle for independence, they continue to suffer under the triple yoke of race, gender and class. African women's suffering is exacerbated by African males' compradorial collusion with neo-colonial capitalist patriarchy. It is in the light of this unholy alliance between indigenous African patriarchy and colonialism that committed post-colonial African writers have taken the barrel of the pen to "write back" to both the empire and African patriarchy. It is against the above background that Sembene Ousmane and Tsitsi Dangarembga have produced their anti-colonial protest literary works.

There are glaring differences between Ousmane and Dangarembga in their opposition to and treatment of women's race, class and gender oppression. This can be attributed

to their differences in (a) gender; (b) class background; (c) educational qualifications; (d) lived experiences, and (e) religious-ideological orientations. These differences have, inevitably, shaped their aesthetics and literary productions, as it will be indicated subsequently. Despite the above differences, these authors have contributed to (a) the decolonisation of Africa through their artistic critiques; (b) the abrogation and appropriation of Western political-literary theories and theology, and (c) most relevantly to this study, the feminist consciousness-raising and the promotion of the human rights of African women and the girl child. These authors' abrogation and appropriation of classical Western political theories and theology is evident in their aesthetics and writings. This impression is confirmed by (a) Dangarembga's adoption of the moderate African womanism or nego-feminism and Ubuntu; and (b) Ousmane's adoption of the spiritually deep African socialist humanism. These authors' abrogation and appropriation of Western aesthetics is evident in their introduction of the indigenous African oral tradition, folklore, mythology, the African socio-linguistic idiom and proverbial expression. Their works are committed satirical exposes and critiques of the plutonic, patriarchal African bourgeois elitists and their self-serving incapacity to effect the socio-political, economic development and empowerment of African women and the girl child.

As intimated above, there are interesting similarities and differences between Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* (1960); first the similarities. In both *God's Bits of Wood* and *Nervous Conditions*, African males are guilty of compradorial connivance with colonialism in the class, gender and racial oppression of African women and girl child. This is best illustrated through the concepts of "the political is the personal" and the "manhood-proving pact" as defined by Schacht and Ewing (1998: 1,149). The "political is the personal" means that what happens in these men's public lives has an impact on their immediate familial interactions. The "manhood-proving pact" means that men enter into an alliance against who, in their pathologically exaggerated machismo, is representative of lesser, inferior humanity. In all cases, those who bear the brunt are the poor and the vulnerable, particularly women and the girl child.

In Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* (1960), Bakayoko's characterisation is indicative of a man who is incapable of leading any campaign on behalf of the poor, vulnerable women and children. As indicated in Chapter 3, his leadership is undermined by (a) lack of strong convictions on and lip service to women's rights to personal and public decision-making; (b) intra-elite squabbles; (c) inter-union bickering over power,

positions and possessions; (d) romantic rivalries, and (e) defections to the French colonial camp. The triple oppression of women is exacerbated by the presence of an elitist African comprador bourgeois class represented by, among others, the egocentric El Hadji Mabigue and the sanctimonious Muslim Imam. Similarly, the characterisation of Babamukuru in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) indicates a middleclass African patriarch who connives with British colonialism in the triple oppression of his own African womenfolk. As indicated in Chapter 4, Babamukuru enters into a manhood-proving alliance with his obsequious, sycophantic lackeys in the oppression of his wife; daughter and extended family members, including the protagonist-narrator, Tambu. Babamukuru is in a "nervous condition" borne of his psycho-pathological anglophilia. This impression is confirmed by (a) the denigration of his own language and culture; (b) his connivance with the white man, Mr. Baker; (c) his "imperious" highbrow bourgeois taste and demeanour, and (d) his repression, victimisation and forced conversion of all women and girl children in his clan by virtue of his Christian, Western education and British colonialism-sponsored opulence.

The major bane of African's strife and the continuing multiple oppression of women, as discussed in this study, is the lack of strong, committed, non-sexist, visionary leadership. This dearth of committed, visionary leadership leads to the adoption of beliefs and behavioural patterns which are anathemas to Africa's united, anti-colonial pact. These self-defeatist beliefs and behavioural patterns include (a) rampant bourgeois materialism; (b) individualism; (c) the PHD (Pull Him or Her Down) syndrome; (d) the sanctimonious attitude towards fellow Africans; (e) cultural self-denigration and, (f) most importantly, sexist, stereotypical attitudes towards women. In Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* (1960), an experienced French colonial administrator, Monsieur De Jean, offers a telling indictment of the vanity, gullibility and corruptibility of the African patriarchs, political leaders and activists. In a telephonic conversation with his colleague from Dakar, Monsieur De Jean reassures him that even this strike is bound to fail:

I'll take care of the natives...But I know them, I assure you, they are children. They are all alike; they are more interested in titles than in money. I know my Africans; they're all rotten with pride...We can either buy off most important leaders for a price, in return, of course-or work on some of the others and try to build a rival union...I've been working on two of them; It wouldn't surprise me if they went along with us (30,32).

As indicated in Chapter 3, some of the African businessmen, political and religious leaders such as the Imam, Beaugosse and El Hadji Mabigue succumb to De Jeans'

colonial-capitalist mechanisations; they fall into his trap. Like Babamukuru, who is rewarded by the British colonialists in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) for being a “good African”, these men turn out to be “lousy comrades”; they are corruptible, mentally and spiritually colonised, so much so that they connive with colonialists in the oppression of their own African women and the girl child. By virtue of his position as the missionary school Headmaster, church elder, the Secgau clan and community leader, Babamukuru’s oppression of his family assumes national political significance. This is clearly revealed in the sequel to *Nervous Conditions* (1988) called *The Book of Not* (2006). In the latter novel, Babamukuru is exposed as “one whose soul hankered to be at one with the occupying Rhodesian forces, mutenges!” (6) or betrayer. He is tried, found guilty and assaulted by the Zimbabwean freedom fighters for his connivance with British colonialists during the chimurenga or liberation war.

The male characters’ incapacity for a decisive, egalitarian anti-colonial activism in both novels is because of their reliance on the Western-educated, self-proclaimed compradorial leadership. This is evidenced by Tiémeko’s dabbling with Marxism, indecisions and blind reliance on Bakayoko. Instead of providing leadership, all he can say is “only Bakayoko understands” and “If Bakayoko was here”. Similarity, in *Nervous Conditions* (1988), the irresolute, promiscuous Jeremiah and Takesure are guilty of obsequious kow-towing, praise-singing and admiration for Babamukuru: “Would we have survived if it hadn’t been for you? Aiwa, we would not. Never!” (46). From a Marxist-feminist perspective, Ousmane and Dangarembga teach us that true effective leadership calls for collective co-operation and willpower. This can be made possible through solidarity with all, including women, and not necessarily through the sometimes whimsical vision of a single, sexist male leader. Failure to appreciate this has led to political instability and the horrors of war not only in Africa but in other parts of the world, as seen in Uganda and Germany under Idi Amin and Hitler, respectively. As history and this study have shown, the most hard-hit victims of war and conflict are always women and the girl child. The persistence of women’s marginalisation is aptly expressed by da Silva (2004: 137) who concludes that:

the politics of empowerment for women proposed by the African feminist is a movement which searches for the full participation of women in African societies’ issues because they defend that there will be no liberation for Africa without women’s liberation.

Characterisation of male characters in both *God’s Bits of Wood* (1960) and *Nervous Conditions* (1988), therefore, reveals African men who are incapable of any campaign

for the decolonisation of Africa. To paraphrase Case's words, (cited in Gadjigo et al., 1993: 9) the characterisation of male characters in both novels reveals men who are intellectually, socially and politically incapable of (a) setting up and sustaining any meaningful progressive social, political and economic revolt and (b) understanding and undertaking any struggle on behalf of African women and the girl child. These men are victims of colonial culture and education which lead to the enslavement or colonisation of the mind, alienation and contempt for their own people. These men are collaborators who, wittingly or unwittingly, (a) are alienated from themselves and their own people and (b) have adopted habits and behavioural patterns which are self-defeatist and inimical to Africa's liberation, reconstruction and development. As indicated in the textual analyses of these novels (Chapters 3 and 4), the butt of their collusive shenanigans are the poor, the weak and the vulnerable, particularly African women and the girl child. As it will be shown subsequently, different women present with different reactions and coping mechanisms in the face of their class, gender and racial oppression.

The textual analyses in Chapters 3 and 4 reveal interesting differences between Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* (1960) and Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988). These differences are evident in these authors' attitude to and treatment of the triple oppression of women. These differences includes (a) the setting; (b) the scope and severity of female oppression, and (c) the scope and intensity of women's reactions to oppression. Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood*, as indicated in Chapter 3, is a reconstruction of the actual workers' strike in an industrialised Senegalese society dominated by Muslim patriarchs; whereas Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* is a fictionalised semi-biographical narrative about a middleclass family in a rural Zimbabwean society dominated by Christian patriarchs. In Ousmane's novel we have a more intense, violent repression of women on a large scale, apparently aggravated by the French colonial policy of direct rule, assimilation and sharia laws; whereas in Dangarembga's novel we have a less intense repression of women on a small scale, apparently ameliorated by the British colonial policy of indirect rule and anglicised separate development, as indicated in Chapter 1.

The women's reaction to repression in *God's Bits of Wood* (1960) is more massive, violent and radical, so much so that "the women had organised their lives in a manner which made them almost a separate community" (242); whereas the women's reaction in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) is less organised, virtually non-violent and moderate. These differences are a reflection of the authors' different concept of committed

liberation aesthetics, as discussed in Chapter 2. In sync with Ousmane's radical Marxist-feminist aesthetics, women such as Penda and Ramatoulaye adopt violent, revolutionary tactics and strategies in their fight against triple oppression. Like Western radical feminists, Penda and Ramatoulaye represent a "new breed of women" who resort to prostitution, violent demonstration against and confrontation with class, gender and racial oppression. Unlike Ousmane's women, Dangarembga's women resort to gentle persuasion through Ubuntu, education, resourceful wit and guile in their fight against triple oppression. This is in line with Dangarembga's moderate neo-feminist aesthetics of double consciousness which, as discussed in Chapter 2, is to avoid violence, to open the doors for negotiation and to create a positive spirit in society. The few exceptions to these predominantly dichotomous reactions are (a) Julia and Nyasha, in *Nervous Conditions* (1988), who try to fight back, and (b) Aiwa and Mainini in *God's Bits of Wood* (1960) and *Nervous Conditions* (1988), respectively, who are cowed into helpless socialisation and submission to patriarchy.

In the light of the persistence of neo-colonial-capitalist exploitation of Africa, African women's reactions call for thorough scrutiny as they have the potential to either make or break the feminist project on our continent. If Africa is to be saved from the chains of neo-colonialism, we should not lose sight of the bigger picture. The subtlety of continuing neo-colonial oppression of Africa calls for a united, concerted effort from both African men and women. The adoption of a radical, revolutionary Marxist-feminist stand is self-defeatist and counter-productive because it is tantamount to playing into the hands of our common enemy, which is, neo-colonial-capitalist exploitation of African men, women and children alike. Dangarembga's insistence that Western feminism needs "fixing", "refashioning" and "interrogating" sensibly resonates with the liberal African women feminists. For instance, Mariam Ba, Buchi Emechete and Zainab Alkali justifiably renounce violent "sexual warfare" because it is not "quite right". Strategically and pragmatically, these women justifiably recommend meaningful union, dialogue and partnership between African men and women. As African women feminists, these women are aware of the "multiple oppressions" that also affect African men, so much so that they sympathise with them. These analytical, perspicacious women are aware of the fact that African men are equally in a "nervous condition" caused by alienation and indoctrination occasioned by imperial-colonial settler culture and education. Their capacity to see the bigger picture translates into a brand of feminism which is neither anti-male nor prone to the instigation of a mutually

destructive, violent sexual warfare. Dangarembga's conceptualisation of African feminism or womanism, as expressed in Killan and Rowe (2006: 96), is:

an effort by African women to be fully involved, as equal partners [with their men], in both the struggle for the freedom and fulfilment of African people in the face of racism, colonialism, and oppression and the worldwide struggle by women against social, cultural and political marginalisation.

Instead of violence and total rejection of everything Western, Africa should be well-served by the adoption of strategies of subversion such as appropriation, eclecticism, syncretism and hybridisation. Some Pan Africanists' rejection of these strategies smacks of what Abodunrin (2008: 251) calls "possessive exclusivity". This possessive exclusivity is borne of their self-contradictory unawareness that "systems of patronage and production have been institutionalised...the historical facts of colonialism inevitably lead to a hybridisation of culture (*Ibid.*). Given our rapidly globalising world, one is bound to (a) reject the revolutionary, essentialist, reductionistic aesthetics of Marxist dialectical materialism, as advocated by Ousmane, El Saadawi and Ngugi; and (b) embrace the alternative African voices which promote evolutionary, mutual cultural-linguistic synergy, hybridity and syncreticity, as advocated by Dangarembga, Achebe and Buchi Emecheta.

Given her double-consciousness as a liberal feminist, Dangarembga has succeeded where Ousmane has failed. Like the moderate, pragmatic Achebe, her novel suggests that the best option is to sift the best from both Africa and Europe and omit the worst from both worlds in the interests of the mind-broadening cultural synergy. Given the complexity of Africa's neo-colonial, capitalist oppression, the African women's coping mechanisms and reactions to their plight should be interrogated and contextualised. Besides her rejection of Ousmane's violent sexual warfare, Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) is a rejection of the violation of African cultural enclaves as revealed through prostitution and lesbianism. Unlike Ousmane's amoral, Marxism-inspired condonation of Penda's prostitution, Dangarembga warns us to avoid the misreading and misinterpretation of the "sisterhood" between Tambu and Nyasha as lesbianism. Needless to say, given the culturally heterogeneous nature of African communities, the advocacy of prostitution and lesbianism as coping mechanisms are inimical to the African feminist project. Besides being immoral in the eyes of the majority of Africans, men and women alike, this is tantamount to the perpetuation of the sexual objectification and cheapening of African women. In fact, it is a denial of women's efficacy as self-respecting agents of change; it is an affront to their dignity, integrity

and capacity to self-empowerment without self-humiliation. There are, however, alternatives to these dysfunctional, self-defeating coping mechanisms.

Instead of resorting to self-humiliating, mutually destructive reactions such as prostitution, the Pull Her Down syndrome and connivance with patriarchy, women should try healthy, mutually beneficial coping mechanisms, tactics and strategies. African women writers, in collaboration with other male feminist writers, literary-cultural critics and activists, should strive to prioritise and highlight the human rights of women and the girl child. Together they should strive to disseminate and implement the principles of “écriture féminine” or women’s writing and gynocriticism. In other words, women must write themselves, write about women and bring women to writing.

Instead of resorting to self-diminishing, dysfunctional reactions to oppression, women should strive to emulate the example of strong, self-assertive women both in life and in literature. On a practical level, women should strive to get educated; women should read voraciously and write prolifically; their reading and writing should include informative, entertaining and feminist, self-empowering books considered to be “bad” or “dirty” by their sexist, patriarchal detractors; they should establish self-help structures, setup reading and writing clubs, and organise information-sharing sessions. Armed with this knowledge, women can kick-start peaceful, non-violent protests, campaigns and demonstrations aimed at consciousness-raising and advancement for men and women, boys and girls. This suggestion is premised on the sober, pragmatic proposition that feminism is not a women-only, anti-male project.

As indicated in the study, patriarchy is a ubiquitous phenomenon that transcends borders, people and cultures. In many African societies, one can safely argue without any fear of disputation that it is still a man’s world. The articulation of women’s issues in post-colonial Africa as well as economic and public decision-making platforms are still dominated by men. It is, therefore, recommended that African feminist writers use both European languages and African vernaculars or translations in order to elicit local and global support for their feminist agenda.

As women speak out and write against patriarchal neo-colonialism, they should also guard against what Dangarembga calls the “beast of rage or anger”. Undoubtedly, rage or anger has potentially disastrous consequences for both literature and the African decolonisation struggle. Despite its almost irresistible, on-paper romantic appeal, radical Marxist feminism is both self-defeatist and counter-productive because of its

(a) advocacy of anti-male violence; (b) rejection of evolutionary subversive strategies such as appropriation and hybridisation, and (c) tendency to thwart literary creativity through its insistence on utilitarian agitpropaganda. It is also recommended that women take advantage of information and communication media such as the internet, radio and television to disseminate their feminist project materials. In this way the “sisterhood” or sisterly solidarity will be fostered and sustained both locally and internationally. The very act of writing and speaking out against patriarchal neo-colonialism is a political-feminist statement in societies where the female voice is silenced, marginalised and devalued.

In many African countries, post-independence states are characterised by a blind adoption and perpetuation of the erstwhile colonial masters’ policies. Hence, Africa has patriarchal states which are bolstered by a patriarchal ideology which continues to oppress and marginalise African women and the girl child. To curb this, there is a need for progressive state intervention. This study maintains that the reconstruction and development of Africa is incomplete without active participation of women. To achieve this, there is a need for transformative state intervention. African political leaders and policy-makers should recognise that women and children’s rights are human rights. African states should legislate for the establishment of standing Ministries and Commissions for Gender Equity and Children’s Rights which, amongst others, should see to:

- (a) the conscientisation of the populace to the human rights of women and the girl child;
- (b) the, implementation and enforcement of affirmative action legislation in both public, government services and private, corporate sectors;
- (c) the stiff punishment for the violations of the human rights of women and the girl child such as rape, murder and domestic violence;
- (d) the declaration of Children and Women’s holidays on the national calendar, and
- (e) the prescription of gender-sensitive reading materials in educational institutions.

The achievement of women’s social, political and economic empowerment can only be achieved if African men are prepared to end gender-class discrimination and make a paradigm shift. Ousmane’s most poignant thematic imperative is that Africa needs a “new breed of men “who are prepared to forego their hitherto privileged positions by virtue of their gender and wealth in the name of gender equity and equality. African men should reject the deliberately Western-orchestrated, divisive egotism and

embrace the African sense of communalism. In the same breath, Dangarembga's most important message is that African men should adopt the "I am well if you are well too" view of the universe if Africa is to be saved from neo-colonialism and the concomitant degradation of women and the girl child.

African men should be receptive to new interpretations of reality and human nature in our rapidly globalising economic community. African men's awareness of and receptivity to new ideas and realities will assist them in transforming and transcending the stereotypical limitations and attitudinal distortions produced by their inherited and socially conditioned nature. In order to avoid complicity in the oppression of their fellow womenfolk, African men should be awoken to the subtle interplay between racism and neo-colonialism. In his doctoral thesis, Rafapa (2006: 15) advises that African leaders should adopt the Afrocentric Pan Africanist manifesto as a social programme. Es'kia Mphahlele, (cited in Rafapa, *Ibid.*), offers the following explanation of Pan Africanism:

Pan-Africanism is based on the belief in a bond between the Black peoples of Africa and the external areas to which the slaves were sent. It is a recognition that we are linked to this continent by a common ancestry and experience of oppression and slavery; of racism being used by Europe as a tool of economic self-enrichment. The Pan-African movement and the idea that gave birth to it came out of Black people's desire to rediscover and regain their identity and heritage, coupled with the desire to rid themselves of colonial rule (Rafapa, 2006: 15).

Rafapa insists that African leaders must implement the Pan-Africanist manifesto as a concretised political programme aimed at

the decolonisation of the mind, especially where cultural directions are concerned, and...renunciation of helpless, grovelling dependence on White leadership and patronage...the fight against poverty, disease, ignorance, made worse by political tyranny...collective active renunciation of [black] dictators... [and facing] the realities of independence (*Ibid.*).

African leaders' failure to implement the Pan-Africanist manifesto, leads to poverty, disease and ignorance; and, as this study has demonstrated, those who bear the brunt are the defenceless, vulnerable women and the girl child. Like their womenfolk, African men should think globally and act locally. African men should show their rejection of hyper-masculinity by respecting women's sexuality, conjugal and reproduction rights, negotiating birth control, assisting working mothers with household chores and child-rearing. African men should avoid the selective, self-serving interpretation of Muslim and Judeo-Christian scriptures; instead they should embrace the greatest of all

injunctions: love, support and protect their wives and children because, as the Latin saying goes, “amor vincit omnia”-love conquers all.

As indicated above, the bane of Africa’s troubles and the persistent multiple oppressions of women is lack of committed, visionary, transformative leadership as exemplified by Presidents Banda and Sirleaf. Patriarchy is a universal phenomenon. It is, therefore, advisable for women to form partnerships with various institutions and like-minded, androgynous men who have committed class and gender suicide. It will be worthwhile to join forces with institutions such as the Pan Africanist African Union, the United Nations Women, Presidents Banda and Sirleaf’s Market Women’s Fund. These institutions strive for the promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment in hithertofore male-dominated sectors, for example, education, health, security and peace-keeping, governance, agriculture and trade.

While thinking globally, women must act locally and start small achievable self-empowerment programmes and campaigns; for example, identification of child-headed families, providing for these children and ensuring that they attend school, prevention of drugs and substance abuse, offering recreation, hygiene and sexuality education to those children. Women should enter into partnerships with local community institutions such as churches, schools, stokvels, men and women’s clubs, local municipalities and traditional authorities. In partnership with these institutions, women should take the lead in the organisation and presentation of training workshops and seminars in order to educate women and girl children on pertinent issues and to advocate for women’s participation in finance, focusing on access to financial services and influence in decision-making positions in all sectors of society.

It is encouraging that the African Union and the United Nations have adopted the post-2015 vision or Agenda 2063 as Decades of Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment on the African continent. It is only through honest communication, commitment and Ubuntu that this vision will translate into the creation of a continent we can proudly call home, a continent truly liberated and redeemed from the stereotypical, misogynistic “dark-continent” stigma. In the words of the United Nations under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of United Nations Women, Mlambo-Ngcuka (in the “Sowetan”, 2015:13), together we must strike for

an Africa where gender equality and women empowerment are recognised as being important for all people, women and girls, men and boys [because] when women are empowered; their families and children are empowered;

their communities are empowered; their country is empowered, and their continent can flourish (“Sowetan”, 1,2015:13).

Lastly, education is the ultimate key to women’s development and empowerment. Indeed, it is only through what Buchi Emecheta calls the Big E or Education and financial independence that women and girl children will become less vulnerable to social ills such as prostitution, sexually transmitted diseases and infections, forced marriages and the “sugar daddy-blesser” syndrome. It is regrettable that, from the researcher’s personal experience as a teacher at both secondary and tertiary institutions, women’s self-empowerment through education is frustrated through the scourge of what has been called “one course, one blanket”. In other words, female students are forced into sexual relations with teachers and lecturers in exchange for either registration or higher grades. To curb this sexist abomination and the pervasive exploitation of women and the girl child, it is recommended that colleges and universities initiate community outreach programmes and conduct participatory action research projects in order to (a) establish the prevalence of male teachers’ or lecturers’ abuse of female learners and students, and (b) explore the feasibility of feminist bibliotherapy and introducing a rudimentary, compulsory Gender Studies or Life Orientation Programme with a more rigorous feminist bent.

To paraphrase Case (1993:10), albeit with a well-reasoned departure from his glorification of radical Marxist feminism, the researcher cannot conclude this last chapter without reiterating the most important rubric of this study. It is only through the positive transformation of gender relations, the acknowledgement and respect of the human rights of women and the girl child, their affirmation and negotiating for the recognition of their economic and social rights, that meaningful evolutionary change will be engendered in African communities. Despite their religious and ideological differences, Ousmane and Dangarembga have added invaluable voices to the African feminist project, both continentally and internationally.

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