

PATRIARCHY IN DANGAREMBGA AND MEDIE 'S SELECTED NOVELS:

A POST-COLONIAL EXPLORATION

by

MAGARET DIPOLELO MAKGOBA

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SUPERVISOR: Dr L. Masha

CO-SUPERVISOR: Dr M.R. Emsley

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DECLARATION

I, Makgoba Dipolelo Magaret, hereby declare that this dissertation, titled: **PATRIARCHY IN DANGAREMBGA AND MEDIE'S SELECTED NOVELS: A POST-COLONIAL EXPLORATION**, is the result of my own independent research and has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to any other institution for any academic award. All sources and materials used in this thesis have been acknowledged and referenced.



Date: 07 November 2024

Makgoba Dipolelo Magaret

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my late mother, Snocky Kgobe; my father, Simon Makgoba, and my son, Thatego Makgoba. The cherished memories I have of my mother's and my father's on-going support have been helpful in my journey, while my son continually inspires me to strive for excellence and make a positive impact in the world.

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ABSTRACT

Patriarchy remains a rooted system that shapes the lives of women in post-colonial Africa, preserving gender inequalities and constraining women's independence. For this reason, this study was prompted by a need to investigate how contemporary African literature reflects and critiques the impact of patriarchal structures facilitated by indigenous and colonial ideologies on women's lives. In particular, it sought to show how the intersectional identities of African women facilitate economic marginalisation, objectification and gender roles' socialisation, to name a few. Through a thematic analysis of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body* (2018) and Peace Adzo Medie's *His Only Wife* (2020), this study primarily examined the depictions of female experiences under the influence of patriarchal norms, both in public and private spheres by uncovering the ongoing struggles of females striving for agency and equality in the face of patriarchal structures. The study employed African Womanism and Intersectionality as theoretical frameworks to understand the layered aspects that contribute to the identified marginalisation of Black women. The findings of this study highlighted that in addition to indigenous and contemporary African philosophies of gender, colonial history continues to aggravate the shaping of gender dynamics in contemporary African societies, perpetuating inequality based on both gender and race. Fundamentally, this study revealed that Black women in post-colonial Africa face multiple layers of oppression, such as patriarchal dominance, economic marginalisation, cultural and social expectations, and educational and professional barriers. The general implication of these findings is that Black women should continue to strive for survival by building solidarity, which influences their opportunities for advancement and self-fulfilment.

Keywords: African Womanism, Intersectionality, Marginalisation, Patriarchy, Post-colonialism

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND AND CONCEPTUALISATION

1.1 Introduction

The impact of colonialism on the representation of women and gender inequality in post-colonial Africa has been a subject of extensive exploration in literary studies (Burrill, Roberts & Thornberry, 2010; Kubra, 2023). In many societies on the continent, the portrayal of women reflects a complex interplay between endemic values and the influence of Western ideals initially introduced through colonialism, to aggravate patriarchy. According to Jaiyeola and Aladegbola (2020:1), patriarchy has been evident across all domains (such as employment, resource accessibility, governance and domestic responsibilities), thereby limiting girls and women to marginalised lifestyles. As a result, their lives are often marked by restricted access to resources, diminished economic opportunities and a reduced capacity to influence decisions affecting them and their communities. This marginalisation perpetuates cycles of inequality and hinders the overall empowerment and social mobility of most females. Jaiyeola and Aladegbola's (ibid) comprehensive examination reveals the interface between colonial historical legacies and patriarchal norms, illuminating the ways in which historical power structures continue to shape and perpetuate gender disparities within the socio-cultural fabric of Nigeria. It is for this reason that, decolonial efforts ought to address and dismantle colonial patriarchal systems to achieve gender equality and social justice.

This study acknowledges that, in addition to the influence of colonial sexist ideology, gender inequality in Africa is preserved by deeply ingrained elements of indigenous African cultures. Chabaya, Rembe and Wadesango (2009) argue that in pre-colonial Zimbabwe, Shona people practised patrilineality, with men holding primary authority over family and societal resources, thus limiting women's access to power. Similarly,

Sefa-Nyarko and Afram (2019) highlight that in pre-colonial Ghana, the Ashanti social structure was male-dominated, with key leadership roles typically occupied by men, while women's roles, although significant, remained secondary. These cases have generally remained even post-colonialism. Consequently, Afisi (2010) highlights that to dismantle gender inequality in Africa; we must confront not only the remnants of colonial patriarchy, but also critically examine how indigenous cultures contribute to this complex issue. Such work prompts the engagement of conversations that acknowledge the layered influences shaping gender dynamics on the continent and inspire a more comprehensive approach to fostering equality.

Fiction by African women writers such as Zimbabwean Yvonne Vera and Ghanaian Ama Ata Aidoo, often serves as a powerful vehicle for expressing the diverse voices and experiences of African women, and challenging gendered stereotypes throughout different generations. These authors and many others, utilise their works to challenge and redefine societal norms of sex, examine gender roles, and expose the complexities of women's experiences in the aftermath of colonialism. Despite the constitutions of various independent African states affirming women's rights, African women continue to encounter disparities including the persistence of inadequate support systems for female education, coupled with employment conditions that fail to accommodate women's biological needs such as maternity issues (Johnson-Hanks, 2006). Thus, recognising women as the primary victims of patriarchy emphasises the necessity of framing gender theory within specific historical and cultural contexts. In response to this imperative, Womanisms as discussed by Nkealah (2006), have emerged as vital frameworks for understanding and addressing the unique challenges faced by African women. These theoretical perspectives reject a one-size-fits-all approach to the fight against gender inequality, emphasising the diversity of experiences and the need to decolonise gender discourse. African Womanism draws on African indigenous knowledge and values while challenging Western-centric perspectives of gender. In addition, this paradigm

contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of gender dynamics by centring the experiences and agency of African women and advancing an approach to dismantle patriarchal structures shaped by colonial legacies and oppressive traditional systems.

Through a thematic analysis of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body* (2018) and Peace Medie's *His Only Wife* (2020), this study critically examined patriarchy in post-colonial Africa in line with some of the aspects mentioned above, including patriarchy in familial relations and marriages, racial and gender biases in the workplace and gendered violence. By engaging with the works of African women novelists and scholars, this study sought to uncover the diverse narratives, perspectives and experiences of African women resulting mainly from their intersectional existence to emphasise their agency and contributions as far as entities of patriarchy and gender inequality are concerned. The chosen novels focus on Southern and West African contexts to acknowledge the diversity of experiences across the continent and recognise that literature from these regions can provide important insights into the unique challenges and strengths of African women in the post-colonial era.

1.2 Research Problem

Although the problem under study is well articulated, the subject of woman oppression is explored by many scholars each bringing a new or different point of view. Because of the latter, this became a sensitive subject which requires thorough reading and sometimes a specialist in an area. One of the studies that contribute to this discourse is that of Dogo (2014), which examines the role of patriarchy and colonisation in perpetuating gender inequality in Africa. African women in the present socio-political and economic milieu are confronted with a myriad of challenges propagated by patriarchal systems such as toxic gender ideologies often resulting in female marginalisation and executed through biased

cultural practices. All these can have profound effects on the physical and psychological well-being of females and their overall quality of life.

Scholars such as Inyabri, Offong and Mensah (2022) contribute to the framing of the current study's research problem, which emphasises the urgency of investigating the continued suppression and marginalisation of Black women attributed to their intersectionality as depicted in post-colonial African women's writing. This current study, therefore, aims to address this empirical gap by examining how the selected literary texts depict the experiences and struggles of women in post-colonial Africa as they navigate life through the intersections of their race as Black individuals, their gender as women, and their status as members of marginalised social and economic classes. In doing so, this exploration also contests the misrepresentations found in colonial narratives, advocating a more accurate rediscovery of the varied roles women occupied in pre-colonial African societies.

1.3 Role of Theory

In line with Kawulich's (2009) assertion that a theory is a principle or set of principles provided to clarify a phenomenon, this study employs Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi's African Womanism and Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality as theoretical lenses to examine the literature. In 1985, Ogunyemi presented the term 'Womanism' as a framework to articulate and examine the unique experiences of African women within the context of literature however, in subsequent developments during the 1990s, the theorist refined and re-contextualised her perspective by incorporating the modifier 'African.' This addition explicitly emphasised the cultural specificity and intersectionality inherent in the experiences of African women, extending beyond a generic Womanist framework (McGuffey, 2013). In addition to Ogunyemi's African Womanism, the concept of intersectionality, as proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, was also adopted in this study as a crucial framework for understanding the multi-layered experiences of African women. Intersectionality

acknowledges that individuals experience overlapping and intersecting forms of oppression and discrimination based on factors such as race, gender, class, and sexuality (Crenshaw, 2013). By considering these intersecting identities and social categories, Crenshaw's framework enhanced this research's understanding of the complexities of African women's lives and experiences, particularly within the context of patriarchal systems and gender inequality.

Phillips (2006) supports Ogunyemi's view that Black women's race differentiates them from white feminists because they have experienced the past and present subjugation of the black population along with present-day subtle (or not so subtle) control exercised over them by the alien Western culture. Given this context, African Womanism is a suitable theoretical framework for the current study because in line with the selected novels and research objectives, the theory is centred on the experiences of African women considering their cultural heritage, socio-economic context, and racial identity. This relevance is extensively discussed in Chapter Two of this study to show how African Womanism and Intersectionality serve as relevant theoretical lenses with which to analyse the experiences of females in post-colonial Africa.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

1.4.1 Aim

To explore the patriarchal powers that affect African women in post-colonial Africa through an analysis of Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body* (2018) and Medie's *His Only Wife* (2020).

1.4.2 Objectives

- 1.4.2.1 To explore the intersection of gender, race, and class in the representation of women in post-colonial Africa.
- 1.4.2.2 To analyse the portrayal of women agency against patriarchy and gender inequality in the selected African literary texts.
- 1.4.2.3 To propose progressive philosophies of eradicating oppressive patriarchal

forces.

1.5 Research Methodology

The current research adopted a qualitative approach particularly for its suitability in the examination of post-colonial novels to unravel the details of patriarchy, with a specific focus on understanding the experiences of Black women in the given context. The primary aim of qualitative research is to gather and examine non-numerical, descriptive data to gain understanding into people's attitudes, beliefs, and motivations regarding their social reality (Apuke, 2017). Thus, the choice of the qualitative research approach was influenced by the need to facilitate a detailed examination of how patriarchal norms intersect with post-colonial realities to influence women's lives, perspectives, and agency.

1.5.1 Research Design

Guided by its qualitative approach, this study adopted an explorative research design. Exploratory research seeks to uncover new ideas by investigating topics with an open-ended approach (Swedberg, 2020). It was particularly relevant to this study of patriarchy in the selected literary texts because it allows for a deeper exploration of how patriarchal structures shape the characters' experiences in post-colonial African societies. Through this research, new perspectives on gender roles, societal expectations, and the impact of patriarchy on women's identities and autonomy could be generated, offering a fresh understanding of the themes in both novels.

1.5.2 Sampling

The sampling strategy adopted in this study was purposive sampling, which is known as the intentional selection of data based on their capacity to clarify a certain theme, concept, or phenomenon (Mallillin & Castillo 2016). The primary sample for this study is Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body* (2018) and Medie's *His Only Wife* (2020). The novels are both written in the 21st century; thus, they help examine the

representation of women in post-colonial Africa. Dangarembga's novel, known for its incisive examination of the post-independence struggle and its impact on Zimbabwean women, provides a detailed portrayal of the complexities of navigating societal expectations and personal aspirations. Likewise, Medie's novel offers a fresh and contemporary exploration of gender dynamics within the context of modern Ghana, probing issues of love, marriage and agency primarily through the lens of its female protagonist.

1.5.3 Data Collection

Data for the current study were collected through a close reading, in-depth analysis and interpretation of the selected novels. In addition, an analysis and interrogation of secondary reading material in the form of critical texts sourced from internet journal articles, libraries and archives was adopted to allow for a richer and more detailed exploration of the themes and concepts present in the novels, while also contextualising and strengthening the findings with existing academic knowledge and perspectives from relevant literature.

1.5.4 Data analysis

With a focus on exploring and interpreting patriarchal phenomena impacting women in post-colonial contexts, this study adopted thematic analysis, which is a qualitative data analysis technique that involves carefully reviewing a dataset and identifying patterns in the meaning of the data to analyse themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

1.5.5 Quality Criteria

In the pursuit of rigorous and reliable research, the study at hand adhered to established criteria that enhanced the quality and trustworthiness of its findings. The foundational elements of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability

respectively, were paramount in ensuring the robustness of this research.

1.5.5.1 Credibility

According to Cameron (2011), credibility is an assessment of how closely the findings of a study correspond to reality. Thus, in this study, credibility was achieved by comparing perspectives from the novels by Dangarembga (2018) and Medie (2020) with relevant scholarly sources from various fields, ensuring a comprehensive examination of themes and concepts to validate the findings through multiple perspectives.

1.5.5.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which research findings can be applicable or relevant to other contexts or settings beyond the specific study (Shenton, 2004). This can be achieved by providing a detailed description of the research context, sampling strategy and data analysis procedures. As depicted in this study, some of the findings are applicable to other African contexts, as they share social and political histories owing to similar colonial and cultural histories. Thus, this allows other researchers to assess the applicability of the current study's findings to similar contexts.

1.5.5.3 Dependability

Pandey and Patnaik (2014) explain dependability as a technique that shows the repeatability of a study, in the same condition or circumstance and same methods to yield similar results in the end. To ensure this, this study documented all the research decisions, methods, and data analysis procedures, allowing for the research to be replicated and verified.

1.5.5.4 Confirmability

According to Franklin and Ballan (2001), confirmability entails maintaining a data audit trail, which includes raw data, memoranda, notes, data reduction, and analysis to ensure that the findings and conclusions of the study are grounded in the data and not influenced by researcher bias or subjectivity. To uphold these criteria, this study's proposal was presented at the Departmental level, assessed by the School and Faculty boards and lastly, the completed work is to be thoroughly examined both within and outside the institution registered at.

1.6 Significance of the study

The significance of studying patriarchal structures in the representation of women in post-colonial Africa through the exploration of African literary texts lies in the study's contribution to a deeper understanding of gender dynamics, power structures and cultural complexities within this milieu. Such research enriches existing studies by uncovering diverse narratives and challenging stereotypes, developing a more comprehensive understanding of the compound realities shaping women's roles and experiences, especially in the Southern and West African contexts. In particular, this study extends to the broader field of gender studies by providing a rich source of empirical evidence and theoretical perspective that contribute to the understanding of gender dynamics that are facilitated by intersectional identities of Black women in the post-colonial contexts depicted in the selected prose. Through the examination of the selected literary texts, the current study further challenges essentialist notions of masculinity and femininity by interrogating dominant narratives such as the domestication of females as natural, amplifying marginalised voices, advancing African female-centred theoretical perspectives and most importantly, informing social change characterised by a non-discriminatory and open society.

In essence, this study seeks to disrupt prevailing narratives by centralising the experiences of Black women and amplifying their voices within the broader gender discourse, as depicted in Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body* and Medie's *His Only Wife*.

1.7 Ethical Considerations

Given that the current study is primarily a close reading of fiction, it is non-invasive and does not necessitate ethical considerations regarding human or animal harm. Despite this exemption, the researcher is committed to upholding ethical principles in the current study. For one thing, the proposal was submitted to the Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) for endorsement prior to carrying out the study. The analysis avoids reductionist or stereotypical interpretations that could perpetuate harmful narratives about African women by adopting an objective stance. This commitment aligns with the principles of responsible research and community engagement, as underscored by Parmar (2004), particularly in the context of resistance and activism. Furthermore, the research adheres to the standards of intellectual property by citing and referencing all academic sources used in the study and to guard against plagiarism, the complete study was taken through Turn-it-in to check similarity index.

1.8 Definition of Key Concepts

The following concepts are frequently referenced throughout the study; thus, providing their clear definitions is important to ensure a specific context in relation to the current work.

1.8.1 African(s)

This refers to varied ethnic groups of people and ideologies that have inhabited what is now known as the African continent for centuries, predating external influences and colonial histories. Chimakonam and Egbai (2024) argue that the designation of

“Africa” and the identification of its people as “Africans” are colonial constructs imposed on the continent and its inhabitants. For this reason, the concept Africa and its people have come to be understood as relating to the categorisation of non-European people. Be that as it may, contemporary studies claim that African identity has nothing to do with race, but such views are not part of this study’s scope. Following the colonial invention of Africa, there have been Othering ways in which the continent and its peoples are perceived and understood, both within and beyond its borders. In summation, African people share historical experiences shaped by colonisation, struggles for independence and ongoing efforts for socio-economic development.

1.8.2 Culture

According to Idang (2015:98),

Culture, as it is usually understood, entails a totality of traits and characters that are peculiar to a people to the extent that it marks them out from other people or societies. These peculiar traits go on to include the people’s language, dressing, music, work, arts, religion, dancing and so on. It also goes on to include a people’s social norms, taboos and values. Values here are to be understood as beliefs that are held about what is right and wrong and what is important in life.

In various societies, individuals harbour distinct behavioural norms and specific emotional responses that researchers attribute to acquired knowledge over the course of their lives. This is why some scholars consider culture to be a product of acquired habits. Sideris (2004) emphasises how dominant cultural norms also dictate the roles and behaviours expected of women in any given African context. As such, culture can create norms which profoundly impact women by reinforcing discriminatory practices, limiting their autonomy, and perpetuating gender-based violence. Considering this, positive cultural practices have the potential to support women’s rights, celebrate their achievements and provide frameworks for their protection and empowerment.

1.8.3 Colonialism

As defined by Ashcroft (2012), colonialism is a prevalent type of cultural exploitation that emerged during the expansion of Europe over the past four centuries. The term 'colony' is derived from the Latin word *colonus* signifying a small farm, and its origin lies in the historical practice of occupying and cultivating land. The imposition of European colonial rule intensified and introduced patriarchal systems that marginalised colonised women (Chuku, 2018). Ypi (2013) supports that the colonial era, driven by exploitative motives and a disregard for local cultures and traditions significantly reshaped the roles and status of women on the African continent. The economic, social, and psychological repercussions of colonial policies continue to shape the experiences of African women today.

1.8.3.1 Post-colonialism

Post-colonialism is the period following the end of formal colonial rule. It involves the processes of decolonisation, the establishment of independent nation-states, and the ongoing effects of colonial legacies on these newly formed countries (Bhabha, 2023). In this regard, Mondal (2014: 2965) asserts that:

To give expression to colonised experience, postcolonial writers sought to undercut thematically and formally the discourses which supported colonisation—the myths of power, the race classifications, the imagery of subordination.

Similarly, Coly (2015) discusses how colonial legacies may have left enduring imprints on societal perceptions of African womanhood, influencing how women are portrayed and how their bodies are politicised. In the post-colonial era, efforts are taken to decolonise and indigenise focus on reclaiming cultural identity and renegotiating power dynamics that were imposed during colonial rule. These processes involve a re-evaluation of cultural values and recognition of the diverse roles that women and marginalised groups played in pre-colonial societies, highlighting the importance of understanding historical contexts to navigate

contemporary challenges.

1.8.3.2 Pre-colonialism

This is the time before the establishment of colonial rule in a particular region. It encompasses the indigenous social cultures and political systems that existed before external powers exerted control. Ogbomo (2005) points out how pre-colonial gender dynamics were in many indigenous African societies wherein, women mostly held significant, positive roles such as queen mothers and regents, and in religion as prophets, diviners and rainmakers. Overall, the positive influence of women in diverse roles within indigenous African societies, as highlighted by Ogbomo (ibid), emphasises the importance of inclusivity, diversity, and the recognition of individual capabilities regardless of gender in pre-colonial Africa. While pre-colonial African societies were often defined by gender fluidity and inclusivity, a variant of sexism existed during this period (Afisi, 2010). This duality is crucial for understanding the realities of gender relations in pre-colonial Africa, where both empowerment and discrimination coexisted.

1.8.4 Femininities

According to Budgeon (2014:7), gender research has evolved to recognise a multitude of femininities that arise from specific socio-historical contexts and emphasised that femininity can be defined as a social construct prescribing traits traditionally associated with being female, such as nurturing, empathy and submissiveness. Greig (2009) further illuminates those often-toxic intersections among these gender roles, accentuating how they contribute to the perpetuation of violence against women. The enactment of emphasised femininity occurs within the framework of the social structure, particularly evident in everyday interactions shaped by cultural norms. These norms often reinforce an understanding of gender, where femininity and masculinity are constructed as opposing categories. This study reflects on the impact of emphasised femininity on the safety and well-being of women and girls with the intention to dismantle harmful feminine traits and promote

healthier, more equitable relationships.

1.8.5 Gender roles

According to De Jong (2000), gender roles are societal expectations and norms that define the behaviours, responsibilities and opportunities assigned to individuals based on their perceived gender. These roles are deeply ingrained in cultural and social structures, influencing personal identities and interpersonal relationships. For instance, Kiptot (2015:12) asserts that:

Women are mainly responsible for their household's needs for food and fuel. In contrast, men are the main bread winners and therefore often engage in high-value activities such as timber production that earn income to support their families. As a result, men's and women's priorities and preferences for tree species choices stem from their roles and responsibilities.

This differentiation is an example of how traditional gender roles shape the economic and social activities of individuals, reinforcing the need to consider the diverse and complex ways both men and women engage in and influence their communities. However, the complexity of gender roles extends far beyond economic responsibilities, as they also encompass social, emotional, and political spheres, as illustrated in Medie's *His Only Wife* and Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body*.

1.8.6 Intersectionality

According to Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality is the interconnected nature of how social categorisations like race, class and gender interact and shape individuals' experiences and social inequalities. Understanding the intersectionality of black females in this study is crucial for acknowledging their diverse and layered experiences across different contexts. For instance, women from marginalised ethnic or socioeconomic backgrounds may face compounded challenges, as they navigate both patriarchal structures and the legacies of colonialism. Conversely, women in more privileged positions may experience different facets of patriarchy, often manifested in subtler forms.

1.8.7 Masculinities

Ratele (2008) discusses various forms of masculinities, attributing their diversity not only to the prevailing notions of masculinity within a given context—typically encompassing dominant, subordinate, and complicit expressions—but also to the significance of viewing males as subjects influenced by gender, ethnicity, race, and political affiliation, alongside other social-psychological categorisations. Hegemonic masculinity as defined in Greig's (2009) work encompasses the cultural expectations and roles associated with being male and often emphasises traits such as dominance, aggression, and emotional suppression. Such rigid expectations placed on men, contribute to power imbalances, shaping interpersonal dynamics and potentially hindering the establishment of more egalitarian relationships between individuals of different genders.

1.8.8 Patriarchy

This social system is defined by male dominance, where men hold elevated status relative to women. The concept of patriarchy, as added by Ademiluka (2018), involves a societal structure in which men exert dominance and control over females as well as subordinate males. In a patriarchal world, men wield social power within key societal structures, leaving women with limited access to such realms. In addition, patriarchal systems contribute to the perpetuation of gender-based abuses and inequalities.

1.8.9 Sexism

Guillaumin (2002) explains sexism as a system of discrimination or prejudice based on an individual's sex, usually favouring one over the other. Rooted in historical, cultural and socio-economic factors, sexism manifests as pervasive gender-based discrimination against African women. According to Bawa (2019), this form of discrimination may manifest itself through the subjugation of women in both traditional and religious spheres, impacting their access to education, economic opportunities and social empowerment. The impact of sexism extends beyond

individual experiences to impede collective progress, hindering the potential for inclusive development.

1.8.10 Women agency

Donald et al. (2020) assert that women's agency is their capacity to establish and pursue objectives, make meaningful decisions, and engage actively in economic and public spheres. Women's agency in post-colonial Africa holds immense significance, as it serves as a catalyst for transformative change across various societal domains. Beyond promoting gender equality, such agency contributes to economic development by enabling women to actively participate in the workforce and entrepreneurial activities. Additionally, increased women's agency translates into improved political representation, leading to policies that address gender-specific issues and contribute to related transformations.

1.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has established the background and conceptual framework for understanding patriarchy in post-colonial Africa. By defining key concepts, outlining the study's purpose, and discussing relevant theoretical approaches, it has provided a foundation for examining gender dynamics and the intersection of colonial and indigenous patriarchal structures. The discussions in the following chapters will build on these aspects to analyse how these frameworks help in understanding the broader implications of patriarchy in contemporary African society.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

Theoretical frameworks serve as conceptual underpinnings that guide research by providing a structured lens through which phenomena are analysed and interpreted (Lederman & Lederman 2015). In essence, theories enhance the consistency and coherence of research, contributing to an understanding of the compound dynamics involved. In post-colonial African research, where the impact of colonialism on societies' cultures and identities are explored, a well-defined Afrocentric theoretical framework is essential. Adigun, Ashcroft, and Griffiths (2019) emphasise the relevance of African-centred theory to post-colonial studies by providing perspective into different ways in which colonial legacies impact African literary expression.

This study was a critical exploration of the historical and cultural contexts that shape post-colonial narratives of gender inequality in societies depicted in the selected novels, emphasising the importance of diverse African perspectives in challenging patriarchal Western-centric and oppressive African indigenous ideologies. To underpin this research, Okonjo Ogunyemi's African Womanism and Kimberle Crenshaw's Intersectionality are employed to decipher the social structures and power imbalances that govern the lives of characters within the post-colonial settings depicted in Dangarembga and Medie's selected novels. Although one theorist is by birth African and the other African American, Ogunyemi (1985) asserts that despite the factors that set them apart, African and Afro-American female writers exhibit similar aesthetic attitudes. That, they form a distinct group from white feminists due to their shared historical experiences and contemporary subjugation of the black community. For these reasons, the selected theories resonate as powerful and inclusive philosophies that not only address immediate concerns of Black women, but also recognise the global context of oppression in the broader black community.

The current chapter extensively discusses the role of theory in this study, as briefly highlighted in the previous chapter. Firstly, this chapter outlines the development of African Womanism and Intersectionality by explaining the historical and cultural backdrop that gave rise to these theories. The discussion on Intersectionality is a critical framework for understanding how various identities such as race, gender and class intersect to shape the unique experiences of Black women. Thereafter, the discussion moves to the conceptual fundamentals of the African Womanist theory, which include the collective well-being of the black community and the prioritisation of indigenous African cultural values. By juxtaposing African Womanism and Intersectionality, the chapter provides an understanding of their theoretical foundations and practical implications, illustrating how they collectively contribute to the broader discourse on gender and social justice in Africa.

2.2 Emergence of African Womanism and Intersectionality

2.2.1 African Womanism

In 1985, Ogunyemi proposed Womanism as a pivotal term to characterise the unique experiences of African women in literature, defining it as a theoretical framework and social movement that centres the experiences, struggles, and cultural heritage of African women. This perspective emerged as a response to the limitations found in most Western feminist theories, which tend to overlook certain aspects that shape the lives of African women. According to Ogunyemi (1985:64),

More often than not, where a white woman writer may be a feminist, a black woman writer is likely to be a 'womanist'. That is, she will recognise that, along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic, and political considerations into her philosophy.

In addition to the above-mentioned, Womanism is a necessary shift, offering a philosophy that not only acknowledges and celebrates African heritage, cultural values and traditions, but also upholds the fundamental principles of black existence, providing an equitable portrayal of womanhood (Ogunyemi 1985).

The 1990s revision of Ogunyemi's theorisation to African Womanism emphasised her identity as an African individual and her understanding of the distinctive features between Black women in Africa and those in the diaspora, especially fellow Womanists such as Alice Walker and Hudson-Weems. Additionally, Ogunyemi (1996:114) opines that because feminism and African American Womanism fail to consider the unique aspects of African experiences, it is essential to define African Womanism. Thus, by incorporating the term 'African', Ogunyemi emphasises the need to centre the discourse on the geographical context explicitly. This revision marked a significant development, aligning her theory more closely with the cultural differences and specificities of African women's lives, further enriching the relevance and applicability of her thesis within the broader context of gender studies and literary analysis. Furthermore, the renaming of this framework to African Womanism, as highlighted by Okafor (2020), emphasises the importance of recognising and respecting the unique socio-cultural contexts of Black women, contributing to diverse experiences and perspectives of Black women and authentic feminist ideology. In an interview with Arndt (2000:714), Ogunyemi asserts that she refined her concept to African Womanism to better address issues such as "extreme poverty and in-law problems, older women oppressing younger women, women oppressing their co-wives, or men oppressing their wives and religion".

2.2.2 Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a vital conceptual framework popularised by Kimberlé Crenshaw's work in 1989, which aims to explain the complex web of social identities and

recognise the intersecting nature of oppression. It becomes particularly crucial when examining the experiences of Black women, whose lives are shaped not only by gender but also by race, class and other factors all at the same time. Crenshaw (1991:3) avers that:

African-American women by virtue of our race and gender are situated within at least two systems of subordination: racism and sexism. This dual vulnerability does not simply mean that our burdens are doubled but instead, that the dynamics of racism and sexism intersect in our lives to create experiences that are sometimes unique to us. In other words, our experiences of racism are shaped by our gender and our experiences of sexism are often shaped by our race.

This philosophy is thus concerned with how various identities of Black women intersect with one another and overlap. The historical significance of Black women and Black feminism in the development of Intersectionality theory raises concerns about the applicability of this analytical tool in addressing diverse marginalised communities and various forms of social power (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013). African women, given their diverse identities, necessitate a distinct theoretical framework that incorporates and addresses the interconnected systems of oppression in the complications of their experiences. In this way, this perspective offers a pathway towards dismantling the enduring legacies of colonialism within the broader social structures by centring on the interconnected systems of oppression, and by addressing patriarchal norms in the post-colonial milieu.

Together, Intersectionality and African Womanism interconnect by emphasising the nature of oppression and advocating for the collective empowerment of marginalised groups. Both frameworks support this study by recognising the intersection of race, gender, and socio-economic factors, promoting unity and the dismantling of systemic barriers, and fostering an inclusive environment that respects and uplifts the agency

of both Black women and men in post-colonial African societies. African Womanism, as elucidated by Ogunyemi (1985), serves as a socio-political framework that acknowledges the interconnected nature of various systems of oppression and identity markers. Rather than treating these factors in isolation, African Womanism emphasises the intersectionality of these experiences and identities, acknowledging that they mutually shape and reinforce each other. In this context, the approach that treats these factors as separate and independent fails to capture the complexity of African women's experiences as it overlooks the ways in which multiple forms of oppression intersect and compound to shape their lived reality. Thus, this study emphasises the importance of addressing these intersecting oppressions collectively to achieve meaningful social change and liberation for African women.

2.3 Conceptual Fundamentals

The conceptual fundamentals of African Womanism which distinguish it from mainstream feminist theories are grounded in African cultural values and perspectives which seek to address the unique experiences and struggles of African women. By incorporating the principle of intersectionality, the theory offers an all-inclusive approach to understanding how various social identities and oppressions interconnect and impact African women's lives.

2.3.1 Collective Black Unity

Guided by the African communitarianism ideology of philosophies such as *ubuntu*, Ogunyemi's (1985) theorisation emphasises black unity by envisioning a community where each individual holds power wherein, the concern is not only with the black sexual power struggle but also with the world power structure that subjugates the black populace. In an interview with Arndt (2000), Ogunyemi emphasises that African men also face oppression within a global context; however, the theorist notes that while that is the case, some African men in turn, oppress Black women at home.

In other words, African Womanism seeks not just to uplift Black women but to instigate a comprehensive societal shift, addressing systemic issues and promoting unity as well as equity between males and females. This overarching goal involves challenging individual attitudes and dismantling structural barriers that contribute to inequality. Ogunyemi (1985:72) emphasises that:

Its ideal is for black unity where every black person has a modicum of power and so can be a 'brother' or a 'sister' or a 'father' or a 'mother' to the other. This philosophy has a mandalic core: its aim is the dynamism of wholeness and self-healing that one sees in the positive, integrative endings of womanist novels

This ideal promotes collective empowerment, promoting a sense of community and solidarity among black individuals especially given the predominant claim that Eurocentric feminisms are separatist. By emphasising roles such as 'brother,' 'sister,' 'father,' and 'mother,' African Womanism points out the importance of mutual support and shared responsibility, which are pivotal in achieving unity and self-healing, as reflected in the positive and integrative conclusions of Womanist novels. Therefore, African Womanism is relevant for the current study because it advocates a power structure where every black person can contribute to and benefit from a shared sense of empowerment. Womanist novelist Buchi Emecheta accentuates the value of positive and harmonious relationships between men and women by rejecting the notion that advocating for gender equality necessitates the rejection of the institution of marriage. Instead, the writer promotes the idea that healthy and equitable partnerships can exist within the framework of marriage, contributing to the overall well-being of individuals and the community (Imaya, 2002). This involves not only addressing surface-level issues but also delving into the root causes embedded in societal structures.

Thus, this aspect of African Womanism calls for a collective effort to break down deeply ingrained systemic barriers which transcend traditional gender roles, encouraging an environment where the unity of Black men and women can thrive. In this way, the framework serves as a catalyst for transformative change, prompting a re-evaluation of societal norms and a concerted effort to create a more equitable and united community which values diversity and respects the agency of every member.

2.3.2 Racial-sexual Resilience

African women face multiple challenges rooted in both their sex and race, which intersect to create unique forms of oppression. Moore (2012) highlights that Black women, particularly those in sexual minority groups, navigate a complex landscape of social identities, often placing their racial identity at the forefront due to the pervasive nature of racism that they encounter from a young age. These intersecting oppressions create a unique set of challenges for African women, making it difficult for them to separate their experiences of sexism from racism. It is for these reasons that African Womanism became relevant in understanding these challenges as it provides a framework that not only acknowledges the dual oppression faced by Black women but also emphasises their resilience (Ogunyemi, 1985).

In a world where societal structures often privilege certain racial identities while rendering others invisible, the impact of race on individuals' experiences is frequently overlooked by those who benefit from these privileges and by systems that fail to acknowledge or address the pervasive nature of racial inequities. For example, Salane (2018) suggests that white individuals often fail to recognise the influence of race on their lived experiences, opportunities and perceptions primarily because societal structures inherently favour their racial identity, thus making instances of racial discrimination less apparent to them. This phenomenon points out the concept of white privilege, wherein the advantages afforded to white people within systems of

power and social hierarchies often shield them from the pervasive impacts of racism, in this case, white women. Their experiences are typically not marked by the same systemic barriers, prejudices, and micro aggressions faced by racial minorities. As such, they may struggle to empathise with the challenges and injustices faced by those from marginalised racial backgrounds. This limitation perpetuates a cycle wherein the voices and experiences of minority groups are side-lined or invalidated, reinforcing the invisibility of racial discrimination within predominantly Eurocentric spaces.

The enduring impacts of historical and colonial legacies continue to fuel racial hierarchies and power imbalances, pervasive social stereotypes, and overarching systemic injustices. These factors shape the distinctive challenges encountered by Black women within the context of systemic racism and sexism, as articulated by wa Thiong'o (1986). Across generations, the echoes of colonial domination reverberate, leaving behind entrenched biases and discriminatory practices that permeate societal structures. Addressing social disparities in South Africa, Badat (2008) emphasises the ingrained inequalities resulting from the systematic exclusion and marginalisation of Black women during colonialism and apartheid. The impact of colonialism on Black women is a profound and interconnected experience, as Burton (2000) notes in the British colonial context. The historical legacy of the British Empire continues to influence the lived experiences of Black women, establishing racial hierarchies and patriarchal structures.

Understanding and acknowledging the role of intersecting identities, such as race and gender, in shaping societal dynamics is imperative for fostering genuine inclusivity and dismantling systemic inequities. Ogunyemi (1985:33) asserts that:

The politics of the womanist is unique in its racial-sexual ramifications; it is more complex than white sexual politics, for it addresses more directly the

ultimate question relating to power: how do we share equitably the world's wealth and concomitant power among the races and between the sexes.

This approach emphasises the importance of addressing both racial and gender inequalities in the pursuit of a fair distribution of resources and power. It underlines the necessity of considering multiple intersecting oppressions to achieve true equity. Based on Ogunyemi (1996), the apparent reverence can be overshadowed by the troubling trope of colonialism as rape, which unveils the exploitation and violation of women's bodies within power structures. This troubling trope reveals how power structures exploit and violate women's bodies, reducing them to objects of control and domination. The colonial rape metaphor emphasises the intersection of gender and imperial power, pointing out the pervasive and violent imposition of control over women, which reflects broader patterns of exploitation and subjugation in patriarchal societies. In this narrative, the sexually active wife becomes the likely target of colonial aggression, representing a conquest of both land and female sexuality.

The analysis provided by Crenshaw (2013) reveals that if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. This intersectional perspective unveils the complexity of their experiences, recognising that Black women may encounter discrimination that is distinct from that faced by either white women or Black men alone. This insight emphasises the importance of understanding and addressing the intersecting dynamics of race and sex to effectively combat discrimination and promote equity and justice for Black women. By addressing these intersections head-on, we can create a more inclusive and empowering environment that allows women of colour to assertively confront and combat sexual abuse.

The discourse surrounding racial and sexual dynamics, as highlighted by the aforementioned scholars, emphasises the pervasive influence of societal structures in shaping experiences. The intersectionality of racism and sexism, particularly as

articulated within Womanist frameworks, highlights the difficulties faced by Black women in navigating power structures. African Womanism is well-suited for addressing these challenges, as it specifically focuses on the experiences of African women, considering both their racial and gender identities. Thus, a concerted effort to confront the interconnected dynamics of race, gender, and power is essential for creating a more just and equitable world for all.

2.3.3 Black heritage philosophies

Cultural identity stands as the bedrock of individuality, conveying the diverse array of experiences, beliefs and traditions that mould one's sense of self. African heritage encompasses the rich cultural, historical and social traditions originating from the African continent. As part of decolonial discourse, the advocacy for appropriation and celebration of black heritages is significant for African Womanism. According to Witte (2019), African heritage plays a crucial role in Dutch colonial history and contributes to the narrative of Blackness within Dutch nationhood. African heritage, therefore, signifies a deep connection to African roots and identity, influencing contemporary discourses on race, culture, and national belonging. Within the realm of African womanist thought, the preservation and celebration of Black heritage and tradition carry profound significance in recognising the unique challenges and triumphs of African women. Ogunyemi (1985) asserts that African and Afro-American women stand apart from white feminists due to their racial identity, having endured historical and contemporary oppression within the black community, as well as enduring the subtle or overt influence of Western culture. Therefore, it is imperative for Africans to embrace and preserve their cultural identity in order to comprehend the experiences of Black women fully. By scrutinising the relationship between cultural heritage, societal norms, and individual agency, this current work uncovers the transformative potential of embracing ancestral wisdom and nurturing collective resilience. Phillips (2006) examines African Womanism, as articulated by Chikwenye

Okonjo Ogunyemi, as a theoretical framework that focuses on the experiences and challenges faced by African women, setting it apart from Western feminism. This framework is deeply embedded in African cultural contexts and is dedicated to addressing the interconnections between race, class, and gender, with a particular emphasis on the roles of family and community. In navigating the complexities of contemporary existence, African womanist perspectives offer vital perception into the enduring resilience and vibrancy of African cultural identity, serving as a beacon of empowerment and solidarity for women across generations.

Black heritage philosophies are deeply rooted in the shared history of subjugation and oppression experienced by Black communities, both directly through systemic racism and indirectly through the internalisation of white values and cultural norms (Chapman-Hilliard & Adams-Bass 2016). This heritage, characterised by a continuous struggle against injustice, has profoundly shaped the identity and experiences of modern black life. As Ogunyemi aptly points out that:

The common black heritage of subjugation by whites, both directly and by the introjection of white values and mores, has determined the nature of modern black life, which S.E. Ogude rightly recognises as a living tradition of suffering and humiliation. To generate public awareness and understanding of this central fact through the writing of stories that are tellingly appropriate and instructive is the black woman writer's first concern (1985:65).

In light of this context, the role of Black women writers becomes crucial. They bear the responsibility of generating public awareness and encouraging understanding of these harsh realities through their storytelling. By crafting narratives that are both appropriate and instructive, they aim to illuminate the pervasive injustices faced by black communities and to preserve the rich cultural heritage and resilience that have emerged from these struggles. Through their work, Black women writers not only

document the ongoing challenges but also inspire resistance and hope, ensuring that the stories of suffering and triumph are passed down to future generations.

2.3.4 Economic Empowerment

In navigating economic issues, African Womanism embraces an intersectional perspective that recognises the inseparable link between economic disparities and race-sex injustices by acknowledging that women of African descent often face compounded challenges due to both gender and racial biases. One of the primary causes was the deep-seated colonial division in educational opportunities between males and females. Matokatoka and Odeku (2020) attribute this phenomenon to entrenched patriarchal norms, which dictated that females were inherently inferior to males, thereby justifying their exclusion from educational and employment opportunities. Consequently, women faced systemic barriers to economic independence and professional advancement, perpetuating cycles of gender discrimination and socio-economic marginalisation. Ogunyemi (1996) emphasises this inequality by revealing how males received preferential treatment in accessing Western education which is crucial for participation in Western-style literary endeavours, leading to the inevitable silence of women in the literary sphere. Moreover, this reinforced their exclusion from lucrative sectors and perpetuated cycles of financial dependence and inequality within most colonial African societies.

The colonial or post-colonial overdetermines women's already native, slavish position by further enslaving her, controlling her very life and economic from a distance she cannot traverse geographically or psychically (Ogunyemi, 1996:8)

The dehumanising impact of oppressive systems has perpetuated stereotypes depicting Black women as inherently suited to servile roles within households, as observed by Moussié and Alfes (2018). These stereotypes stem from historical

narratives that have positioned Black women as subservient and inferior, reinforcing the idea that their labour is less valuable. Black women have historically been relegated to low-wage caregiving and domestic work due to limited access to higher-paying employment opportunities attributed to racial discrimination (Yearby, 2020). As a result, Black African women continue to experience economic inequalities rooted in the historical legacies of intersectional marginalisation, perpetuating cycles of oppression and disadvantage.

According to Ogunyemi (1996), the post-colonial system in Africa, has reinforced cycles of gender discrimination and economic exploitation. Moreover, as wa Thiong'o (1986) and Badat (2008) assert, historical legacies intersect with broader systemic issues, exacerbating racial and gender disparities faced by Black women. Recognising and addressing these intersecting challenges is crucial for promoting gender equality and dismantling systemic injustices within post-colonial societies. Therefore, a concerted effort to challenge patriarchal attitudes, confront racial hierarchies, and address systemic inequalities is essential for development of inclusive and equitable economic opportunities for Black African women.

2.3.5 Nationalism and Political Agency

African Womanism acknowledges the unique socio-political context of African women, providing a vital platform for articulating their experiences and advancing their political agendas within broader feminist discourse. For this reason, the theory facilitates a deeper understanding of the political landscapes in Zimbabwe and Ghana and contributes to more effective strategies for addressing gender inequality and advancing women's rights. To fully understand the complexities of the female characters depicted in Medie's *His Only Wife* and Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body*, it is essential to delve into the contextual circumstances of their respective nationalities, which are characterised by their societal, cultural, and political

landscapes against which their stories unfold. The integration of understanding the political intersectionality of Black women not only enhances a theoretical understanding but also provides a practical framework for challenging power dynamics and addressing ongoing social and political conflicts. Cho *et al.* (2013:17) aver that “Political intersectionality provides an applied dimension to the insights of structural intersectionality by offering a framework for contesting power and thereby linking theory to existent and emergent social and political struggles”. By incorporating political intersectionality, scholars and activists can better address the complexities faced by Black women and other marginalised groups in their efforts to achieve social justice and equality. This practical dimension of intersectionality is crucial for developing effective strategies that confront and dismantle power dynamics, thereby making meaningful progress in addressing on-going social and political conflicts.

Colonialism not only imposed foreign rule but also redefined national identities in ways that marginalised Black women, stripping them of their voices and visibility within the national narrative. Ogunyemi (1996: 95) states that:

Colonialism silenced women and made them invisible, since the colonialist talked only with male leaders to keep the peace. Post-colonialism is beginning to restore women’s voice, to some degree. The nation’s history affected female consciousness, sensitizing women to the complexities of our predicament, which is compounded by an ubiquitous and seemingly indomitable foe.

This historical marginalisation has left an enduring impact on the national consciousness, where the struggle for women to reclaim their rightful place within the national narrative continues. Despite the slow progress, the post-colonial era marks a critical juncture where women are beginning to assert their voices, challenging the

remnants of colonial legacies and striving for inclusion in the ongoing formation of national identity.

The Ashanti War, fought between the Ashanti Empire and British colonial forces in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, had a profound impact on black people, particularly Black women in Ghana. The war highlighted the resilience and leadership of African women, with figures like Yaa Asantewaa emerging as symbols of bravery and defiance. Igomu and Musa (2022) discuss Hezekiah Lewis' short film, *Warrior Queen*, which portrays Yaa Asantewaa's significant role in the Ashanti resistance against British colonisation. Asantewaa, the Queen Mother of Ejisu, led her people in the War of the Golden Stool in 1900, demonstrating remarkable courage and strategic acumen. Asantewaa's leadership not only galvanised the Ashanti people but also challenged the colonial narrative that sought to undermine the capabilities and authority of African women. Hence, Asantewaa's legacy emphasises the significant contributions of Black women in the fight against colonial oppression, elevating their historical and cultural status within their communities and beyond. The matriarchal traditions of the Ashanti, as explored by McGee (2015), have also played a crucial role in the advancement of Ashanti women. These traditions have long empowered women with significant social, economic, and political influence, promoting an environment where female leadership is respected and nurtured. The prominence of women like Yaa Asantewaa is a testament to the strength of these matriarchal structures. The impact of the Ashanti War, therefore, extends beyond the immediate military conflict, but is a reflection of their resilience and leadership during times of war which has inspired subsequent generations. This legacy continues to serve as a powerful reminder of the critical role that Black women play in the on-going struggle for equality.

The Zimbabwean landscape, pivotal in Dangarembga's novel, reflects a history shaped by colonial exploitation and subsequent struggles for independence. Pettis

(2008) illustrates how conflicts between the Shona and Ndebele tribes in 1893 were exploited by white settlers to seize valuable lands and confine indigenous peoples to “tribal trust areas,” similar to the US reservation system. This displacement disrupted traditional gender roles and marginalised women’s contributions, paving the way for Southern Rhodesia’s colonial rule from 1923. Munangagwa (2009) portrays the Rhodesian Bush War as a resistance against white minority rule, highlighting injustices such as land seizures and systematic exclusion of black people from political and economic participation. Post-colonial Zimbabwe continues to grapple with these legacies, with contemporary challenges exacerbating gender disparities.

In using the Nigerian context, Ogunyemi (1996:94) explains that the resultant of the independent African state’s political instability and poor economic dependency partly stems from these countries’ proverbial mismanagement of power and wealth. It is thus expected that, women face heightened vulnerabilities to violence, economic hardship, and political marginalisation, underscoring ongoing struggles for gender equality amidst socio-economic and political instability. African Womanism provides insights into nationalism and political agency, addressing issues that have affected Africans and contributed to the current state of national and political affairs.

2.4 Conclusion

Evidently, in the realm of post-colonial studies, the frameworks of African Womanism and Intersectionality provide crucial insights into the multi layered experiences of Black women. On one hand, African Womanism stands out for its emphasis on celebrating Black identity, as well as unity facilitated by a proposed equal power dynamic between Black men and women, which are often overlooked in mainstream feminist discourse that tends to prioritise Western perspectives of gender separationism. On the other hand, Intersectionality illuminates how race, gender, class, as well as other social and identical markers intersect to shape individuals’

experiences. In the aftermath of colonialism, this intersectional approach particularly offers a comprehensive understanding of the layered challenges faced by Black women, emphasising how historical legacies and contemporary socio-political dynamics continue to influence their lives. Moreover, political intersectionality enriches African female centred discourse by integrating structural insights into social and political struggles. In Zimbabwe and Ghana, where colonial histories have left lasting impacts on racial hierarchies and economic disparities, Black African women navigate unique political landscapes shaped by these complexities. Centering their voices and perspectives in discussions on gender inequality and women's rights is essential for developing effective strategies to address systemic injustices and promote meaningful social and political transformation within African societies.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

Patriarchy as an established social system characterised by hegemonic masculine dominance and largely, the subjugation of girls and women, has existed across the African continent for centuries although in different forms (Okafor, 2020). This enduring structure not only influences individual lives but also shapes broader societal norms and expectations. In the realm of literature, many African writers such as Buchi Emecheta, Sindiwe Magona and Tsitsi Dangarembga engage the manifestations of female marginalisation in their societies by utilising their creative talents to unveil the power dynamics and cultural norms that perpetuate male supremacy.

This part is more about reviewing literature that is in the area of this study. It is noticeable as well that this study has managed to identify the relevant literature. More encouraging is the ability to use relevant material without completely ignoring the fairly old one. In this way, this review sought to uncover the narratives that not only document the presence of patriarchy in African contexts but also offer alternative perspectives and strategies for challenging and dismantling this age-old system. In this review, the theories discussed in the previous chapter were employed in the discussion of the themes herein. The current chapter begins by analysing the representation and treatment of women in African fiction. It then explores the historical impact of indigenous African cultures on shaping Black women's lives and identities as well as their economic marginalisation. Some of the key issues discussed include gendered expectations and power dynamics within familial relationships; inequalities faced by women in the economical arena and arranged marriages within African families. This chapter concludes with an exploration concludes with an exploration of the objectification of the female body as

well as the evolution of gender roles, which speaks to female agency.

3.2 Representation of women in literature

Colonialism significantly altered the literary landscape of African societies which are a reflection of the imposition of European cultural norms and knowledge systems which in-turn, disrupted indigenous socialisation processes as depicted in the representation of females in literature. In this study, 'representation' refers to the portrayal of characters and themes in literary works, as well as the presence and recognition of authors within the literary canon. According to Parashar and Schulz (2021), the legacy of colonialism is reflected in post-colonial African literature, emphasising the challenges of reconciling traditional African values with those enforced by colonial rulers.

In terms of historical demographics, female literary voices were and to some extent continue to be silenced through systemic biases and gender-based discrimination embedded in educational structures that were introduced by missionaries wherein, apart from being patriarchally oriented, early education was mostly accessible to males more than females. As a result, the male-dominated literary tradition led to the widespread exclusion of authentic female voices and experiences in African literature. Consequently, the portrayal of women was often filtered through a patriarchal lens, reinforcing gender stereotypes and diminishing the complexity and diversity of women's roles and contributions. Silva (2004:130) supports that,

African women's voices have been unheard, thus the images of African woman in pre-colonial as well as in colonial periods were mostly presented by African men who were in charge to write the African literature and through their patriarchal view to tell their female counterparts experience.

This silence reflects a broader trend in early post-colonial African literature, where sexist colonial and African native ideologies intersect, highlighting the need for a more diverse and equitable literary representation. Emsley and Montle (2022) argue that in an unbiased literary environment, women would be provided platforms to articulate their experiences, enabling their literary contributions to be academically recognised.

Literature has the ability to reflect and power to shape societal perceptions of gender ideologies. Chilisa and Ntseane (2014) focus on resisting dominant discourses, which include challenging the ways in which mainstream feminist theories may overlook or even perpetuate colonial and Eurocentric perspectives. The aforementioned study argues for the inclusion of indigenous and African feminist theories that foreground the experiences of marginalised racial groups. This is because, the persistent impact of colonialism on African societies, as portrayed by Ashcroft (2001), extends beyond mere political and economic structures to influence cultural narratives and representations. In post-colonial Africa, women writers have been given a platform to express their voices and perspectives through literature and African Womanism supports that “by writing at all, women have entered the fray and successfully established a counter discourse” which challenges and redefines dominant narratives (Ogunyemi, 1996:95).

Historical stereotypes and colonial narratives often depict African women through a Eurocentric lens, perpetuating harmful and reductionist portrayals that undermine their diverse roles and agency. For instance, in colonial literature, African people were frequently depicted as “the other,” which included that Black women were characterised by exoticism and perceived as primitive beings in need of European intervention and guidance (Lionnet, 2018). This representation not only relegated all Black individuals to the status of “the other” of the White Self, but also positioned Black men somewhat higher in the social hierarchy compared to Black women. In

Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), Nnu Ego's struggles and suffering are presented within the context of both traditional Igbo society and the colonial environment of Lagos. While the novel offers a critical examination of the limited roles available to women in post-colonial Africa, it also emphasises the influence of colonialism by introducing new forms of economic and social pressures. In contrast, Kubra (2023) asserts that in the pre-colonial era, African women faced fewer limitations in their roles as society members and were active and influential in their everyday familial and social lives. Part of the Western-centric portrayals of African women was used to justify the imposition of Western values and control, implying that African societies were inherently oppressive towards women and needed external intervention to achieve progress and modernity. Moreover, this depiction is evident in narratives that reflected British and Victorian ideologies of all women as submissive and passive figures, reinforcing colonial ideologies of superiority and justifying the imposition of Western values and control over African societies.

In addition, literature's power to portray gender norms is particularly evident in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) where women are mostly assigned domestic roles and are responsible for maintaining the household, raising children and supporting their husbands. For instance, Ekwefi, Okonkwo's second wife, was deemed cursed and a let-down because out of her ten pregnancies, only one daughter survived. Through this storyline, Achebe (1958) depicts the patriarchal notion that giving birth to many children is a woman's crowning's glory despite having caused Ekwefi emotional and physical pain. This is attributed to the idea of associating female hood with motherhood. In this way, literature, mirroring society, often emphasises conventional gender roles, confining women within predetermined expectations and limiting their autonomy (Anyidoho, 2021).

Literature such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and Sefi Atta's *Swallow* (2010) depict the clash between indigenous cultures and colonial

legacies. Adichie's novel highlights the lives of characters like Olanna and Kainene, who face both societal expectations and the devastating consequences of war. The colonial divide, which still lingers after independence, exacerbates the inequality that women experience, positioning them as vulnerable amid political and social upheaval. In addition, the novel portrays how colonial influences, such as British education and Christianity, clash with Ibo traditions, intensifying the subordination of women, even as they attempt to assert their independence in a post-colonial society. Similarly, in *Swallow*, Atta (2010) examines the lives of women in 1980s Nigeria, focusing on characters like Tolani and her friend Rose, who must navigate harsh socio-economic conditions. Evidently, colonial legacies such as the imposition of Western norms and economic systems have left behind gendered divisions of labour and opportunities, making it harder for women to escape poverty. As Tolani contemplates smuggling drugs to survive, Atta illustrates how the structural inequalities established during colonialism persist, trapping women in precarious positions. The novel further explores how traditional gender roles, compounded by economic instability, limit the choices available to Nigerian women, forcing them to make difficult and often dangerous decisions.

Literary narratives move beyond mere reflection, subtly influencing readers to internalise and accept the reinforcement of stereotypes and dominant narratives that marginalise African women, overlooking their struggles and experiences of these gender roles as inherent and unquestionable aspects of their societal framework. Consequently, it becomes difficult for individuals to challenge or deviate from these norms without facing resistance or backlash from the broader community. Following this rationale, literary representation is a pivotal battleground for the advocacy of gender equality and there is a need for a concerted effort to contest harmful stereotypes and promote diverse and empowering narratives that reflect the realities of women in post-colonial Africa.

3.3 The Role of African Cultures in Shaping African Women's Lives

The role of indigenous African culture in shaping the lives of African women is a compound phenomenon due to the diversity of historical traditions, societal norms, and regional variations across the continent, which influences women's roles and experiences in unique ways. However, women's lives have been changing given that cultural traditions are not static; rather, they evolve and adapt over time in response to various factors such as globalisation and other societal changes (Giddens, 2003). In line with the aforementioned, this study explores the ongoing influence of past and present African cultures on the lives of contemporary African women.

In indigenous Shona culture, women exercised substantial authority through various roles, reflecting their critical contributions to maintaining social and economic stability within their communities (Cheater, 1986). As mothers, they held significant influence especially over their daughters whereby for married daughters whom bride price had been paid; they had authority over property matters. Additionally, as *vatete* (*Paternal aunt*), women played a crucial role in the education of their brothers' children by providing guidance, moral upbringing, and imparting cultural knowledge and traditions. They also served as producers or service-workers with special skills, retaining control over the proceeds of their labour. Evidently, pre-colonial Africa was not devoid of positive aspects concerning women's roles (Sapiencia, 2019).

The division of gender roles came at a cost for women, as it was exploitative and limited their opportunities to explore other capabilities or pursue diverse roles outside of these designated tasks. Despite African women being granted prominent roles as queens, priestesses, healers, traders, and community leaders, the society remained somewhat patriarchal. According to Afisi (2010:4),

In submission therefore, one could say that women have played indispensable roles in traditional Africa. But in spite of the activities, roles,

responsibilities and positions women held in traditional Africa, the man in pre-colonial Africa was still the head of the family as well as leader of the society; society was purely patriarchal in nature. The man still played the controlling agent in the family; women played supporting roles to the men, and the roles of women were complimentary to men.

This ingrained patriarchal system meant that women's roles were primarily supportive and complementary to those of men. Despite their active involvement, the societal norms that constrained women's agency and autonomy were deeply informed by cultural aspects such as traditional gender roles and expectations, which often positioned men as the primary decision-makers and leaders within both the family and the community. This current study argues that in an equitable society, both women and men should collaboratively contribute to the survival and growth of the community by participating in nurturing and supporting roles. In this way, an egalitarian approach recognises and values the diverse strengths and abilities of individuals, which encourages a balanced community structure where both genders can contribute meaningfully to the well-being and progress of society.

Despite certain oppressive practices, such as giving women in marriage, sending them as tribute and trading them, these cultural practices as noted by Johnson (2005), possess the remarkable ability to either uphold or challenge prevailing patriarchal systems. Oduyoye (2001) argues that indigenous African cultures provide a profound foundation for understanding the roles and identities of African women. Indigenous African cultures emphasise communal values by prioritising the collective well-being of the community over individual interests. In many African communities, communal values manifest through shared child-rearing responsibilities, where children are seen as the responsibility of the entire community rather than just their biological parents. There is a growing movement among African female scholars and activists, such as Amina Mama, who reinterpret and adapt traditional practices to challenge patriarchy within Africa's progressive intellectual tradition. Mama (2007)

illustrates that adapting cultural practices can critique and resist patriarchal norms by reevaluating traditional gender roles and advocating for women's rights. This process of adaptation is evident in the way traditional practices are being reinterpreted to align with contemporary gender equality values. For example, certain traditional rites that historically emphasised women's subservience or exclusion from leadership are being transformed to include women's active participation and leadership roles in community governance. Similarly, traditional practices surrounding marriage, such as bride price, are being questioned and reinterpreted to focus on mutual respect and equality rather than ownership and control. These adaptations allow for the preservation of cultural heritage while aligning with contemporary gender equality values, thereby resisting and transforming patriarchal structures within African societies.

African Womanism encourages a critical engagement with cultural norms and recognises the strength of drawing upon cultural heritage to advocate for gender equality. Moreover, it emphasises the idea that negative cultural practices can be transformed to empower women and promote their rights while respecting traditional African values and practices. Isike and Uzodike (2011) add that African Womanism is essential as it seeks to empower women and promote their rights within the context of traditional African values and practices. Indigenous culture, once seen as a framework for patriarchal norms, can now become a source of inspiration and resilience for those striving for a more diverse and fairly society. As explored in this discussion, cultural practices and norms rooted in historical traditions have contributed to the shaping of gender roles. There is a dynamic shift occurring as contemporary scholars, activists, and women themselves engage in reinterpreting and adapting these traditions to challenge and dismantle patriarchy. The discourse surrounding indigenous African culture and its impact on women's lives is marked by a tension between historical gendered divisions and the potential for cultural resilience and adaptation.

3.4 Economic Marginalisation

The economic marginalisation of Black women in post-colonial Africa is mainly embedded in colonialism which played a pivotal role in shaping gender dynamics and reinforcing male dominance with regard to economics. Colonial powers, driven by exploitative economic interests, systematically disrupted existing gender roles and hierarchies which afforded both men and women opportunities to contribute to their household's wealth in various ways. Since the incursion of colonialism, Black women have always faced greater economic challenges due to their intersection of race and sex, which results in unique forms of discrimination and marginalisation (Akyeampong & Fofack, 2014). According to Steady (2007), this economic marginalisation persists in post-colonial Africa despite the change in political leadership, as various complex factors continue to affect women's economic opportunities. These include persistent gender inequalities in access to education and employment opportunities, patriarchal structures that limit women's participation in decision-making and leadership roles, inadequate legal protection for women's property and inheritance rights, and cultural norms that perpetuate unequal distribution of resources and responsibilities within households and communities. Additionally, economic policies and development strategies often prioritise sectors and activities traditionally dominated by men, further marginalising women in economic spheres.

European colonial powers engaged in territorial expansion with the primary goal of exploiting the abundant natural and human resources within the colonised regions (Aduke, 2019). The extraction of valuable resources such as minerals, agricultural products and other commodities, served as a means to fuel the economic growth and industrial development of the colonising and colonised nations. The imposition of forced labour and the establishment of economic systems tailored to benefit the metropole emphasised the exploitative nature of colonialism which also stripped

Black women of their economic agency and relegated them to subordinate positions. Raji Olumoh and Abejide (2013) argue that women's economic activities in the pre-colonial Yoruba Land of Nigeria were mostly essential for the community's development. One significant aspect was agriculture, where women were proficient in cultivating staple crops like yams, cassava and vegetables. Their expertise not only contributed to the nutritional needs of their families but also bolstered the broader food security and economic stability of the community. Moreover, women were involved in trade, participating in local markets and showcasing their entrepreneurial prowess (Gimba, 2012). Similarly, in pre-colonial Ghana, as noted by Amoah-Boampong and Agyeiwaa (2021), women were integral as traders, farmers, and leaders, contributing actively to the economic, social, and political spheres of their communities. In Chivi, pre-colonial Zimbabwe, women were pivotal in both political and environmental domains, managing natural resources and playing essential roles in agricultural production and decision-making processes (Mazarire 2003). Their influence extended beyond domestic duties, reflecting significant economic independence and agency. However, under British colonial rule, these roles were diminished, with women increasingly marginalised from economic participation.

In addition to coercing cheap or free labour for the cultivation of cash crops, mining operations and other economic activities, the colonial economic system also disadvantaged women by restricting their access to resources and employment in the said fields which were then regarded as masculine (Abramovitz, 2017).

The resultant political instability and the embarrassing economic dependency stemming from Nigeria's proverbial mismanagement of her enormous wealth have taken, and are still taking, their toll (Ogunyemi, 1996:94).

This systematic exploitation perpetuated economic disparities between the colonial powers and their colonies, but also left enduring imprints on the socio-economic structures of the affected regions long after the end of formal colonial rule. It is for these reasons that African Womanism regards the consideration of the economic sphere in the suppression of women in Africa, especially as influenced by aspects such as race and gender, as important to women-centred theorisations.

Given the above background, the economic marginalisation of women in post-colonial Africa stands as one of the fundamental tenets of African female emancipation. To navigate towards a more equitable future, it is crucial to recognise and rectify the historical legacies that continue to shape the economic landscape for women. Despite the current climate of economic marginalisation, it is not all gloom; there is potential for positive change. There has been an increase in the presence of women in industries and occupations traditionally dominated by men. Furthermore, legislation in most of developed nations mandates equal pay for work of equal value between men and women.

3.5 Gendered expectations and power dynamics in familial bonds

The relationship between expectations and power dynamics in familial setups has always existed in various cultural, social and political contexts throughout history and this has significantly been influenced by gender norms because the dynamics of familial relationships are not immune to the broader societal expectations placed on individuals based on their gender. By examining how individuals negotiate and challenge sexist dynamics in such settings, this study illuminates the complexities inherent in relationships, offering insights into the ways in which gendered expectations shape the understanding of societal roles.

3.5.1 Family Structure(s)

The influence of patriarchy is a pervasive and deeply rooted aspect of societal life in family settings in post-colonial Africa. This is evident in the traditional power structures that persist (Mudau & Obadire 2017). The family, considered as the cornerstone of society, becomes a space where patriarchal norms shape various aspects which include the division of household labour and decision-making processes. Be that as it may, Chuku (2018) states that it is essential to acknowledge that throughout history, not all societies have wholly subscribed to similar patriarchal norms, particularly evident in pre-colonial African societies characterised by a diverse array of social structures, including matrilineal and egalitarian systems. Egalitarian principles promoted cooperation and mutual respect, challenging traditional gender hierarchies. This rich social organisation in pre-colonial Africa emphasises the historical gender dynamics and provides understandings into alternative models of societal organisation that existed prior to colonial influence. Pre-colonial African women embodied versatility, independence, hard work, and resilience as they contributed to the socio-economic well-being of their households and communities. In explaining the substantial transformations, Nzegwu (2012) opines that the consanguineal family system of the pre-colonial Igbo society did not exclusively grant power to fathers and husbands but instead, power was distributed among both men and women, with significant roles for maternal kin and extended family members. This collective authority meant that decisions were often made collaboratively, rather than being dominated by a single patriarchal figure. However, the introduction of the nuclear-family ideology in Africa has led to a notable decline in the once-prevalent consanguineal ties within Igbo families. This new ideology has progressively supplanted traditional Igbo family values with those associated with the nuclear family, resulting in substantial shifts in power dynamics and the allocation of family resources such as land, homesteads and household roles. The foundation of these new family values rests on the notion of a permanent union between a husband and a wife, leading to the displacement of the lineage as the central

structure of the family. Thus, the impact of colonisation has played a role in reshaping traditional family structures, often imposing Western ideals that reinforce male authority and relegating women to subordinate roles, especially in institutions such as marriage and parenthood.

3.5.1.1 Patriarchal Norms in Post-Colonial African Marriages

Traditional marriage as discussed by Mulaudzi (2013) refers to marriage ceremonies and practices that are rooted in cultural, religious, or customary traditions specific to a particular community or region. One aspect of this for pre-colonial African societies is the involvement of not just the couple but also both families from whom consent is largely required (Madukwe & Madukwe 2019). This emphasises the communal nature of African societies, where the choice of a marriage partner requires approval from family members and in some cases, even the gods. However, as part of the colonial project, traditional marriage systems in post-colonial Africa have come to model ancient Western marriages defined by Victorian patriarchy. For instance, Ogoma (2014) notes a significant impact of the Western marital system: a marked shift from these traditional practices. In contemporary times, parents have little to no involvement in their children's choice of marriage partners. Instead, this decision has become the prerogative of the individuals involved and occasionally, religious institutions.

In societies where traditional gender roles are prominent, there is a belief that men and women have distinct responsibilities within nuclear families, and these roles contribute to social order and harmony. For instance, Chitakure (2016) describes the traditional marriage practices in Zimbabwe, where women were taught to be obedient to their husbands and fulfil domestic duties while men were not taught the same. In addition, the responsibility of caregiving duties reinforces the role of women in maintaining familial harmony and fulfilling the needs of children and elders. These

teachings of women to be obedient and focused on domestic duties is primarily rooted in cultural perceptions of femininity, which traditionally place high value on qualities such as nurturing, caregiving, and submission (Parpart, 2019). Busingye (2020) adds that African women, particularly in polygamous marriages or those subject to widow inheritance endure patriarchal control where their survival often depends on conforming to male-dominated structures. These dynamics are compounded by cultural expectations that bind women to roles of submission, making it difficult for them to challenge patriarchal norms without facing societal backlash. Additionally, colonial legacies have distorted African women's agency, adding further layers of oppression to their struggle against patriarchy.

In addition to the abovementioned, Black women navigate not only the general traditional gender roles emphasised in marriage but also cultural dynamics that further shape societal expectations. These factors may influence how Black women negotiate their identities, roles, and expectations within the context of both their cultural traditions and broader racial dynamics. As a result, Black women may find it challenging to challenge these norms without encountering resistance or social repercussions from their communities. The expectation to conform to predefined roles and behaviours can be deeply ingrained, making it difficult for Black women to assert their agency and challenge patriarchal dynamics within their marriages.

3.5.1.2 Arranged Marriages

Raphalalani and Musehane (2013) define an arranged marriage as a socially and often legally recognised union where a man is united with a woman or multiple women. Beyond its personal significance, arranged marriages often embody broader socio-cultural values and practices, influencing social roles, expectations and community dynamics.

In patriarchal societies, fathers often wield considerable influence in arranging marriages for their daughters. In the colonial context of Nigeria, Ogunyemi (1996)

avers that Nigerian fathers considered arranged marriages as strategic benefits by marrying their daughters to colonial officials, albeit with detrimental consequences. This practice was often driven by political motivations within customary law, envisioning that offspring from such unions would serve as bridges between Nigerian communities and the ruling colonial establishment, promoting a sense of alliance. Thus, in many African societies, arranged marriages were instrumental in forging political alliances and ensuring social cohesion. According to Grillo (2011), marriages between different clans, tribes, or kingdoms were often arranged to strengthen political ties and prevent conflicts. By marrying into another influential family or group, a family could secure alliances that would protect their interests and provide mutual support in times of need. This was particularly important in societies where political power was distributed among various clans or tribes. However, alongside these perceived advantages, such arrangements also carried detrimental consequences. The practice reinforced power imbalances inherent in patriarchal systems, perpetuating a cycle where women were essentially used as political pawns, reducing them to instruments of familial and political strategy rather than recognising their individual rights and desires within marriage and society at large. In this way, these women were stripped off their agency and autonomy.

Pre-colonial arranged marriages in Africa encompassed a wide spectrum of practices. These ranged from scenarios where both partners willingly consented to the union, to instances where the girl faced abduction if she refused the proposal. This diversity points out that arranged marriages during this period were not uniform; they could involve negotiation and mutual agreement between families, but also sometimes coercion or pressure tactics, particularly towards women. Kavulavu and Mukhwana (2021) reveal the practices of arranged marriages in Kenya, asserting that:

Sometimes the girl's parents secretly gave the man the consent to abduct their daughter. If they knew that the girl would not accept the man of their

choice, they could allow him to abduct her. He was only required to pay the bride wealth after or before the abduction depending on the agreement between the two. Abduction could also result if the boy's suggestions to win the girl were futile. In case the boy kept persuading the girl to marry him but the latter turned down the offer, the boy could become impatient and abduct the girl (2021:14).

The above context reveals familial dynamics and societal norms where parental consent to abduction was sometimes granted in scenarios where the girl was unwilling to marry the chosen suitor. This illustrates how arranged marriages could involve complex negotiations and varying degrees of coercion, reflecting the diverse cultural landscapes and customs across different regions of Africa. Such historical perspectives emphasise the importance of understanding arranged marriages not as a singular practice, but rather as a spectrum influenced by local traditions and social dynamics.

There are some laws which prohibit abduction of girls in post-colonial Africa. For instance, Letsika (2005) states that Section 34(1) of The *Lesotho Penal Code Act* prohibits forcing anyone into marriage against their will and further stipulates that it is a criminal offense to abduct a girl. In other parts of contemporary Africa, arranged marriages persist as a viable institution, often motivated by familial and financial considerations. These unions frequently revolve around the economic advantages sought by one or both partners' families. Love is not necessarily the primary catalyst for such marriages; instead, they are often entered into to secure material benefits linked to one's social status or economic stability. For this reason, arranged marriages in this context can be seen as a strategic alliance where both families stand to gain in one way or another (Aguiar, 2018). This perspective suggests that marriages between individuals from affluent backgrounds are preferred, as it is believed that such unions mitigate the potential challenges associated with poverty in contemporary African societies.

Arranged marriages in Ethiopia, particularly those involving young girls, are deeply rooted in cultural, economic, and social dynamics that have shaped family and community structures for generations. One of the key motivations behind these marriages is the preservation of family honour and the maintenance of social status. Promissory marriages, where future unions are arranged by families long before the children involved reach marriageable age, are common practices that ensure cultural continuity and social stability (Susuman *et al.* 2017). Additionally, the practice of arranged marriages is closely tied to controlling female sexuality and reproductive rights, reflecting societal expectations regarding chastity and purity. By marrying off girls at a young age, families exert control over their daughters' sexuality, ensuring that it aligns with community norms. This control is further reinforced by the practice of placing young brides under the guardianship of their in-laws until they reach puberty.

Arranged marriages in Africa have historically been shaped by cultural, economic and political factors. In both pre-colonial and post-colonial contexts, these unions served as strategic tools for preserving family honour, controlling female sexuality, and forging political alliances. While the practice ensured social cohesion and continuity, it also reinforced patriarchal norms and perpetuated power imbalances, particularly regarding the role and autonomy of women. In contemporary post-colonial Africa, arranged marriages continue to reflect these traditional values while increasingly being influenced by economic considerations.

3.5.1.3 Patriarchal parenting

The prevalent dynamics of parent-child relationships in the post-colonial milieu reflect a profound entanglement with patriarchal ideology, exerting a broad and enduring influence on the roles and expectations assigned to individuals, particularly manifest in the socialisation of children into traditional gender norms and service-

oriented roles within the household. Parents knowingly and unknowingly contribute to the establishment of gender distinctions among their children, emphasising their influential role in the socialisation process. For instance, most mother-daughter relationships reflect hegemonic expectations placed upon females, such as prioritising family duties and limiting personal ambitions. Mothers contribute to gender distinctions among their children, which include socialising their daughters into traditional feminine roles by instructing them on the "appropriate" behaviours and roles for women in society (Mtenje, 2016), while fathers often reinforce these distinctions by modelling and encouraging traditional masculine roles, expecting their sons to exhibit traits such as assertiveness, independence, and leadership. However, this study asserts that both mothers and fathers can instill traditional gender roles in children of the opposite sex, as mothers might impart masculine traits to their sons and fathers may guide their daughters towards traditionally feminine behaviours, perpetuating gender norms across all children. Part of these includes the emphasis that the primary duty of daughters is to cater to the needs of the men within the family, underlining a traditional expectation of women's service-oriented roles in the household.

Evidently, the relationship between patriarchy and family dynamics in post-colonial Africa reveals a rooted in cultural traditional that shapes societal structures. This current study opposes unbalanced socialisation approaches that promote the grooming of young girls into submissive roles. Such one-sided teachings pose a significant danger by perpetuating gender stereotypes and limiting individuals' potential based on societal expectations, ultimately hindering the development of a just and fair society. The present dominant traditional power hierarchies within families which often favour male authority are evident in various aspects such as family structures, and decision-making processes. The evolving landscape of family structures emphasises the transformative impact of external influences. Moving forward, emphasising an understanding of these dynamics is essential for

dismantling ingrained patriarchal norms and working towards inclusive family environments that honour the diversity of African societies. This can be achieved through enacting and enforcing laws that protect women's rights, including laws against gender-based violence, discriminatory practices, and unequal access to resources, can help dismantle patriarchal structures and promote equality within families.

3.6. The Objectification of Female body

In contemporary discourse on gender studies, the objectification and violation of the female body stands as manifestations of entrenched power imbalances. The objectification of women's bodies reduces them to mere objects of desire, perpetuating societal norms that devalue their autonomy and dignity. Concurrently, physical and psychological violations against women, as outlined by Tamale (2004), serve to perpetuate historical power dynamics worsened by colonialism. These violations encompass not only physical abuse but also emotional and sexual harassment, often strengthened by harmful traditional ideologies. This section explores the dimensions of gender-based violence and its broader implications for social justice and feminist activism.

The sexualisation and objectification of female bodies have deep historical roots that persist in contemporary society. Historically, the colonial era significantly shaped the perceptions and representations of Black female bodies. According to Benard (2016), the Black female body was exoticised and hypersexualised to perpetuate colonial ideologies, portraying these women as inherently sexual and available for the gratification of others. This legacy has carried forward into modern media, where Black women continue to be depicted through a lens of hyper sexuality and exoticism in contemporary discourse, albeit in more subtle and insidious forms. Sanger (2009) highlights how modern South African magazines target different racial

audiences by presenting black and white women in contrasting ways. Black women are often depicted as exotic and hypersexual, reinforcing colonial stereotypes, while white women are portrayed within the norms of white heterofemininity. This objectification stems from racist stereotypes that dehumanise Black women and reduce them to mere objects of desire, reinforcing power dynamics that privilege the coloniser while further marginalising and disempowering Black women. The objectification results in a range of psychological issues, including body image concerns and depressive symptoms.

This reductionism perpetuates harmful stereotypes that prioritise the external over intellectual and emotional dimensions. Women's abilities, achievements, and aspirations may be overshadowed by a relentless focus on their looks, encouraging an environment where their value is contingent upon meeting narrowly prescribed beauty standards. For instance, women may feel pressured to conform to unrealistic beauty standards, leading to body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem (Markula, 2001). This pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards within patriarchal societies places an undue burden on women, often resulting in heightened body dissatisfaction and diminished self-esteem as they grapple with the pervasive expectation to meet narrow and often unattainable physical ideals.

The subjugation of women through the sexualisation and objectification of their bodies not only disempowered them but also entrenched fear in them, leaving a legacy that continues to affect African societies today. Hence, the concept of 'The Female Fear Factory' by Gqola (2021) highlights how patriarchal norms have been weaponised to create an environment of fear and insecurity for Black women. Gqola (ibid) further asserts that the notion that certain individuals are considered "safe to violate" due to their gender and racial identity underscores the deeply rooted prejudices that persist. In essence, the discrimination faced by Black women in post-colonial Africa is a tragic continuation of historical injustices.

Colonial stereotypes and hierarchies persist in influencing societal perceptions, accentuating the critical need to confront and deconstruct these damaging narratives in order to realise genuine gender equality and justice. Concurrently, patriarchy operates as a pervasive system of power and dominance, perpetuating harmful gender norms and practices that yield detrimental psychological consequences. Stanton *et al.* (2022) elucidate one such consequence: sexual objectification. Within patriarchal frameworks, women frequently endure objectification, being reduced solely to their physical attributes and sexual allure.

As such, patriarchal systems create an environment where women are subjected to various forms of discrimination and violence, contributing to their overall mental distress. Gouws (2017) emphasises the need to consider intersectionality in understanding these effects despite the psychological challenges posed by patriarchy, many women and communities in Africa demonstrate resilience and resistance. Tamale (2004) points out the importance of women's links to resources in fostering resilience. Empowering women through education, economic opportunities, and support networks can enhance their psychological well-being and provide them with the tools to challenge patriarchal norms. To break the cycle of violence against women, it is vital to adopt comprehensive strategies that not only enhance their material conditions but also foster environments that prioritise mental health and emotional well-being. This is crucial because, sometimes, abuse is not solely determined by the lack of resources or support, but primarily stems from the fact that the female body is often viewed as a site for violation. By addressing both the physical and psychological aspects of violence, society can strive towards creating a more equitable and supportive space for all women to thrive and assert their agency.

3.7 Evolution of Gender Roles and Women Agency

The evolution of gender roles throughout history in Africa reflects various factors and understanding this evolution is crucial for developing strategies to address gender disparities effectively. Efforts to challenge patriarchy and redefine gender roles are evident in the process of reclaiming egalitarian indigenous African identity. This is proof that the African populace did not passively accept the changes brought about by the coloniser, as well as oppressive traditional systems. African women specifically demonstrated resilience and agency in various ways, such as advocating for women's rights through movements such as Progressive Women's Movement of South Africa (PWMSA). Moreover, Hodgson (2002) points out that Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF) is a prominent movement that advocates for legal rights, gender equality, and women's empowerment striving to create a more equitable society. Such a movement is essential in challenging stereotypes and discriminatory practices, advocating for equal opportunities in education and the workplace, addressing issues related to reproductive justice, and promoting the overall well-being and agency of Black women. Thus, women's movements across Africa have been instrumental in challenging and overturning patriarchal norms. Henceforth, this study advocates a more inclusive representation that reflects the diverse and experiences of women in post-colonial African societies.

Theories and movements such as African Womanism are pivotal to female agency because they enable women to navigate difficulties and contribute to the on-going process of decolonisation. This approach empowers women to challenge oppressive structures while acknowledging the need to critically examine pre-colonial ideals and their impact on gender dynamics. African Womanism, with its cultural relevance, community-centred focus and emphasis on agency, emerges as a powerful tool for redefining gender roles and promoting equality in the post-colonial African context (Phillips, 2006).

The challenges that Black women face in their pursuit of authenticity within an abusive society is rooted in the historical legacies of colonialism and patriarchal systems. As such, Black women are unable to express their true selves, embracing their identities, experiences, and aspirations without fear of judgment or oppression. The tension between conformity and authenticity reflects a struggle for self-determination and transformation, emphasising the need for positive cultural reclamation and community-centred approaches to redefine gender roles and challenge patriarchy in post-colonial Africa. Craps and Buelens (2008) emphasise that African women often struggle with societal pressures to conform, while simultaneously seeking to authentically discover themselves. The issue of conformity for African women often revolves around adhering to engrained cultural and gender norms. Societal expectations demand adherence to traditional roles, such as being obedient, nurturing, and prioritising domestic responsibilities. Conforming to these expectations is often driven by cultural and familial traditions, aiming to preserve established social structures and maintain societal harmony. The reimagining of indigenous conflict resolution models in post-colonial Africa acknowledges the crucial role of women as traditional peacebuilders, marking a significant shift in the understanding of gender roles (Isike & Uzodike, 2011). Through this assertion, Mogoboya (2011:73) quotes on Ntuli that:

The African Renaissance (identity) project offers us an opportunity to reflect on our condition, to re-examine our rudders and to develop new paradigms that can pull us out of this morass. It affords us a moment to pause and reflect, with the benefit of hindsight, on the benefits of Westernisation, the insights we have gained from it and the losses our culture has sustained; what to retrieve and what to jettison. Our past was not perfect. No society has ever produced a perfect culture – not even Atlantis. However, there were cultures that attained standards worthy of emulation. We propose to examine pre-colonial Africa and its institutions, especially educational institutions, with a

view to comparing it with what we have today and to ascertain if there are models we can adopt in order to move forward.

This recognition points out the importance of women's contributions in fostering reconciliation, mediation, and community cohesion within African societies. Following the above movements and theories, gender equity policies have emerged as driving forces behind the evolution of gender roles in Africa, aiming to address discrimination and promote women's rights (Kevane, 2004). Recognising the role of women in various sectors, African governments have introduced policies to increase their representation in decision-making positions, challenging negative traditional gender dynamics (Bryceson, 2019). For instance, The National Gender Policy (2015) of Ghana offers comprehensive policy directives, strategies, and institutional structures to translate the government's pledges into tangible actions aimed at realising gender equality and enhancing the empowerment of women within the overarching national vision of putting forth a stable, unified, inclusive, and prosperous nation with equitable opportunities for all.

While these policies play a crucial role in challenging traditional norms, there is a need for careful consideration of their implications. For instance, while legal reforms safeguarding women's rights, particularly in land ownership and inheritance, aim to reduce gender disparities and foster economic and social empowerment (Anyidoho, 2021), it is important to recognise that simply reverting to pre-colonial ideals does not automatically eliminate gender inequality. Pre-colonial societies had their own complexities and forms of gender biases. Therefore, addressing gender inequality requires a nuanced approach that acknowledges both historical and contemporary challenges. Thus, although quotas and affirmative action policies aim for inclusivity, it is essential to navigate the fine line between honouring authentic pre-colonial practices and critically evaluating their impact on gender equality.

While the focus on women's agency and the re-evaluation of pre-colonial ideals is crucial, it's imperative to recognise that narratives of identity formation extend beyond women to encompass men as well. Ammann and Staudacher (2021) emphasise the complexity of masculinities in Africa, acknowledging that men, too, navigate the tension between conformity and authenticity within patriarchal systems. The exploration of masculinity in post-colonial Africa, as seen in Chinua Achebe's works and discussions by Ratele (2013), reveals the multifaceted nature of men's experiences and their ongoing process of self-discovery in a changing societal landscape. The ongoing process of self-discovery and identity formation should involve both men and women, recognising the complexities that arise from historical, socio-political, and economic shifts.

3.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, the literature review highlights the pervasive influence of patriarchy on African societies, as evidenced through various lenses such as literature and indigenous cultural practices. Women's representation in literature reflects and perpetuates entrenched gender norms, often relegating them to subordinate roles in various aspects of their lives, such as marriage and economics. This portrayal often leads to women being objectified and seen as mere instruments in these spheres, rather than as fully autonomous individuals. However, amidst these challenges, there is a growing movement towards reinterpretation and adaptation of indigenous cultural practices to empower women and challenge patriarchal norms. This transformative endeavour, exemplified by initiatives such as African Womanism, showcases the resilience and agency of African women in reshaping their socio-cultural landscape. Moving forward, promoting a more diverse and just society requires continued efforts to challenge discriminatory practices and promote diverse narratives that reflect the realities of women in post-colonial Africa.

CHAPTER 4: UNVEILING PATRIARCHAL CONSTRUCTS IN TSITSI DANGAREMBGA'S DANGAREMBG *THIS MOURNABLE BODY*

4.1 Introduction

This Mournable Body depicts the gender dynamics, racial power structures and the quest for agency amidst rapid societal changes wherein, the female characters' narratives provide a lens through which to examine the impact of the intersection of race, class and gender in post-colonial Zimbabwe. In line with the aforementioned, the current chapter intends to address Black women's enduring struggle for identity and respectability politics in relation to autonomy and liberation in a world marked by turmoil in inequality. Through the protagonist Tambudzai and other female characters, Dangarembga offers a compelling assessment of the varied challenges and victories encountered by women in a society dealing with the aftermath of colonial rule.

This chapter analyses Dangarembga's novel by firstly, providing a summary of the novel and a brief biographical overview of the author to highlight the novelist's trajectory. This is followed by an analysis of key themes depicted in the narrative, with a particular focus on patriarchal norms in post-colonial Africa, including the effects of colonial sexist legacies and indigenous traditions that shape gender dynamics in domestic and economic contexts. The chapter then explores the theme of gender-based violence through an examination of its impact on Black women such as Getrude and Mako. Lastly, the chapter highlights empowered women who, despite facing significant challenges, have made notable progress and serve as models for alternative paths for subjugated women.

4.2 The author and novel synopsis

Born in Mutoko, Zimbabwe in 1959, Tsitsi Dangarembga's upbringing and education intensely influenced her identity as a writer and activist. Dangarembga's background includes being a daughter of teachers; her mother Susan holds the distinction of being the first black Southern Rhodesian woman to earn a university degree. Villanova (2023) explores this author's profound sense of displacement, both in Zimbabwe and the United Kingdom, a sentiment that resonates deeply with the novelist's experiences. Her early encounters with social injustices and gender disparities ignited a passion for storytelling as a potent tool for confronting and addressing societal issues. Having been born in a colonised nation, Dangarembga (2022) asserts her status as an "existence refugee," emphasising a lifelong struggle from the moment of her birth, and likely even before, considering the conditions that she was born into and their impact on her prenatal surroundings diminished sense of self, likening herself to a mere shadow devoid of personhood. This portrayal justified harsh control over African men from the 1890s onward, positioning women as prey needing rescue from socio-economic exploitation by men, thus creating distinct gender identities between African men and women. Furthermore, her move to England at the tender age of two led to Dangarembga's struggle with a sense of estrangement due to her racial and gender identity. In her formative years, the experience of being perceived solely through the lens of her 'blackness' led her to internalise a perception of inferiority and marginalisation in relation to those who were not black, often feeling lesser or excluded compared to individuals from other racial backgrounds.

With academic pursuits at the University of Zimbabwe and the German Film and Television Academy in Berlin, Dangarembga harnessed her skills in filmmaking and literature. Her acclaimed debut novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988), explores themes of colonialism, gender and identity, setting the stage for her continued advocacy for social change through her work. Dangarembga's characters in her fiction trilogy are deeply informed by her own life encounters and the injustices that she faced. Similar

to the protagonist Tambudzai, Dangarembga attended a predominantly white girls' school, her enrollment reliant on her uncle's support. Through *This Mournable Body* (2018) and her broader literary work, Dangarembga amplifies marginalised voices and challenges oppressive systems, inspiring readers to envision a more just and equitable society.

This Mournable Body offers an assessment of the composite nature of Black women in post-colonial Zimbabwe where the protagonist Tambudzai and secondary characters such as Nyasha, Gertrude, Mrs. Taka, Mrs. Manyanga, Mrs. Moetsabi, Pedzi, and Netsai navigate the difficulty of their lived experiences and societal constraints. The novel begins with Tambudzai living in a hostel in Harare, dealing with the difficulties of securing employment in the bustling city. This opening sets the stage for her struggle with alienation and the erosion of her identity in a post-colonial context as she faces the complexities of racial discrimination, and the clash between traditional values and modern influences. Throughout the novel, the psychological state of Tambu is a pivotal reflection of her perceived failures considering her once promising past. She bears the haunting image of a hyena constantly laughing at her plight, symbolising her deep-seated shame and despair. This theme is magnified when Tambu is put off work after severely punishing a school learner and is subsequently admitted at a mental institution. It is at the institution where the protagonist experiences profound mental instability, feeling ashamed of herself and retreating into isolation.

Tambudzai's quest for economic stability leads her to a series of jobs, each presenting new challenges and reflecting broader societal limitations which point out the persistent economic and social hardships faced by many in Zimbabwe. As stated by Otieno (2019:22), Tambudzai's education has not brought her the success she aimed for because despite her university education, she experiences unemployment

and becomes a victim of both race and gender discrimination in post-colonial Zimbabwe.

As the narrative progresses, Tambudzai's sister Netsai is introduced, providing an idea into generational dynamics and the lingering impacts of women's involvement in political war. Netsai's story reveals how the lack of State support and compensation for former soldiers impedes the economic progress for many Black women, aggravating poverty and limiting opportunities even for their families. In addition to this national disappointment, Nyasha, Tambudzai's educated and rebellious cousin who attempts to balance career ambitions with familial duties, faces disillusionment at the disappointment of her home country's impedimental role in the empowerment of Black women who she tries to assist in the workshops that she hosts in her home. Alongside her partner Leon, the couple challenges conventional gender roles in heterosexual marriages with Leon being supportive of Nyasha's endeavours. Nyasha and Leon's domestic employees the Takas, represent traditional values and authority in marriage wherein, Mr. Taka reinforces traditional gender roles, establishing a dynamic where adherence to power dynamics in heterosexual marriages is considered of utmost importance.

Tambudzai's hostel mates Gertrude and Mako exemplify female bodily objectification both in the public and private space. Gertrude's experiences highlight how rigid gender norms dictate women's roles and value, confining them to predefined societal expectations that undermine their autonomy and self-worth. Similarly, Mako exposes the harsh reality of physical abuse that women endure in private spaces, illustrating the pervasive nature of gender-based violence and control.

Tambudzai's interactions with other characters, such as Mrs. Moetsabi, Mako, Mainini Lucia, Christine and Pedzi, further illustrate the resilience of women in post-colonial Africa. As such, these women navigate oppressive societal structures and historical injustices with determination, often forging their own paths to

empowerment. Despite facing numerous challenges, Tambudzai and the women around her persistently strive for greatness. Their stories reflect the strength and tenacity of African women, who continue to defy expectations and seek a better future amidst ongoing challenges. The use of the second person "you" narrative technique intimately draws readers into Tambudzai's perspective, inviting empathy for her struggles against societal expectations and her own aspirations. Throughout the narrative, Tambudzai confronts various obstacles, from economic and political hardships to cultural norms that curtail her agency. This prompts critical reflection on the myriad challenges faced by women in Zimbabwean society.

4.3 Gender and domestic expectations in *This Mournable Body*

In recent decades, shifts in family structures and dynamics have significantly altered the lived experiences of African women, fundamentally reshaping their roles and opportunities within familial bonds Nzegwu (2012). The family set-ups and gender dynamics in *This Mournable Body* are reflective of the influence of patriarchal ideologies facilitated by colonial legacies and oppressive indigenous ideologies and this is portrayed through the character of Leon, Nyasha, Netsai and her two daughters as well as Tambu and her mother.

Social institutions typically dictate the social and cultural norms which dictate the roles of women in family dynamics, career opportunities, political participation and education. Within the context of engrained gender roles, the division of labour in both the private and public spaces mirrors a historical legacy of colonial oppression which systematically marginalised Black women (Agbaje, 2021). This legacy perpetuates the expectation that females primarily undertake domestic responsibilities, further establishing gender disparities within the family structure. As a result, females encounter barriers to personal development and self-determination, as their opportunities for educational attainment and participation in extracurricular activities

are limited. In light of this, Dangarembga (2018) illustrates how men can challenge and redefine traditional gender roles by actively engaging in household duties alongside their partners. Through the character of Leon (German), the novelist portrays men who reject the passive roles assigned to them by society and instead support their female counterparts in domestic tasks such as cooking, as exemplified when Leon is described preparing a meal alongside Nyasha (124). This behaviour is notably surprising to Tambu who attributes it to the fact that her brother-in-law is not African raised, reflecting her own ingrained expectations about gender roles influenced by her family's traditional views. This depiction not only undermines the stereotype of men as solely breadwinners but also emphasises the importance of equitable partnerships where responsibilities are shared. African Womanism (1996:103) advocates for women's literature as a platform for critiquing failures in both domestic and public spheres. Thus, Dangarembga's portrayal of an egalitarian home in which, men not only lessen the burden on women but also contribute to a more balanced and respectful relationship dynamic in their household, is commendable.

Netsai, who lost her leg during the war, made the decision to entrust her two daughters Concept and Freedom to her mother's care upon realising her inability to adequately provide for them. As the designated primary caretakers, mothers are often left with the responsibility of providing for their children even when they are unable to, while fathers can be absolved (Scarborough, 2001). Netsai's inability to work for her children places them at a disadvantage, limiting their access to education (232). While she is the primary caretaker, the financial strain is aggravated by the lack of support from her siblings, who are also unable to contribute financially and thus making it impossible for the children to buy books and school uniforms. As a result, they primarily take on household duties at their grandparent's house. As expected, in line with the dominant gender ideology, Netsai's daughters are praised for the part that they play in caring for their grandmother's household. Tambudzai's

mother expresses gratitude towards Netsai for bringing her daughters, acknowledging the invaluable contribution that they make to the household by cooking and maintaining cleanliness. Netsai's daughters fetch water from the pump down the road and do the washing (225). If the children were boys instead of girls, they may have not been faced with the same level of expectation or praise for engaging in household chores (Wikle, 2014). According to Njogu and Orchardson-Mazrui (2013:2), boys and girls undergo socialisation within the family, educational institutions and other social spheres, which condition them to adopt specific behaviours and assume distinct roles in society.

When Tambudzai eventually returns home from the cities, to secure a partnership with the chairwoman of the women's club for Village Eco-tourism, her mother instructs her to stay in their old house because Tambudzai's uncles only allocated them one room in the new house constructed (229). As such, Tambudzai eagerly promises to build her mother a house before her uncle's house can be completed. However, despite Tambudzai's keenness to construct a new home for her mother, she dismisses her daughter's offer, claiming that if Tambudzai's father could not build a house, Tambudzai herself lacks the capability to undertake such a task (229). This attitude reflects a persistent belief that tasks considered beyond the capability of males, especially those regarded as heads of households and thus providers and protectors, are automatically seen as outside the competence of females (Hiller, 2014). In this case, Tambu's mother's belief that building a house for families is inherently reserved for men, reflecting deeply ingrained gender stereotypes and expectations within their society. However, this current study argues that familial responsibilities should not be rigidly divided along gender lines but rather embraced as collective endeavours, wherein each member contributes according to their abilities. The narratives presented in the exploration of colonial legacies as well as indigenous African systems with regard to gender roles

within post-colonial African societies emphasise the pressing need for a paradigm shift towards mutual support. (Aniekwu, 2006).

Dangarembga's depiction of characters such as Tambudzai, Nyasha, and Netsai, alongside their respective familial dynamics, emphasises the profound impact of colonial legacies and patriarchal ideologies on gender roles within post-colonial African societies. These narratives expose the constraints imposed by gender norms and by historical injustices. By challenging out-dated notions of masculinity and femininity, Dangarembga advocates for a redefinition of familial responsibilities as collaborative efforts rather than rigidly divided by gender. Embracing a model of mutual support and inclusivity within family structures is crucial for fostering resilience, empowerment, and societal progress in contemporary African contexts.

4.4 The Influence of Intersectionality on wealth disparity

The intertwining forces of economic marginalisation and patriarchal structures present formidable barriers, particularly for Black women who often find themselves at the intersection of multiple forms of disadvantages. The legacy of colonialism casts a long shadow of systems and structures that continue to perpetuate economic inequalities along gender and race lines. In *This Mournable Body*, Dangarembga reveals economic inequality between black and white people as well as women and men, which looms large over the post-independence era. Phimister and Pillosof (2017) emphasise the inherent conservatism of the white wage labouring class in Zimbabwe's economic history, which aimed to maintain their superior position by ensuring a lack of a white reserve army and an uneducated African workforce; this historical dynamic continues to affect the current Zimbabwean state by influencing socio-economic inequalities and labour relations between Black and white people. Dangarembga largely portrays this theme through Tambudzai and Tracey.

This Mournable Body depicts how Black women navigate a Zimbabwean society fraught with challenges including homelessness and fractured familial structures mainly due to economic instability. Olufemi (2000) asserts that the lack of stable homes, strong familial support systems, and viable employment opportunities heightens the vulnerability of African women, a reality starkly illustrated by characters like Tambudzai, who has long been estranged from her family. The novel is a creative portrayal of how black people, particularly women, in Zimbabwe are constantly battling the urge to leave the country for better economic opportunities. Even news reports in the country are flooded with stories of many people who recently obtained qualifications such as Tambu, leave the country for work in neighbouring states (85). Dangarembga points out Tambudzai's frequent struggles to secure employment, as seen when in one of her attempts at a job interview; Mbuya Riley's employee curtly informs her that there are no available positions (16). This interaction not only exemplifies the broader systemic barriers and dismissive attitudes Tambudzai faces but also suggests the possibility of underlying tensions between women in precarious positions. Mbuya Riley's employee might have felt intimidated by the prospect of another Black woman potentially threatening her job security. This fear could have driven her to dismiss Tambudzai even before her employer had the chance to meet her, reflecting the harsh realities of competition and survival in a society where opportunities are scarce.

The historical structure of oppression continues to shape contemporary realities, perpetuating the marginalisation of Black women even under black governance in post-colonial Zimbabwe. According to Ossome and Naidu (2021), Zimbabwe's economic state is marked by considerable instability and challenges, particularly in relation to gendered land reforms that impact agricultural productivity and economic equity. Colonial-era economic disparities and patriarchal norms persist, reinforced by corruption and nepotism in post-colonial administrations. As a result, women like Tambudzai continue to face socio-economic challenges presented by their neo-colonial states,

reinforcing inequalities and perpetuating systems of oppression that disproportionately advantage white women while marginalising Black women. Despite Tambudzai's access to education, facilitated by her uncle, her struggle for security persists due to systemic economic challenges. After graduating from the University of Zimbabwe, Tambudzai struggles to find meaningful employment and can only secure a job as a copywriter at an advertising company owned by white individuals. There, she works with a former schoolmate, Tracey, who despite holding the same qualifications, is appointed to the board of executives at the same company. Despite her hard work and dedication, Tambu's white male colleagues often take credit for her contributions. For example, during a critical project where Tambu developed a comprehensive marketing strategy, her ideas were presented by a white male colleague at a board meeting without acknowledging her efforts (42). This appropriation of her work by her white male colleagues not only deprives Tambu of the recognition she deserves but also hinders her career advancement. This scenario points out the concept of intersectional marginalisation, as it emphasises the compounded discrimination that she faces. As a Black woman, the protagonist is subjected to both racial and gender biases, which intersect to create unique and intensified barriers. Her experiences in the workplace illustrate how systemic inequities persist, where Black women's contributions are often overlooked or claimed by others, thereby perpetuating their marginalisation (Crenshaw, 1989). This disparity in the career outcomes highlights the racial segregation that Tambudzai faces, showing how her abilities and achievements are continually undervalued and overlooked because of her race. As per hooks (2000:03), the predominant presence of white women in today's feminist discourse often overlooks critical questioning regarding the alignment of their perspective on women's reality with the lived experiences of women as a collective group. Rooted in colonialism, imperialism, and systems of racial superiority, this privilege has afforded white women access to opportunities, resources, and power that have been systematically

denied to women of colour. From economic advantages to social status and political influence, white women have benefited from the legacy of colonial domination and racial oppression, perpetuating their privileged position within societal frameworks. As such, Dangarembga (2018) emphasises the disparities faced by Black women like Tambudzai in the workplace in comparison to their white counterparts.

After leaving the agency, Tambudzai, like many other determined women, ventures into the city in search of employment and opportunities to build a better future for herself. Despite having a good education, Tambudzai finds herself encountering the harsh realities of economic insecurity that her education alone cannot mitigate. Throughout her experiences, the looming spectre of financial instability weighs heavily on her, amplifying her desire for a secure future. While residing at Mrs. Manyanga's place and grappling with the challenges of poverty, Tambudzai adopts a mantra of "less eating and less spending" (41). However, one day as Tambudzai gazes out of the window, she contemplates her circumstances and the challenges ahead explicitly doubting herself as she asserts that:

You are concerned you will start thinking of ending it all, having nothing to carry on for: no home, no job, no sustainability family bonds. You have failed to make anything for yourself, yet your mother endures even more bitter circumstances than yours. How with all your education, do you become more needy than your mother? (41).

This comparison points out the systemic nature of oppression that persists across black generations, emphasising how patriarchal and postcolonial dynamics continue to thwart the ambitions and potential of women like Tambudzai, leaving them to deal with despair and a lack of purpose. The social, political, and economic dynamics of these two generations have significantly influenced their financial positions. For Tambudzai's mother, colonial rule imposed severe limitations on economic opportunities for Black women, confining them to the domestic arena (Abramovitz,

2017). Post-independence, while there was hope for progress, the persistence of patriarchal structures and the nation's economic instability hindered substantial improvement in women's economic status. Tambudzai's generation faces the compounded effects of these historical injustices along with contemporary challenges such as high unemployment, urbanisation pressures, and a failing education system that fails to translate into job opportunities.

Living in Mrs. Manyanga's house exposes Tambudzai to the comforts and stability of a familial home, intensifying her longing for a similar sense of security in her own life. Initially, she finds herself eager to marry one of Mrs. Manyanga's sons for financial security, particularly Larky, whom she first saw (43). Her motivation for considering marriage is not based on love but rather on the prospect of stability and connected with her fear of poverty and homelessness. Thus, her wish to marry one of the Manyanga's sons emerges as a pragmatic response to her profound anxieties about economic vulnerability, revealing that even an educated woman can be compelled by economic pressures to seek stability through marriage. During one visitation by Mrs. Manyanga's sons',

Envy blossoms in Tambu's heart, for at this point, in spite of her inaction, she still entertains a desire not for marriage itself but for the security the state of being married brings. She does not direct the grudge against the wives she has not seen, but against these vain, vacant-eyed, plastic-nailed creatures who are enjoying a life of security and ease, the kind of living she had envisioned for herself and up until that calamitous day at the agency had worked for so diligently (73).

In such contexts, where economic opportunities are scarce and social safety nets are lacking, women often find themselves compelled to prioritise survival over personal fulfilment or emotional well-being. Despite her aspirations and desires leveraging her education to achieve professional success and independence, Tambu

finds herself envious of the security that marriage symbolises, rather than the institution itself. The downside of it is the possibility that Tambudzai's desperation for financial security might lead her into a patriarchal relationship where she sacrifices her autonomy and agency in exchange for stability. Thus, this study emphasises that women such as Tambudzai should strive to maintain independence by building their careers, acquiring skills, and establishing their own sources of income despite how challenging it may be. In that way, their marriage will encompass love and longevity, transcending mere accumulation of wealth or financial stability.

Eventually, Tambudzai secures a teaching position after numerous setbacks. However, the relentless stress and frustration from her challenging circumstances lead to a mental breakdown and in a moment of uncontrolled distress, Tambudzai physically assaults one of her students, Elizabeth (95). This behaviour has a profound effect on her professional life, leading to her suspension and further aggravating her mental health issues. As a result, Tambudzai is hospitalised due to her mental breakdown (103). This incident highlights the psychological toll of her struggles and the overwhelming pressures she faces in both her professional and personal life.

The fear of pregnancy among women is connected to the prevailing realities of high unemployment rates and economic instability. With limited access to formal employment opportunities and minimal social safety nets, many women find themselves precariously positioned in the workforce. The prospect of pregnancy brings forth anxieties of potential job loss, as employers may view maternity leave as burdensome or costly. Sonfield *et al.* (2013:12) assert that economically disadvantaged women may be at particular risk of negative employment outcomes as a consequence of closely spaced or unplanned births. Dangarembga (2018) exemplifies this dynamic by portraying Mai Taka, who boldly denies her boss' insinuation of her pregnancy by inquiring if Mrs. Taka is not carrying 'anything'

judging by her help's petite round figure. Nyasha's employee however dismisses the question by using Taka as an excuse and that her employers have so much work for her to do, and pregnancy may be a possible deterrent (124). Evidently, some women are often hesitant to start families or expand existing ones, fearing the financial repercussions and the risk of losing their source of income. This reluctance further shows a larger systemic problem where women's reproductive choices are deeply connected to socioeconomic circumstances, emphasising the necessity for comprehensive policies and support systems that empower women to make educated decisions regarding family planning without jeopardising their economic security or career goals.

4.5 The Impact of Political Endeavours on Black Women

The intersection of politics and the identity of Black women is a terrain rife with complications, where the experiences of these women are often relegated to the periphery of mainstream discourse. Political endeavours as stated by McNay (2014), refer to efforts or activities undertaken to influence, shape, or participate in the governance and political processes of a society. As such, political engagements are significant for Black women as they navigate systems of oppression rooted in race, gender, and frequently class. Uche (2023:12) contends that women often form the backbone of political movements, raising solidarity and facilitating change. In addition, Womanism (1985:64) highlights the importance of understanding political dimensions in the quest for women's emancipation in the African context.

In this discussion, it is crucial to explore the effects of war on women such as Netsai and Mainini Lucia who even post-wars, continue to struggle with psychological and economic ramifications in post-colonial Zimbabwe. Even Tambu seems to be tired of listening to Christine's recollections of their involvement in the war as well as injustices that come with it (84), however, the latter's is proof that the Zimbabwe that

they see is not the one they had envisioned. During the war, these women fought not only for national freedom from colonial rule but also for their own liberation and the future of their communities. Their efforts emphasise the critical role that Black women played in striving for both national and personal freedom, asserting their rights and contributing to the broader struggle for independence and equality (Farmer, 2017).

Black women suffer not only the enduring hardships stemming from the sustained effects of colonialism on politics that marginalises their voices and opportunities, but also the deeply personal toll of conflict and violence. Mainini Lucia embodies this dual burden with her life impacted by her involvement in the war for liberation. Initially motivated by the hope of securing a better future for herself and her son, her aspirations are shattered when her son becomes a victim of the violence perpetrated by the Rhodesians (147). Assigned the task of leading cattle away to spare them from slaughter, Lucia's son is mercilessly murdered, illustrating the brutality and indiscriminate nature of conflict. Mainini's experience of losing a son to the brutality inflicted by Rhodesian forces underlines the personal sacrifices made by Black people in the struggle for liberation. However, *This Mournable Body* further demonstrates the resilience of Black women striving to survive in post-colonial Africa, despite the challenges that they endured during colonialism. Mainini Lucia owns a security company, which is highlighted when she proudly mentions having created a logo, uniform, and everything else for her AK Security Company (146). Moreover, Christine, also a former combatant, works at Mainini's company, illustrating that Black women continue to persevere and succeed despite the historical adversities that they have faced.

During the struggle of civil war in Mozambique, both men and women bore the physical and psychological scars of conflict, enduring impairments and losses that profoundly affected their lives. However, the aftermath of war differed significantly for

women, particularly mothers, whose experiences encompassed unique challenges. These women often faced the burden of caring for families in the absence of husbands or fathers Nsamenang (2010), managing households under strained conditions worsened by war. Netsai epitomises this harsh reality, having lost one leg during the tumult of war. Her disability serves as a reminder of the toll of conflict, both physically and psychologically. Beyond the immediate loss of limb, Netsai's experience speaks to the broader sacrifices and struggles faced by countless individuals thrust into the midst of political turbulence and violence. During Tambudzai's visit home, she becomes aware of the pervasive impact of the war on her entire family. For instance, Netsai's daughters are deeply affected by their mother's disability and they often freeze in place whenever the topic of their mother's tragic loss of her leg arises. Tambudzai's mother pours out her emotions as she expresses:

My daughter ended up with one leg, although she started with two. One leg with two children, Tambudzai. That mathematics does not work out. That is why these children are uneducated. It is the wrong numbers. Netsai could not work. You sent nothing (232).

The absence of the father of Netsai's children speaks volumes about the unequal burden placed on female parents in Zimbabwean society in which the prevailing societal expectation is that women bear the sole responsibility for childcare and family upkeep. As carriers of pregnancies, women are often the primary caretakers of children despite any shortcomings or challenges that they face, for Netsai, this is worsened by the fact that her children's father may have been from Mozambique since they met during war and never saw each other again after that (226).

Netsai's resilience through her unwavering determination and ability to endure despite challenging circumstances in the face of adversity speaks to the strength and perseverance of African women who often bear the brunt of political hardships.

Beyond physical disability, Netsai embodies the collective spirit of endurance that characterises many African women, navigating life and overcoming the myriad challenges wrought by political instability.

The narratives of Mainini and Netsai highlight the intersection between personal struggles and political turmoil as well as the enduring sacrifices and hardships endured by Black women in their pursuit of freedom and justice within restrained political landscapes (Crenshaw, 2013). What distinguishes the politics of Black women from men is their navigation of intersecting systems of oppression rooted in gender and class. While men may also face political challenges, women like Mainini face additional layers of complexity, such as the regret of participating in war instead of fulfilling perceived duties as caretakers at home. Despite being marginalised in mainstream discourse, the resilience of women such as Mainini and Netsai in the face of adversity speaks to the strength and perseverance of African women who bear the brunt of political hardships. As Dangarembga's narratives compellingly illustrate, understanding the complexities of women's political engagement requires recognising the interplay between personal experiences and broader societal struggles, and acknowledging the unique perspectives and contributions of Black women in shaping political discourse and outcomes.

4.6 Gender-Based Violence

Black women in the post-colonial milieu continue to be vulnerable to physical and psychological violations on the basis of their gender and race which seem to be worsened with time. Most forms of this abuse tend to limit women's autonomy and expose them to various forms of exploitation (Mensah, 2023). Dangarembga portrays Mrs. Taka, Gertrude, and Mako as facing various forms of violation that women encounter in post-colonial Zimbabwe. Mr. Taka and Shine are depicted as

perpetrators of violence against women while Bertha is portrayed as a woman who accepts or condones such violence.

Masha (2019:19) avers that one way in which men instil stern leadership over women is through violence. As such, Mr. Taka is a good example of this because from time to time, his wife is reported as not well because of bodily harm. One time, when Mrs. Taka is invited to accompany her employers and their children to the cinema, she opts not to wear her work uniform as it is not required for the outing. However, as the car approaches the gate which Mr. Taka was attending to, he notices that his wife does not have her working uniform on and starts to interrogate her about it. When they do not reach a conclusion, Mr. Taka asserts that he will address the matter further at home (155). His immediate assumption that Mrs. Taka lied reflects a deep mistrust and a rigid adherence to his own rules, indicating a domineering and authoritarian nature. Furthermore, Mr. Taka's insistence on discussing the matter at home suggests a desire to maintain strict control over his wife's actions and decisions, even in public settings. This behaviour exemplifies a patriarchal mindset where the husband's authority is unquestionable, and the wife's autonomy is severely restricted. The situation escalates to the point where Nyasha and Leon have to intervene, persuading Mr. Taka to allow his wife to go to the cinema with them (154). This intervention highlights the severity of Mr. Taka's control, as it requires the involvement of others to mediate and ensure Mrs. Taka's participation in what should be a simple social outing. The fact that external parties need to step in demonstrates how Mr. Taka's authoritative behaviour is not only oppressive but also publicly visible, affecting those around him. Through a conversation between Mrs. Taka and Nyasha, the former unveils the physical violation that she endures from her husband.

Nothing that happens now will stop anything anymore. In fact, from the time I went down yesterday, was already going to happen. Remember Mai Anesu, I said, no, it's better for me not to go. He had already kicked my leg

that morning. So what is going to happen today will happen when I have seen the film and not when I haven't seen it (156).

In the passage above, Mrs. Taka reflects on her experience of violence, control and intimidation within her marriage and portrays a sense of resignation and inevitability regarding the violence she faces. In doing so, she also recognises that the abuse is not contingent upon her actions; it will occur regardless. Moreover, this highlights the dynamics of power and control in abusive relationships, where women often feel trapped and powerless to break free from the cycle of violence.

In addition to the abovementioned, *This Mournable Body* depicts the scrutiny and societal expectations faced by women such as Gertrude who encounter a hostile reception for her perceived inappropriate attire according to cultural norms and context-specific standards. Gertrude is depicted as an elegant woman, accentuating her curves as she sashays over to a combi, catching the attention of a group of people inside and outside vehicles. While Tambudzai is in a combi, she witnesses the attention that her hostel mate has garnered from people at the Market Square. As Gertrude tries to climb on to the taxi, she loses her grip and falls, playing into the audience of the crowd that laughs (22). The issue here is that the character is not dressed decently as per the societal dictates and thus, she becomes the target of an unfriendly crowd's accusations of improper dress, highlighting the dehumanising way in which society reduces women to mere objects for scrutiny and judgment. Both men and women make sneering comments and Tambu appears to be enjoying the spectacle. One woman trying to pass by Gertrude comments that women who dress like the victim are a problem in the society, one man shouts that someone open Gertrude's thighs for her. The crowd's commentary moves from the victim on the ground to attempting to stop her from getting into the taxi with the driver asserting that naked people are not allowed to go into vehicles because they are not bedrooms (23-24). Gertrude is eventually rescued by a young man who helps her cover up and look for another combi. Evidently, the crowd's behaviour highlights the

disturbing reality that women are often trivialised in patriarchal societies especially with regard to bodily autonomy (Maluleke & Moyer, 2020).

The objectification of Gertrude's body not only serves as an illustration of the pervasive misogyny within the community but also reveals the insidious nature of the constant surveillance and policing of women's bodies reinforcing patriarchal notions of modesty and propriety that dictate women's behaviour and appearance. In this instance, Gertrude's autonomy and agency are stripped away as her body becomes a site for the projection of societal norms and expectations dress code. Womanism suggests that heterosexual black males' interactions with the ideological female body often entail seeing the black female body either as self-sacrificingly maternal or self-sacrificingly sexual, and sometimes both simultaneously (Ogunyemi 1985:2). This study argues that the issue of dress code should be dealt with sensitivity and without imposing restrictive or discriminatory standards solely based on gender.

In a post-colonial Zimbabwean society which is informed by cultural norms and traditional gender roles that dictate modesty and propriety (Ewelukwa, 2002), Mako, who adheres to the accepted dress code by wearing baggy clothes, still experiences sexual violation, illustrating that adherence to these norms does not protect women from gender-based violence. Mako is sexually assaulted by Shine, a fellow tenant at Mrs. Manyangas, who emerges from his room in a manner that led Mako to assume he was merely going out (56). Mako explains to Bertha that Shine enjoyed himself behind her, and that she thought she should let him finish and go, so she kept quiet (57). To this, Dangarembga reveals how some women have normalised sexual assault through Bertha's response.

Only that? Then why are you crying? Bertha demands. He didn't threaten you? He didn't say he will find you again? Mako, if you ask all women at your workplace, in fact women, maybe just not Tambudzai over there, then you will know it's what nearly every one of them puts up with (57).

This incident reveals that females are assaulted not only in public spaces but also within the private confines of their homes. The assumption that adhering to traditional norms of dress and behaviour can protect women is dismantled as the narrative exposes the pervasive nature of misogyny. This pivotal moment challenges the notion that women's clothing choices alone dictate their treatment and the deeper issue of entitlement and disregard for women's autonomy and bodily integrity. The experiences of both Gertrude and Mako highlight the urgent need to challenge patriarchal attitudes and dismantle systems of oppression that perpetuate the objectification and mistreatment of women.

In conclusion, Dangarembga's narrative illuminates the intersecting challenges faced by women in post-colonial Africa, with a particular focus on abuse and trauma. Through compelling characters like Mrs. Taka, Gertrude and Mako, Dangarembga skillfully portrays the complexities of navigating societal expectations and the pervasive violence and assault against women both in public and private spaces. These stories serve as a poignant reminder of the resilience and strength of women who confront and resist oppressive systems, demanding respect for their autonomy, dignity, and rights.

4.7 The Shifting Landscape of Gender Norms: Women's Agency and Empowerment

The transition of gender roles facilitated by the agency of women is a process that has been shaped by historical, cultural and socio-economic factors across different societies and time periods. Throughout history, gender roles have been deeply embedded in social norms and expectations which often constrain women's autonomy and opportunities for self-determination. However, as societies evolve and progress, there has been a gradual shift towards challenging traditional gender norms and empowering women to assert their agency in various spheres of life (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). This current section explores how gender roles have

evolved over time, the challenges and obstacles women have faced in asserting their agency and the ongoing efforts towards achieving gender equality and empowering women to fully participate in all aspects of life. In this way, this study gains insight into the complexities of gender dynamics and the ongoing struggle for gender justice and equality in Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body* through the following characters:

4.7.1 Tambudzai

Tambu's economic despair takes a turn when she reconnects with Tracey who then extends her a job offer as a receptionist at Green Jacaranda Safaris. From that moment on, the protagonist strives to regain her footing after a challenging period marked by a mental breakdown and an unfortunate incident culminating in her confinement to a mental institution. Under the guidance of Tracey, her former college mate and colleague from their shared experience at an advertising agency, Tambudzai embarks on a new chapter in her journey towards stability and self-renewal. As part of her employment package, Tambudzai is granted a house on a five-year lease, with the option to convert it into an agreement of sale (176). This new job not only provides the protagonist with financial stability but also enables her to reconnect with her roots. It is through this job that Tambu is finally able to visit her family back in the village after a long while, driving there and bringing along some goods for them (227). This visit highlights the positive impact of her new employment, as it allows her to support and reconnect with her family, reaffirming her sense of identity and belonging. This opportunity marks a pivotal moment for Tambudzai, who, despite initially contemplating marriage to one of Mrs. Manyanga's sons for wealth, security, and a home, now emphasises the significance of perseverance over relying solely on marriage for social security or validation. As Tambudzai proudly reflects on her journey, she is grateful that she did not attain a well-renovated house by marrying one of her former landlady's sons.

Your smile expanding on your face, you compare the stone colours to Mai Manyanga's ochre. Your good fortune all but brings you to tears as you stand next to your own kitchen without having to marry any of the Manyanga brothers (178).

This captures the thoughtful sense of accomplishment and independence that Tambudzai experiences which challenges the notion that marriage is the sole source of security and happiness for women especially in the 21st century. Instead, it points out the importance of self-reliance, determination, and self-love in achieving personal and professional success. Through Tambudzai's story, Dangarembga reveals the transformative power of women's agency and resilience in navigating the complexities of post-colonial African society and redefining traditional notions of femininity and success.

4.7.2 Pedzi

The agency of women is vividly demonstrated through the character of Pedzi who initially worked as the receptionist, typist and project officer at Green Jacaranda Safaris and has ascended to the role of project manager due to her innovative contributions. Pedzi earned her job by going extra miles for her job which includes arriving early at work, making phone calls and most importantly, pitching an impressive business proposal to Tracey. Tracey's inclination reveals her appreciation for ideas proposed by her staff, particularly when they contribute to advancement. Initially wrestling with jealousy over Pedzi's achievements, Tambudzai eventually recognises and embraces Pedzi's success and proficiency by conceding that Pedzi surpasses her in providing innovative ideas. It is Pedzi who makes Tambu realise that a girl from high-density areas can become a successful businesswoman (213).

Pedzi's journey serves as a beacon of hope for women across post-colonial Africa, showing that with hard work, determination, and unwavering commitment to their

goals, they can overcome obstacles and achieve greatness. This character's journey echoes sentiments expressed by scholars like Afisi (2010), who discuss the essential roles women play in societal development. Through Pedzi's narrative, the resilience and agency of women in post-colonial Africa are celebrated, inspiring others to embrace their authenticity and pursue their dreams despite the odds stacked against them. Also, Tambudzai's acknowledgment of Pedzi's work serves as reminder to encourage solidarity among Black women, emphasising the importance of supporting each other in their respective journeys toward success and empowerment. This narrative emphasises the notion that Black women, driven by determination, can thrive independently, without feeling compelled to seek marriage solely for security rather than love. This echoes the sentiments of African Womanists like Nawal El Saadawi, who have long advocated for women's autonomy and empowerment. Hence, Pedzi's autonomy and professional growth exemplify the broader movement towards recognising and validating the capabilities and aspirations of African women. Through Pedzi's achievements, the narrative not only highlights individual empowerment but also promotes a collective vision of progress, where women support and inspire one another to break free from traditional constraints and pursue their ambitions confidently and independently.

4.7.3 Mrs. Moetsabi

The achievements of one woman can serve as a powerful source of inspiration and empowerment for others, fostering a positive ripple effect among women in post-colonial Africa. This is exemplified through the character of Mrs. Moetsabi, who owns a fashion boutique also known as Queen of Africa. Tambudzai is inspired by Mrs. Moetsai's success, learning that it transcends national borders, which convinces her that achievement knows no boundaries. Tambudzai's reaction, nodding in affirmation and stating "yes, women like you can flourish," (187) shows the impact of seeing another woman succeed in defying societal expectations and pursuing her dreams.

Although Queen Moetsabi business fell into decline, she kept on rallying. As Tambudzai asserts

She adds nail polish, lipstick and manicure sets to her displays. Slowly she phases out West African fabrics. She contracts a young woman with qualification from the polytechnic to sit with cuticle cutters, nail buffs and razor blades at a folding table set in a corner of the shop (192).

Mrs. Moetsabi's success serves as a beacon of hope and possibility, demonstrating that women have the potential to thrive and excel in various fields, even in the face of formidable challenges. Through this assertion, Dangarembga's plot inspires women in post-colonial Africa to believe in their own abilities and potential, encouraging them to persevere and pursue their aspirations with confidence and determination. Ogundipe (2014) also emphasises the importance of female solidarity and support networks in fostering women's empowerment. Mrs. Moetsabi's journey highlights the need for women to innovate and adapt in the face of economic and social challenges, reinforcing Ogundipe's perspectives on the strength and resilience of African women. By emphasising the achievements of women like Mrs. Moetsabi and Pedzi, the narrative celebrates the resilience and agency of women, while also challenging prevailing norms and stereotypes that may seek to limit their opportunities for success. Ultimately, the message conveyed is one of empowerment and encouragement, inspiring women to embrace their own unique paths and strive for excellence in spite of the obstacles they may face.

4.7.4 Mainini Lucia

In Dangarembga's narrative, Mainini Lucia, an ex-combatant turned businesswoman, represents the evolving role of African women in shaping their own futures. By establishing her security company (A.K company), Lucia symbolises resilience and a commitment to empowering other women. When explaining her company's services

to Tambudzai, Christine proudly interjects to inform Tambu that she works at A.K company (146), highlighting how Lucia's initiative creates employment for women. Despite the hardships she faced during the war, including the loss of her son (147), Lucia remains determined to uplift others by providing them with opportunities, exemplified by her decision to employ Christine, a woman who has also endured significant challenges.

Dangarembga (2018) illustrates the solidarity among African women, showing how they support each other in overcoming societal and gendered constraints. Lucia's employment of Christine reflects the collective empowerment of women, as they create opportunities for each other in a world still shaped by historical and social burdens. By building these networks of support, Lucia not only ensures that women today can thrive, but she also paves the way for future generations to rise in an environment where strength, unity, and leadership are valued. This demonstrates that African women are continuously leaving their mark, ensuring a better path for those who follow. African writers such as Mariama Bâ have also depicted the strength and resilience of women in overcoming societal constraints. In her work, Bâ highlights the importance of women's solidarity and the transformative potential of their agency. Mainini Lucia's journey highlights these themes, reinforcing the idea that women's empowerment is crucial for societal progress.

4.8 Conclusion

In *This Mournable Body*, the unravelling of patriarchal constructs illuminates the enduring struggles faced by African women in a society rife with gender inequities. Yet, amidst these challenges, there lies a potent message of empowerment and solidarity among women. By dismantling patriarchal norms and supporting each other, women can forge paths to greater achievements and empowerment. Through collective action and mutual encouragement, women can amplify their voices,

challenge societal norms, and carve out spaces where their talents and aspirations are celebrated and valued. Ultimately, unity between men and women, coupled with resilience and mutual support, enables them to overcome patriarchal constraints and achieve their full potential, thereby paving the way for a future characterised by enhanced equality and empowerment for everyone.

CHAPTER 5: GENDER IDEOLOGIES IN THE INTERFACE OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY IN MEDIE'S *HIS ONLY WIFE*

5.1 Introduction

In *His Only Wife*, Medie skillfully captures the tension between individual aspirations and communal responsibilities, illuminating the difficulties of oppressive traditions within the context of a rapidly changing post-colonial Ghanaian society. At the heart of this chapter, lies an exploration of patriarchal norms prevalent in some parts of post-colonial Africa, emphasising their marginalising effects on Black women and control over heterosexual marriages and relationships.

Following an overview of Medie's selected novel, this chapter analyses post-colonial societal dynamics by specifically focusing on gender relations, socioeconomic disparities, and cultural norms that significantly influence individuals such as the protagonist, Afi. The aforementioned character depicts a world governed by age-old traditions where customs and societal expectations negatively shape personal relationships and roles. Central to this analysis is the incorporation of Ogunyemi's African Womanism, which offers a theoretical framework for understanding and advocating for the rights and experiences of Black women in Africa amidst the clash of culture and colonial legacies.

5.2 The Author and Novel Synopsis

Peace Adzo Medie, originally from Liberia, relocated to Ghana during her childhood where she attended OLA Girls Senior High School. According to the Cheeky Natives Podcast (2024), Medie pursued her higher education at the University of Ghana, graduating with a Bachelor's degree in geography before furthering her studies in the United States where she earned a Doctor of Philosophy in Public and International Affairs from the University of Pittsburgh. The novelist's excellent academic

performance is proven by her accolades which include the 2019 Best Article Award from the European Journal of Politics and Gender. Snaiji (2023) asserts that the disruption of the civil war on Medie's upbringing in Liberia, led her to observe disparities in societal structures during visits to Ghana, where she witnessed how socioeconomic status influenced individuals' ways of life. These experiences led her to reflect on societal expectations and the impact of social class on individuals' adherence to established norms.

In an interview with Jackson (2020), Medie explains that her motivation for writing *His Only Wife* stemmed from a desire to portray narratives of Black women simply going about their daily lives. This emphasises the importance of representing diverse voices and experiences of women in literature, a phenomenon which early African writings were reluctant to depict. *His Only Wife* is a story about a young seamstress called Afi Tekple, who lives with her widowed mother in a small post-colonial Ghanaian town but spends much of her time at her uncle Pious' home, where he resides with numerous wives and children. After Afi's father passes away, she and her mother face eviction from their government owned residence, with their belongings seized by creditors alleging debt. However, their circumstances take a turn when affluent Aunt Faustina Ganyo, esteemed in their community in Ho, extends her generosity towards Afi and her mother. The primary condition for this rescue was a proposal that Afi marries Aunt Faustina's second's son Elikem, also referred to as Eli. Despite her concerns about potential backlash or criticism from her community and loved ones, Afi accepts the marriage proposal. Epstein (2020) asserts that as influenced by her family, Afi agrees to marry Elikem for financial stability, unaware of Elikem and his family's true intentions. Upon moving to Accra, Afi discovers that Elikem is enamoured with another woman, Muna, whom his family disapproves of and thus orchestrated a marriage to separate him from, as urged by his mother.

Afi faces pressure to charm Elikem away from Muna to secure financial stability for her family and appease Uncle Pious' selfish demands. Living in the same neighbourhood as Evelyn, a girlfriend to Eli's brother Richard, Afi becomes acquainted with the local social scene, where she learns more about Elikem's complicated relationships. Evelyn is known for her defiant nature, which leads to her being unaccepted by Aunty Faustina.

The narrative unfolds amidst societal expectations and familial pressures, as the protagonist navigates the difficulties of her marriage and strives to carve out her own path in life. Afi ultimately chooses her independence over the pressures that have dominated her life when she decides to leave Elikem after he confesses that he loves both Muna and Afi. Despite the challenges and the potential backlash from both her family and the Ganyo family, Afi pursues her passion for fashion design, opening her own boutique. This decision marks a significant turning point for her, as she asserts her agency and embarks on a journey of self-discovery and empowerment. The ending emphasises her courage to defy expectations and create a future on her own terms.

5.3 Family Influence on Marriage Dynamics in Contemporary Africa

The family unit has long been a cornerstone of African societies, exerting a profound influence on the social, cultural, and economic fabric of communities. In contemporary Africa, family influence continues to play an essential role in shaping marriage dynamics by often dictating the norms and expectations surrounding marital relationships (Umubyeyi & Mtapuri, 2019). This influence manifests through various channels, including parental guidance, extended family involvement, and cultural traditions that govern marital practices. This section explores the ways in which family influence intersects with marriage dynamics in contemporary society

depicted in Medie's novel, examining the enduring traditions as well as the evolving trends that reflect diverse and changing social landscapes.

Medie (2018) examines the societal expectations imposed on women in the traditional roles of mothers, as well as the complexities of women such as Afi when competing for the affection of a man who asserts his dominance and entitlement. In *His Only Wife*, this theme is depicted through characters like Afi, Eli, Muna, Faustina Ganyo, Richard, Evelyn and Afi's mother. The narrative explores the personal struggles and resilience of these women while critiquing broader societal structures that perpetuate gender inequities. Through the familial relationships, Medie points out how gender roles continue to shape gender dynamics and impact the everyday lives of families in post-colonial Africa. This includes the influence of Afi's mother on her daughter's choices and values, and her cousin's role in shaping her social interactions. Similarly, the dynamics within Eli's family, particularly the influence of his mother, sister Yaya, and Richard, further illustrates how these patriarchal norms affect and dictate familial roles and relationships.

5.3.1 The role of older women in perpetuating inequality through gender expectations and traditional roles

In the interview with Arndt (2000:714), Ogunyemi includes the issue of conflict with in-laws and older women suppressing younger women as part of the considerations of African Womanism. Medie depicts older women such as Aunty Faustina Ganyo and Afi's mother who are also products of patriarchal socialisation and instead of leading by example and countering sexism; they mould their daughters into obedient vessels for various reasons which include securing prosperous marriages for the family's benefit. This supports Baraka *et al.*'s (2022) assertion that mothers play a significant role in influencing arranged marriages, where parental influence is pronounced. In this context, mothers often act as key decision-makers and

facilitators in the matchmaking process, leveraging their social networks and cultural authority to arrange suitable matches for their children. As Afi reaches maturity, Aunty Faustina proposes for her to marry her son and it cannot be denied that her actions are undeniably exploitative because she uses her past and present financial generosity to presume entitlement over Afi and Elikem's future, an indicator of her controlling behaviour and desire to dictate other people's lives.

While exploitation typically involves the manipulation of others for one's benefit, Aunty Faustina upholds this dynamic by controlling her family and enforcing traditional gender roles. Furthermore, Aunty Faustina believes that her economic stature gives her the right to dictate Afi's marriage, thereby maintaining a structure that prioritises her own dominance and control, despite being a woman herself. This reflects the social and economic dynamics of post-independent Ghana, where traditional practices and hierarchical structures often intersect with modern aspirations (Isahaku, 2009). In this context, Afi's experience of her impending marriage to Eli resonates deeply with traditional societal norms where women are used as pawns expected to uphold family honour and secure familial happiness through obedience to arranged marriages, disregarding the individual bride's opinion.

During the wedding preparations, Afi's frustration and discontent of being forced to marry a man she hardly knows become evident as she confides in her cousin Mawusi, who is fixing her makeup. The bride's discomfort is worsened by Eli's absence on their wedding day citing a business trip overseas as an excuse and his brother Richard therefore having to stand in for him (1).

I couldn't have been sweating that much; I wasn't nervous, not then anyway. I was mostly weary. Since my mother told me that I would be marrying Eli, I had felt as though I was balancing our two families like a basin of water, which was full to the brim, on my head. It wasn't easy being the key to other people's happiness, their victory, and their vindication. I

desperately wanted the wedding to be over because then I would have done my part. Or, rather, I would have begun to do my part (4).

As a young woman, Afi feels the weight of familial expectations and societal pressures to fulfil her role as a bride, symbolising the transition from one family to another. Her weariness stems not from nervousness about the wedding itself but from the burden of being the instrument of others' happiness and social validation. Despite her apparent compliance, there is a sense of resignation and reluctance in Afi's demeanour, hinting at the difficulties of navigating gender expectations and personal agency in her community. This study advocates that being a wife should not cage women in a sense that their aspirations become void. When it comes to life-altering choices like marriage, their voices should be heard and respected.

In one of the conversations between Evelyn and Afi, it is revealed that Aunty Faustina exerts control over her children by emotionally manipulating them into familial obligations. For instance, Aunty Faustina's influence extends to disapproving of her sons' intentions to marry Muna and Evelyn, primarily because of their assertive personalities. She once persuaded Eli's old uncles to back her, knowing very well that her son would not marry without his family's blessing (261). Furthermore, Afi recalls Richard telling her how his mother lamented Eli's decision to move out the residence she shared with Richard, to move into a flat with Muna, who was pregnant at the time (59). This is proof that Aunty Faustina and her children regarded this as Muna's ploy to distance Eli from his family. Aunty Faustina's disapproval for Muna's independence emphasises the rigid gender dynamics at play, where women who resist subservience are marginalised. Muna is portrayed as a girlfriend who defies societal norms. For example, she once forcibly removed Yaya, who had recently returned from South Africa, from their hotel suite because she wanted to take an afternoon nap (67). These actions led to Eli's family disliking Muna, prompting them to hold a family meeting where they asked him to reconsider his relationship with her (67).

Similarly, Aunty Faustina ordered Richard to break up with Evelyn as soon as she found out that they were together, simply because of the claim that Evelyn's father once insulted Aunty Faustina, some twenty-two years ago. Therefore, these acts of deciding who her sons marry or date, reflects Aunty Faustina's exertion of control and influence over their choices. Further in her conversation with Afi, Evelyn discloses that:

Aunty is controlling. She behaves like she is God. She wants to tell everybody what to do, how to live, even strangers. But I don't blame her; I blame the people who keep bowing down to her; beginning with her sons who have never had the courage to open their mouths and say no to her, not once in their whole lives. I cannot understand how men like Richard and Eli allow themselves to be treated like small boys (167).

Evelyn criticises not just Aunty Faustina's authoritarian behaviour but also the passive compliance of her sons Richard and Eli, who lack the courage to assert their independence and thus enabling their mother's often unwarranted control. Evelyn's frustration points to a critical flaw in the structure: the willingness of individuals to accept subjugation rather than challenge the status quo, thereby allowing the cycle of control and conformity to continue unbroken. Afi's forced marriage to Eli has been emotionally devastating for her and through it all, her mother dismisses her concerns about not knowing Eli, which reinforces the expectation that marriage is the ultimate goal, regardless of her personal aspirations of becoming a successful seamstress (31). Afi's mother guides her to view her marriage to Eli as a milestone, framing the arranged union as a customary practice within their community. Chantler and McCarry (2020:7) argue that it is crucial to acknowledge the problematic portrayal of women as mothers responsible for perpetuating forced marriage due to poverty, thus operating within the confines of societal expectations and power dynamics. Young women are strictly prohibited from challenging these norms, even when their own lives are at stake.

Afi, don't forget who you are. You are not an actress and this is not a romance film. This is not one of those telenovelas you and Mawusi have been watching. This is real life. This is our life. You will get to know him and like him. That's how it is. If you don't believe me you can go and ask any married woman you know. Ask any woman if she loved her husband before she got married or even if she loves him now (32).

The above emphasises the traditional gender roles and the prioritisation of marriage as a duty rather than a matter of personal choice or affection. As is shown above, in *His Only Wife*, older women are depicted as pivotal agents in the perpetuation of patriarchal norms, ensuring the continuation of traditional gender roles across generations. Characters like Afi's mother and Aunty Faustina Ganyo are products of a system that moulded them into enforcers of societal expectations. They impart the lessons that they have internalised to younger women, teaching them to prioritise marriage and obedience over personal ambition and autonomy. By urging their daughters to accept and uphold these entrenched norms without question, they reinforce the very structures that limit their own freedoms, perpetuating a cycle of subjugation and conformity that defines their community's view of womanhood.

5.4 Differential expectations in marital roles of wives and husbands

Marital roles in many societies, including contemporary ones, are often defined by a set of different expectations placed upon wives and husbands. These expectations are rooted in historical, cultural, and social norms that have traditionally ascribed specific duties and behaviours to each gender within the institution of marriage. In the novel in discussion, this theme is portrayed through the marriages of Afi and her mother. This theme, therefore, explores how these various outlooks manifest in the context of post-colonial Ghana and the implications that they have on marital satisfaction as well as gender equality. Moreover, the discussion examines the ways

in which evolving societal norms are challenging and redefining these traditional roles.

After marrying Eli, Afi's frustration continues as Aunty Faustina and some of her children give her a task of separating Eli from Muna by emphasising that Afi should claim what is rightfully hers (16). Contradictorily, Eli is not explicitly given any responsibility to ensure that Afi stays away from other men, or that he distances himself from Muna. In contrast, he is sympathised with guided by the belief that Muna gave him something, a 'love portion,' which is thought to have caused him to follow her around. These narratives expose the unequal expectations placed upon Afi and Eli within their marriage, revealing a systemic imbalance where Afi is groomed to be a dutiful wife without any reciprocal expectations placed upon Eli to respect and value her.

When Aunty Faustina speaks to Afi about a terrible fight that broke out between Muna and Eli, resulting in the latter's decision to leave for good, Aunty Faustina encourages her daughter-in-law not to be preoccupied with that but that,

That is the life of a wife, especially a wife of a man like Eli. If not woman, there will be another one sniffing around, trying to steal what is yours, and you cannot sit down and let that happen. You have to learn to fight for your husband, never let your guard down. You are lucky my son is not like other men. But even good men can fall, and women have become desperate in this country, especially those Accra women. There is no time for sleep in marriage (122).

The above excerpt reveals another expectation placed on wives, which is the pressure to constantly compete with other women to ensure the security of their marriages. Aunty Faustina emphasises the relentless vigilance that married women are encouraged to guard their husbands' loyalty, often sacrificing their own peace and self-worth. This requirement to fend off other women to preserve their marital

status reflects a broader societal norm that binds women's value and identity to their roles as wives, undermining female solidarity through enforced rivalry. In support, Adichie (2015) reveals that young girls are taught to diminish themselves, seeing each other as competitors for men's attention rather than for personal or professional achievements. The same dynamic applies to Afi, as she is taught to separate Eli from Muna instead of pursuing her own ambitions. This societal conditioning perpetuates a cycle where women's value is tied to their relationships with men, undermining their potential for independence and self-fulfilment.

Upon Eli's initial arrival in Accra, he neglects to inform Afi of the expected duration of his stay, leaving her in a state of frustration and uncertainty. This lack of communication leads Afi to question the trajectory of her marriage, pondering whether it would continue to be characterised by brief visits and uncomfortable exchanges (76). When she tells her mother about this, Afi is instructed not to inquire about her husband's comings and goings. This is testament to the fact that African women are compelled by cultural norms to use silence as a means of protecting their marriages (Chisale, 2018:3). Afi firmly asserts that this expectation is unreasonable and restrictive, highlighting the oppressive nature of such gender dynamics within marital relationships (44). Moreover, she is particularly frustrated with the Ganyos, as she feels that they should have informed her that she would not be living with her husband before she left Accra. In fact, Afi believes that Eli should have been the one to disclose all the relevant details about his whereabouts, but it was not so.

Despite Afi's diligent efforts to fulfil her duties as a wife, which include managing household chores and satisfying Eli sexually, her husband's actions remained disheartening. Eli consistently chooses to spend his time away from Afi, opting to stay with Muna, and their daughter Ivy, which undermines his wife's efforts and causes her immense frustration. In a candid conversation with her mother, Afi expresses her deep disappointment and disillusionment with her marriage as she

asserts that she did everything she was told to do to keep Eli, including cooking and cleaning, but Eli still left (133). Afi's words reflect the immense pressure placed on women to conform to traditional gender roles, where their value is measured by their domestic and sexual servitude to their husbands (Bassey & Bubu, 2019). This study criticises the unrealistic and unjust expectations of patriarchal norms, emphasising the futility of striving to meet societal standards that do not guarantee respect, loyalty, or love in return. Through Afi's experience, Medie exposes the detrimental impact of patriarchal structures on women's well-being and advocates for a more equitable approach to marital relationships.

The notion of accepting infidelity as a normative aspect of marriage points out the unequal power dynamics characterising traditional marriages and Medie (2018) exposes this wherein, men assert entitlement over women's bodies by engaging in multiple partnerships. Afi's neighbours Saviour and Lucy, recount their experiences in the flats, conveying to Afi the following:

But most scandalous were the married Ghanaian men who rented the flats for their girlfriends and divided their time between two homes. The guards told me that there had been a huge fight some months before my mother and I arrived. A wife whose husband was a senior manager at one of the of the banks found out that he was keeping a woman at Kings court. She had driven over with two friends, deceived her way into the compound, and then stormed the girlfriends flat (56).

The practice of having multiple women is deeply entrenched in patriarchal ideologies of hegemonic masculinity which is also defined by male sexual conquest and promiscuity. This patriarchal dynamic not only undermines the autonomy and agency of women but also perpetuates inequalities within intimate relationships.

Eli's siblings Richard and Yaya, often visit Afi at work to reassure her that their brother spending time at Muna's is for the sake of his daughter and not for Muna

(162). This scenario depicts how women are pressured to stand for disloyalty through familial interventions. Additionally, Afi is influenced by Evelyn to accept the notion that men often have side girlfriends and that a wife's role should be the primary focus in a marriage and the financial benefits that comes with it (175). Evelyn's perspective reinforces the idea that accepting infidelity as a norm and prioritising one's role as a wife is crucial for maintaining the relationship. This viewpoint supports the traditional expectation that women should tolerate their husbands' extramarital affairs while concentrating on their responsibilities as wives, reflecting broader societal attitudes towards marital fidelity and gender roles. Ultimately, Medie unveils the pervasive influence of patriarchy on both men and women, compelling them to conform to its dictates.

5.5 Socioeconomic disparity in post-colonial Ghana

The depiction of some women within the post-colonial Ghanaian society in the novel in discussion serves as a reflection of the pervasive marginalisation that they endure, wherein their economic empowerment is predominantly derived through the institution of marriage. Cultural norms dictating gender roles often confine women to domestic spheres while assigning the primary responsibility of providing for their families to males (Rubio-Marín, 2015). However, this traditional division of labour poses a significant risk of poverty when a male provider passes away leaving women, who are often solely trained for household duties, to grapple with financial challenges. Medie (2020) starkly reveals the theme of socioeconomic disparity through the characters of Afi and her mother, Eli, Uncle Toga Pious, Uncle Wisdom, Yaya, Muna and Evelyn.

Afi's mother reflects on their situation of financial disparity, expressing regret over not being more involved in managing their finances with her late husband. She accentuates that she should have paid more attention to what Afi's father was doing

with their money, as they have been experiencing poverty since his passing. When they are unable to afford basic necessities at the market, Afi avers that:

her mother lamented to her during a trip to Asigame, the big market, where she had been unable to afford most of what we needed: beef, rice, milk, margarine, milo. She had always known that my father spent a great deal of money on his brothers and their families. But we were always well provided for, she had never harped on the issue (23).

This narrative depicts the subtle yet intense influence of gender roles on the family's financial dynamics. Afi's mother, adhering to traditional norms, assumes a passive role in financial management, deferring to her husband's decisions. Afi's mother's reluctance to point out her husband's spending habits emphasises the internalisation of gendered expectations and the pressure to maintain familial harmony. These forces aggravate their native subjugation by imposing distant, unbridgeable control over their lives and economic conditions, further entrenching traditional gender roles and economic dependencies.

Against the setting of contemporary Ghana, where traditional norms intersect with modern aspirations, Afi deals with the harsh reality that her path to financial security is linked to her marital status. In discussing financial independence, Ogunyemi (2000: 718) clearly states in an interview with Arndt that:

The first thing is not to be financially dependent on any man. That is the first thing your mother teaches you - because you may not inherit from your father, you may not inherit from your husband. That is why you must, as much as possible, be self-sufficient. I think when a man sees that a woman is self-sufficient, there is a certain respect in the relationship, and I think this is very important.

Afi's experience reveals that achieving financial security is frequently constrained by her marital status, emphasising Ogunyemi's assertion that self-sufficiency is

essential. By striving to be economically independent, Afi not only navigates these traditional expectations but also demonstrates the value of self-reliance in gaining respect and autonomy within relationships. Dery and Bawa (2019:2) emphasise the dynamic nature of marriages in African societies, pointing out how they evolve within the context of changing social structures, economic conditions, and material constraints. This is starkly portrayed through the characters of Afi and her mother. Afi reflects on her mother's desire for everything to fall into place seamlessly: for Eli to find satisfaction in Afi, for Eli's mother Aunty Faustina Ganyo, to reclaim her son, and for Afi and her mother to bask in the elevated status that would inevitably accompany their connection, through marriage to the Ganyos (6). After Eli visits Afi at her workplace for the first time after they got married, Afi meets her husband who comes in visits and promises to visit the following week. Through excitement, Afi calls her mother and notifies her about Eli's visit as she avers the following:

I told her knowing the news would make her happy. I wanted her to be happy. She had suffered greatly since my father's death. I understood that my marriage to Eli was already changing her life and giving back to her some of the dignity and respect she had lost with the death of my father. I understood that this marriage was also her way of paying back aunty. I understood that because of all these things, I had to make this marriage (118).

Through Afi's marriage to Eli, there is a tangible shift in the family's fortunes, as it not only brings joy to her mother but also restores a sense of dignity and respect lost with her father's death. This depiction accentuates the interaction between wealth, and familial obligations, where marriage serves as both a means of securing economic stability and repaying debts of gratitude, perpetuating existing disparities within the community.

Other women, like Aunty Faustina, are financially secure, which gives them the power to exert control over those in lack, in contrast, those who depend on their husbands like Afi's mother suffer when their source of support dies (23). For instance, when Afi leaves her husband in Accra to return to Ho because he was not living in his main house, it upsets Aunty (175). After Aunty Faustina convinces Afi to return to Accra and insists that Afi stays until her issues with Eli are resolved. Consequently, Aunty Faustina tells Afi's mother not to come to work or attend guild meetings until she convinces Afi to return to Accra (190).

In addition, the author reveals how marriage emerges as a means of financial security, exemplified by the negotiation of bride prices. Sambe *et al.* (2013: 65) assert that in the past, the tradition of bride price was considered beneficial as it provided formal recognition of marriages, protected wives from abuse, stabilised the marital relationship, and united the two families. However, the practice appears to have become commercialised and to have lost much of its traditional value in many instances. Afi recounts an incident where one of her cousins, from Uncle Excellent's eldest son, was preparing for marriage to a girl she has attended school with. Afi's father's family, led by Uncle Toga Pious, was actively involved in the wedding preparations and proceedings where tensions arose over the bride price negotiations, with Afi's mother revealing disagreements about the extensive list of demands from the bride's family, including extravagant items such as a flat-screen TV (105). Uncle Wisdom adamantly opposed these requests, emphasising the preservation of cultural traditions and values which are not determined by monetary items. The clash between modern materialism and traditional values becomes evident, reflecting the struggle to retain cultural identity in the face of contemporary influences which include unstable economic considerations.

As such, Uncle Toga Pious aims to secure wealth through the negotiation of marriage, thereby placing women in a position more vulnerable to marginalisation by

the groom or the groom's family wherein in most instances; failure to abide by the gender expectation or attempts to leave the marriage can result in exploitation and abuse or rejection. During a conversation about Afi's future plans after graduation, the ladies speak about Eli assisting Afi in opening a boutique when Yaya squeezes in the fact that Afi should remember where she comes from and all that the Ganyos have done for her (219). This shows how Afi and her mother are continually controlled and manipulated by the Ganyos, who leverage their financial support and social status to maintain power over them. When Afi finally realises that the Ganyos have used her as a way of coming between Eli and Muna and decides to leave Eli for good, Yaya reminds her of her background again.

We picked you from the gutter and gave you a life that you could not had in a thousand years. There are countless women in this country with pretty faces and fat asses- you are not special. We could have chosen any one of them for my brother. How far do you think that face and body would have taken you? Where would your high school degree have taken you in this country where even university graduates can't make it? You were nothing and you are still nothing. Think about that before saying that you are divorcing him and allowing that woman to come back into this house (272).

Yaya's statement emphasises how Afi is demeaned and pressured to conform to their expectations, revealing the extent to which the Ganyos use their social and economic leverage to maintain dominance and influence over Afi and her mother who face backlash whenever they attempt to assert themselves. Medie (2018) also exposes the ways in which poverty and entrenched gender roles disadvantage women such as Evelyn, often leading them to seek financial security through relationships with married men. Despite her mother's hope that Evelyn would receive an education by living with an uncle who made promises to support her schooling, Evelyn found herself instead overburdened with domestic duties (109). Her uncle and his wife deemed her fit only for cooking and cleaning up after their children. This

starkly points out Evelyn's struggle for survival within a system that limits her opportunities based on societal expectations to conform to prescribed roles of obedience and economic circumstances. Evelyn opens up to Afi about how she survived asserting that:

I ran away. I stayed with friends for a while, slept in peoples kitchens, and once in a kiosk in Kaneshie market. But I met a man who took me in- his wife lived in Kumasi at the time-and put me in school. Of course, I had to pay him in kind, but you know nothing is free in this country (109).

Evelyn's hardships and experiences have led her to adopt the belief that a man's actions are inconsequential as long as he provides financially. This is depicted when Afi expresses a desire to reside in Eli's spacious home, currently occupied by him, Muna, and their child however, Evelyn counsels against coercing Muna to vacate the premises, urging her instead to appreciate the financial stability provided by Eli. Evelyn's perspective emphasises the importance she places on material security over other considerations, reflecting her pragmatic approach to navigating life's challenges. Evelyn advises Afi that:

You have to learn to enjoy the money and ignore the man's faults. Enjoy yourself, go shopping, ask him to move you into a big house of your own, one with your name on the tittle, ask for a bigger car, a four-wheel-drive, in fact, asks two cars! Invest the money he gives you, start your own business, help your mother start a business. Let him go and spend the weekend with other women if he wants. You just live your life and enjoy it (175).

The passage emphasises the pervasive influence of patriarchal norms that dictate that women should prioritise financial security and stability within marriage, within African societies, shaping the perceptions and expectations of Black women

regarding marriage. The advice given reflects a societal narrative that prioritises financial stability and material gain over emotional fulfilment and relational harmony.

5.6 Overcoming patriarchy and cultural bias

Afi Tekple shines throughout the story with her honesty, defiance and loving heart. She proves that even inside a rotten society, one could remain loyal. Afi's journey is marked by her struggle to find her own voice and identity in a society that imposes strict patriarchal norms. Initially, she chooses to marry Eli as a solution to her family's problems, unveiling her lack of choice (06). Her initial acceptance of a marriage arranged to benefit her family exemplifies how women are often coerced into decisions that uphold patriarchal structures, as they bear the burden of family expectations (Addo, 2020). Afi navigates the complexities of her marriage and the expectations placed upon her, she begins to assert her independence. In a pivotal moment of realisation, the protagonist confronts the harsh truth that Eli is unwilling to sever ties with Muna. This revelation forces her to confront a daunting decision: whether to endure the ongoing emotional turmoil of Eli's divided attention in a marriage dictated by family and societal expectations, or to forge a new path towards personal liberation. Staying would mean sacrificing her emotional well-being to uphold the appearance of marital stability and honour her familial obligations, particularly those imposed by Aunty Faustina's authority. Confronted with these options, Afi decides to reject Eli's proposal of a polygamous marriage. Batra (2017: 346) argues that polygamy, when seen as a method to increase sexual and domestic labour within a patriarchal household, inherently comes at the expense of women. Even if women appear to have a "choice" in entering polygamous marriages, this choice is heavily burdened with complex physical, emotional, social, and economic ramifications. Medie (2018) explores the complexities inherent in polygamous marriages, particularly through Afi's conversation with Evelyn wherein Afi confesses her inability to accept being one of Eli's wives, pointing out the emotional and

psychological struggles she faces. Evelyn tries to persuade Afi to stay with Eli, arguing that his kindness and love should outweigh the discomfort of his relationship with another woman (175). However, Afi's disapproval distinguishes herself from other women who might agree to such an arrangement and ultimately compromising their self-respect and personal happiness by sharing her husband.

You don't understand, you don't know how it feels like, how much it hurts. I wish I could be one of those women who are able to live with another person in their marriage, those women who proudly say they are the farm and the other woman is only a garden. I wish I could be like them but no matter how hard I try I can't bring myself to accept her. I love him and I just can't share him with another woman, I can't (175).

Afi's struggle to accept sharing her husband with another woman put in a nutshell her defiance against the patriarchal and culturally biased norms that demand women's compliance and self-sacrifice. Despite the societal pressure to conform and accept a polygamous marriage as she is influenced by women such as Mawusi that even women with university degrees, doctors and lawyers are in polygamous marriage (268), Afi stands her ground. Her love for Eli and her inability to accept another woman in their marriage drive her to assert her autonomy and challenge the cultural norms that seek to diminish her agency as she advocates that that's just not her, she is not built like that (269).

The protagonist's refusal to conform, despite the emotional turmoil it causes, marks a significant step in her journey toward personal empowerment. Afi succeeds with her boutique and has built a house where she stays with her mother who started baking pastries, which Afi serves in the boutique alongside fruit juices (276). This achievement not only marks her financial independence but also symbolises her break from traditional roles and her ability to create a new life on her own terms.

Afi's journey concludes as a powerful testament to personal resilience and the quest for self-empowerment in the face of deeply ingrained patriarchal and cultural biases. Her refusal to accept a polygamous marriage, despite the immense societal pressure and the influence of figures like Mrs. Fautina Ganyo her mother, Yaya and Mawusi, highlights her unwavering commitment to her own values and sense of self-worth. Afi's ability to navigate these challenges and emerge victorious is not only a personal triumph but also a beacon of hope for others facing similar struggles. By choosing divorce, asserting her independence, and successfully establishing her boutique, Afi redefines her role in her own life and paves the way for a future free from the constraints that once bound her. Her story, enriched by her love for Eli and her steadfast refusal to compromise her dignity, serves as an inspiration for women everywhere, illustrating the profound impact of standing firm against oppressive norms and advocating for one's own happiness and autonomy.

5.7 Conclusion

In *His Only Wife*, Peace Adzo Medie masterfully unravels the complex interplay between tradition and modernity, exposing the entrenched sex and gender ideologies that govern the lives of her characters. Through Afi's experiences, the novel highlights the persistent influence of traditional norms that define women's roles and limit their autonomy, even as they navigate the evolving landscape of contemporary Ghana. The tension between maintaining cultural heritage and embracing modern aspirations reveals the multifaceted nature of gender dynamics. Medie's portrayal of the Ganyos' manipulation and control underscores the pervasive power structures that continue to oppress women, illustrating that true empowerment requires a critical examination and dismantling of these deep-rooted ideologies. Ultimately, the novel calls for a re-evaluation of societal values, advocating for a balance that honours tradition while fostering gender equality and individual agency.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This study sought to address the patriarchal forces that affect the representation of women in post-colonial Africa through an analysis of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body* (2018) and Peace Adzo Medie's *His Only Wife* (2020). The study examined how intersecting factors shape the experiences and identities of Black women in societies characterised by unequal gender ideologies that are facilitated by remnants of colonialism as well as oppressive traditional ideologies, in the selected contemporary novels. Through a thematic analysis, the research uncovered the ways in which the authors portray the struggles, resilience, and agency of their female characters within the socio-political and cultural contexts of post-colonial Africa.

The primary literary texts which are set in the 21st century, located in the African Southern Hemisphere (Zimbabwe) and the Northern Hemisphere (Ghana) respectively, were intentionally selected to provide a comprehensive look at the ways in which patriarchal structures persist across different regions of Africa. This time frame reflects a period where many African nations continue to struggle with the clash of legacies of colonialism and oppressive traditional systems while simultaneously forging new national and cultural identities. The novels captured this ongoing transition and its impact on women's lives and societal roles.

This chapter presents summaries of all the chapters in this study, which include the findings and the conclusions drawn from the analyses conducted in Chapters Four, and Five of this study to assess whether the study's aims and objectives have been met. Additionally, the current chapter highlights the study's contributions to new

knowledge in the field of post-colonial feminist literature and provides recommendations based on the findings.

This study employed African Womanism and Intersectionality as its theoretical frameworks to explore the complex layers of oppression faced by African women in post-colonial societies. African Womanism, as developed by Ogunyemi (1985), focuses on African cultural values, family, and community, offering a lens to understand the gendered experiences of African women while promoting unity between men and women in the struggle against patriarchy. Intersectionality, theorised by Crenshaw (1989), complements this by analysing how various identities—such as race, gender, and class—intersect to shape unique experiences of marginalisation, particularly within the context of colonial and post-colonial legacies. Together, these frameworks provided a comprehensive approach to examining the multifaceted challenges that African women encounter by enhancing the understanding of the intersecting factors that impact woman's experiences. They point out the need for transformative approaches to address systemic inequalities and advocate for progressive changes in societal frameworks, confirming their effectiveness in revealing and addressing the complex realities portrayed in the novels.

Although this study primarily focuses on post-colonial literature, it also explored pre-colonial African societies to consider how historical and on-going colonial legacies continue to influence gender dynamics and social hierarchies, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the difficulties surrounding the representation of Black women in African literature. Part of the discussion in the chapter reviewing literature, demonstrated that women in pre-colonial Africa held significant roles as queens, priestesses, healers, traders, and community leaders. However, scholars such as Afisi (2010) and Silva (2004) argued that despite these roles and responsibilities, men remained the heads of families and leaders of society, reflecting a partly

patriarchal structure which was also characterised by gender fluidity. Men were the primary decision-makers, while women's roles were supportive and complementary.

Colonialism aggravated the marginalisation of Black women, placing them at the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy. As demonstrated through studies including that of Crenshaw (1989), the marginalisation of Black women is attributed to their intersectional racial and gender identities, as well as and socioeconomic status. These have collectively shaped the current status of many Black women in independent African states wherein, under Black governance, economic marginalisation persists despite changes in political leadership. This demonstrates how various complex factors continue to limit Black women's economic opportunities, while white women often benefit from systemic advantages that were established during the colonial era.

The discussion in Chapter Three further argued how scholars like Nzegwu (2012) have demonstrated that indigenous African family structures have been modified post-colonialism, introducing values associated with the nuclear family and resulting in significant shifts in power dynamics, allocation of resources and household roles. This transformation has reinforced patriarchal norms within marriages and influenced parenting practices, perpetuating a patriarchal approach to familial relations. Moreover, the study illustrates how patriarchy has led to the objectification of the female body, which was exoticised and hypersexualised to support colonial ideologies. This legacy continues in modern media, where Black women are often portrayed through a lens of hypersexuality and exoticism.

Despite these intersecting challenges, the study emphasises the vital role of African women in fostering unity among African people that is also defined by egalitarianism as supported by Chikwenye Ogunyemi's African Womanism and Kimberlé Crenshaw's Intersectionality.

6.2 Tsitsi Dangarembga's Novel: *This Mournable Body*

Dangarembga's novel offered a profound understanding of what it means to be black and female in post-colonial Zimbabwe. Through the character of Tambudzai and other female characters in *This Mournable Body*, the novelist provides critical insights into the economic, social, and psychological challenges faced by women such as Mrs. Taka, Nyasha, Netsai, Gertrude, Mako and Tambudzai in depicting the profound pain and disillusionment experienced in this context. These characters and the events surrounding them were analysed as symbolic reflections of the nation's broader struggles in the aftermath of colonial rule wherein, most independent states of Africa have been and continue to be influenced by preconceived notions of racial superiority, patriarchal dominance, and economic hierarchies that privilege Western ideals. This discussion revealed that Black women face intersecting challenges, not limited to patriarchy but as illustrated by Crenshaw (1991), also worsened by the enduring legacy of colonialism and systemic oppression based on gender and race.

The analysis in Chapter Four revealed that despite strides towards equality, opportunities granted to Black women such as Tambudzai, often remain overshadowed by racial biases and patriarchy, hindering their advancement compared to their white counterparts, in this case Tracey. Otieno (2019) attributes this to the fact that colonial Rhodesia was classified according to race. Tracey and Tambudzai both went to a multiracial school and worked at an advertising agency, but their experiences and opportunities differed significantly due to their racial identities. Tracey received preferential treatment and quicker promotions, benefiting from the residual colonial and racial biases that favour white employees. On the other hand, Tambudzai struggles to gain recognition and faces constant micro aggressions and systemic barriers. Tambudzai's experiences further highlight the intersection of gender and class, particularly for Black women who come from

backgrounds that place them at a socio-economic disadvantage, particularly in a society where their access to education and employment is limited.

Tambudzai's unfulfilled hopes for stable employment considering her good education, reflect not only personal disappointment but also symbolise the broader societal frustrations faced by individuals belonging to marginalised groups of people. This study found that their struggles illustrate the significant barriers faced by minority groups in accessing opportunities and achieving social mobility, revealing the gap between the initial optimism of independence and the harsh realities of ongoing socio-economic challenges.

In addition to the above, the novel also exposed the persistence of patriarchy as a mechanism of control over married and non-married women in post-colonial Africa. Roberts and Thornberry (2010) point out that the historical continuity of these oppressive structures demonstrates how deeply ingrained patriarchal ideologies remain influential, affecting both legal systems and social norms that govern women's lives in contemporary African societies. The suffering of Mrs. Taka, who endures domestic abuse, highlights the broader issue of gender-based violence and reflects the societal norms that continue to oppress women. This study found that Mrs. Taka's plight emphasises the challenges faced by women trapped in patriarchal marriages dictated by male authority, which are symptomatic of the larger societal gender issues. The experiences of Gertrude and Mako reveal the harsh realities of gender-based violence and the enforcement of societal conformity, illustrating how both non-conformity and adherence to traditional prescriptions of femininity can result in severe repercussions. Gertrude's non-conformance to societal standards of modest femininity, as shown by her distinctive mode of dress, results in severe verbal and physical abuse, illustrating the rigid gender norms and punitive measures against those who deviate from these expectations. Conversely, Mako, who adheres to conventional dress, faces physical assault and rape in the private space of her

room, emphasising that even women who conform to traditional norms can suffer brutal consequences. This study has found that these experiences reflect the realities of gender-based violence and the enforcement of societal conformity.

African Womanism and Intersectionality, with their emphasis on collective struggle and resilience, further illustrate how female characters navigate intersecting oppressions. Mainini Lucia's experience as an ex-combatant who now runs a security company, exemplifies the resilience of African women in overcoming socio-political challenges. Her role in employing and supporting other women, like Christine, reflects a deep commitment to collective advancement, showing how women band together to create opportunities. Black women, such as Mainini Lucia, Pedzi and Mrs. Moetsabi highlight their efforts to reclaim agency within patriarchal societies, revealing the challenges and successes that they face in reducing inequality and overcoming systemic barriers.

In summary, the analysis of *This Mournable Body* reveals that, despite advancements towards equality, Black women continue to face significant barriers due to racial and gender biases. However, the novel also highlights their resilience, as they persist in striving for empowerment and autonomy despite these obstacles. The portrayal of these ongoing struggles serves as a critical reflection on the gap between the promises of independence and the harsh realities of post-colonial socio-economic conditions, underscoring both the need for continued efforts to dismantle oppressive patriarchal structures and the unyielding determination of Black women to overcome these challenges.

6.3 Peace Adzo Medie's Novel: *His Only Wife*

This study has found that Peace Adzo Medie's *His Only Wife* offers an examination of the constraints imposed on women by traditional and patriarchal societies in Ghana. The narrative centres on Afi, a young Ghanaian woman who enters into an

arranged marriage with Eli, a man of higher economic status, as a strategic response to her and her mother's economic disadvantage. This is brought about by Medie's depiction of the impact of gender roles that confined women to the domestic sphere. This limitation becomes particularly pronounced in the event of a man's death, as exemplified by Afi and her mother's suffering. The gendered expectations placed upon women not only restrict their opportunities but also worsen their vulnerability when their male providers are no longer present. This study has found that Afi and her mother's plight exemplify the broader issue of how gender roles disadvantage women by relegating them to dependent positions within the domestic sphere. Consequently, Afi's initial choice to marry Eli is driven by the economic benefits and security it offers, yet it also confines her within a traditional role that diminishes her personal autonomy. This study has found that the patriarchal norms that dictate male authority and female subservience create significant barriers to Afi's empowerment, reinforcing gender inequality within her society. Midzi (2022:229) suggests that while disparities between men and women persist in both traditional and modern societies, these inequalities cannot be addressed by simply isolating men from women or by idealising traditional practices over modern ones. Instead, it is more practical to seek a balanced approach.

As a prominent figure in Afi's life, Aunty Faustina wields significant influence over her decisions, embodying power and control. Her domineering control emphasises the extent to which women's autonomy is curtailed by societal norms and economic lack, illustrating how female agency is constrained not only by male authority but also by internalised practices among women themselves. The novel further explored the emotional and psychological toll of living under restrictive cultural norms. Afi's efforts to navigate her constrained circumstances and assert her independence reflect a broader struggle for personal empowerment among women in traditional settings. The punitive measures faced by defiant women such as Evelyn and Muna, who

challenge societal expectations, highlight the severe backlash imposed on those who resist to be controlled.

His Only Wife illustrates how patriarchal norms and colonial legacies severely restrict women's autonomy in Ghana, particularly for those facing economic disadvantages. Afi's arranged marriage, driven by economic necessity, epitomises how such constraints confine women within limiting roles that undermine their personal freedom and often aggravate their vulnerability and restricts their choices. The novel emphasises the persistent barriers to gender equality and emphasises the need for integrating both traditional values and progressive reforms to better support women's autonomy and opportunities. This study thus, concludes that Black women in post-colonial Africa continue to face significant challenges due to the enduring influence of patriarchal structures, as depicted by the selected novels which offer an exploration of how gender intersects with race, class and gender in post-colonial Africa. African Womanism and Intersectionality have proven successful in analysing the literary texts discussed, offering profound insights into the experiences of Black women in post-colonial Africa. In *His Only Wife*, the intersection of gender and class shapes Afi's experiences and opportunities, revealing how economic and social status impact women's agency.

In *This Mournable Body*, Dangarembga explores how gender and racial contexts influence the experiences of women, particularly in relation to their socio-economic positions and societal expectations. Together, these works illuminate the ways in which multiple identity factors interact to affect women's lives. By highlighting the personal and systemic impacts of patriarchy, both novels suggest the need for transformative approaches to address and dismantle oppressive structures. Through their fiction, Dangarembga and Medie advocate a re-evaluation of traditional gender roles and societal norms, proposing that progress towards gender equality requires both individual and systemic change. The narratives emphasise the importance of

challenging entrenched patriarchal values and fostering more equitable and inclusive societal frameworks.

By highlighting the personal and systemic impacts of patriarchy, both novels effectively portray the pervasive nature of gender inequality and the need for transformative approaches to dismantle oppressive structures. Through their fiction, Dangarembga (2020) and Medie (2018) successfully advocate for a re-evaluation of traditional gender roles and societal norms, illustrating how these entrenched values perpetuate the subjugation of women. In *This Mournable Body*, Dangarembga vividly captures the struggles of women against societal expectations and economic marginalisation, while in *His Only Wife*, Medie presents the intersection of gender and class as a critical factor in limiting women's agency. Both novels are successful in emphasising the importance of challenging patriarchal values and fostering more equitable and inclusive societal frameworks, thereby contributing significantly to the discourse on gender inequality in post-colonial Africa.

6.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion presented, the following recommendations are presented:

- **Enhance Implementation of Gender Equality Policies**

Existing gender equality policies should be effectively implemented and monitored to ensure that they achieve their intended outcomes. This involves providing adequate resources, training, and support to institutions responsible for enforcing these policies. Regular assessments and updates should be conducted to address any gaps and ensure that policies remain relevant and effective.

- **Improve Access to Legal Protections and Services**

Strengthen the accessibility and effectiveness of legal protections and services for women by improving the responsiveness of legal systems to gender-based violence and discrimination. Ensure that women, regardless of whether they live in rural or urban areas, can easily access justice and support services. This involves implementing measures such as establishing more accessible legal aid services in rural areas, providing mobile units to reach remote communities, and enhancing digital platforms for urban women. Additionally, all programs and services should be designed to be inclusive and cater to all genders, recognising and addressing the unique needs of each individual while promoting gender equality and protection.

- **Expand Economic Empowerment Programmes**

Build on existing economic empowerment initiatives by expanding their scope and reach. Programmes should focus on providing women with skills training, access to capital, and support for entrepreneurship. Enhancing collaboration between government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and the private sector can help create more comprehensive and sustainable economic opportunities for women.

- **Promote Ongoing Research and Evaluation:**

Support and fund research that evaluates the impact of existing policies and programmes on gender equality. This research should focus on identifying best practices, understanding the effectiveness of interventions, and recommending improvements. Ongoing evaluation helps to ensure that policies are dynamic and responsive to changing needs and contexts.

By implementing these recommendations, post-colonial Africa can begin to dismantle persistent patriarchal structures and create inclusive societies where women and men can thrive equally.

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