

## Patriarchy and Counter Discourses: A Critique of Female Subordination in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*

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### ABSTRACT

The present study is a critique of an African English novel *Nervous Conditions* to explore how the writer speaks back to the patriarchal oppression. For this purpose, the researchers intend to explore the patterns of female subordination in African patriarchal society and the ways with which women resist this oppressive system as embedded in *Nervous Conditions*. The study utilizes Walby's (1990) concept of 'private patriarchy' from his theory of patriarchy. Radical feminism as a feminist perspective of patriarchy provided the theoretical background to carry out this study. Grounded in qualitative research design, the present study utilizes qualitative textual analysis to identify the meaningful patterns working to highlight and challenge patriarchal oppression in the text. The results of the study indicate that the text under study highlights the subordination of African women through seven patterns where they are shown to be a victim of discrimination in the familial domain regarding food distribution, the burden of household work, educational opportunities, daily living conditions, child gender preference, and in freedom of mobility and freedom of opinion/decision. Moreover, the reaction of the women towards this subordination is identified concerning three different aspects where women escape, get entrapped or rebel against this patriarchal system. The study has found *Nervous Conditions* a challenging narrative that questions the unjust female subordination in a patriarchal society. The researchers conclude the study by substantiating Dangarembga's stance that this game of entrapment, rebellion and escape is disastrous for the females and humanity as a whole.

**Keywords:** Patriarchy; gender discrimination; female subordination; *Nervous Conditions*; Radical feminism

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## INTRODUCTION

Literary works especially the genre of novels highlight certain thoughts, ideas and issues related to the relationships of human beings. Literary analysis according to Manyak&Manyak (2021) aims to uncover the deeper meanings contained within literary texts. One of these meanings conveyed by literary texts, especially by the female writers in feminist literature is the issue of inequality between women and men resulting in female subordination in the context of patriarchy. The concept of patriarchy is associated with the rule of the father as the male head of a family. This social and ideological construct considers men as the central determinant of women and controls as their property (Walby, 2002, p.22). Hence, patriarchy refers to a system where males dominate a relationship and control the women. Patriarchy can be called a feminist perspective where feminists consider that the patriarchal family set-up represses these females and designates them to a position of subordination. The feminist movement appeared to eliminate gender discrimination to improve the position of women and transform gender relations (Walby, 2002, p.26).

The concept of patriarchy is more specifically concerned with the second wave of feminism so the feminist perspective of patriarchy suited for the present study is that of radical feminism. Walby (1990) argues that radical feminism looks into the analyses of gender discrimination where men dominate women and this domination of men is called patriarchy. Various feminist scholars and activists, such as Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and Robin Morgan, investigated the patriarchal nature of society during the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s and worked to combat gender inequality through judicial changes and cultural change. Koussouhon and Agbachi (2016) argue that gender performance depends on social or cultural norms. Butler (1990) challenged the notion of fixed gender identities and emphasized how patriarchy perpetuates particular gender standards through recurring actions and behaviours. Connell (2007) examines the feminist perspective theory and the part knowledge production plays in forming perceptions of gender and patriarchy and highlights the significance of taking into account various viewpoints and the experiences of oppressed groups.

African women have been portrayed as the oppressed group in several texts composed by many African authors. These texts have been analyzed by some researchers from different perspectives. Many researchers (Ruthven, 1984; Davies 1986; Ngara, 1989) analyzed the oppressed and subordinated position of African women who has been a victim of patriarchal oppression. However, the later studies focused on analyzing women through a critical lens for a paradigm shift. Likewise, Allagbe and Alou (2021) also discovered how through redefining the African women in the literary texts unveils the possibility of a matriarchal and patriarchal society complementing each other. Following Familusi's (2012) urge for a paradigm shift so that "the supposed hitherto marginalized woman will be emancipated" (p. 229), the present study aims to further this research by examining *Nervous Conditions* to see how Dangarembga (1988) rebels against the dominant ideology of patriarchy by portraying her women characters through their subordinated position and their resistance against it. Moreover, most of the studies that have been conducted to analyze *Nervous Conditions* focused on the marginalization of women from patriarchal and colonial perspectives but little attention has been paid to the analysis of patriarchal patterns in familial domain from the perspective of radical feminism. Hence, the present study aims to highlight how the selected text is a counter-discourse towards the patriarchal system and female subordination. For this purpose, the study is guided by two research objectives: to find out how patriarchy in the familial domain results in female subordination, and how the female characters react to this female subordination in *Nervous Conditions*.

By this aim and research objectives, the researchers set the following research questions to collect and analyze the data:

1. Which patterns of female subordination in a patriarchal family setup are reflected in *Nervous Conditions*?
2. How do different female characters react to this female subordination in *Nervous Conditions*?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The representation of women in the fictional discourse on the issue of gender equality has been one of the areas of focus for critics and feminists. The familial domain where women have been bound to carry on their domestic chores has been a topic of great interest for researchers (Alharafesheh, 2016; Yee Kan & Laurie, 2016) to see the working of patriarchal ideology. The critics of African literature have been mostly concerned with the biased picture of women portrayed by male writers in their writing. For example, Little (1980) found that African women are mostly portrayed as appendices to men. Davies (1986), too, considers literature as a venue “through which negative attitudes and stereotypes of women are perpetuated, even created” (p. 75). Likewise, Ngara (1989) asserts that male African writers project their women negatively and in a subordinated position. Tan, Tjin and Raj (2023) explore the social cultural identity of Malay women and find that from a subordinated female identity the female character transcends to a heroic role. They further maintained that Malay women encountered subtle feelings of deprivation either due to marriage or their barrenness.

The representation of female characters in the writings of female African writers has two aspects. Firstly, some writers continue to portray women following the already existing conventions and norms set by the male authors because these women face the pressure of the critics and publishing houses who are male-dominated (McEldowney, 1999). The second group of African women writers wrote with a realization that culture plays a crucial role in the subjugation of women (Ruthven, 1984; McEldowney, 1999). These female writers produced that literature had elements of resistance in it by depicting the typical situation of females' subordination. *Nervous Conditions*, the novel selected for the present study belongs to this second type of writing which highlights the female's subordination and oppression in an African patriarchal society. In such a society according to Allagbe and Allagbe (2015), "men are expected to play such stereotypical roles as fatherhood, husbandhood, and leadership, women are traditionally expected to be mothers, housewives and subservient." (p. 386). *Nervous Conditions* presented patriarchal oppression and was rejected by four publishers for portraying black females negatively (McEldowney, 1999).

This novel has been analyzed by several researchers from different perspectives. For example, Uwakweh (1995) analyzed this novel to find out how an escaped woman who is cut from patriarchy is determined to learn and mature. Another study by Masika, Orina and Musungu (2019) on *Nervous Conditions* was carried out to see how the author imagines the roles of modern African women through her characters who are not controlled by patriarchy. Arrey-Ngang (2019) in her study of this novel asserts that the women in African societies are silenced under social pressures. Angaye and Udisi (2022) in their study conducted to see the development of African literature considered *Nervous Conditions* as a novel with representation of womanhood through the language of oppression. Yet in another study, Le Hegarat (2022) analyzed *Nervous Conditions* concerning the trope of the cannibal to find that Nyasa, the female teenager's refusal to eat is in

opposition to her being devoured by the colonial regime. Tugume (2022) with a focus on women's entrapment in the institution of marriage and gender-based violence analyzes *Nervous Conditions* to conclude that Dangarembga proposes the idea of single womanhood to avoid patriarchy instead of suggesting some way where women can integrate into the already male-dominated society. Moreover, SFAIHI (2022) while analyzing *Nervous Conditions* has found that though women are shown to be a victim of psychological and sexist oppression, they can struggle against this oppression through education and their solidarity.

Hence, this brief overview has shown that *Nervous Conditions* has been analyzed from different perspectives of feminism, postmodernism and post-colonialism. The present study of this novel from a radical feminist perspective is expected to be crucial as it analyzes the text by discussing the women's state through both the patterns of patriarchy and patterns of resistance emerging within the text.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study is based on radical feminism, one of the perspectives within feminism. Feminism appeared as a response to unequal and imbalanced treatment of women and men in society and it worked to promote equality by putting an end to these discriminations based on constructed imbalances. While discussing the aim of feminism Koussouhoun et al., (2015) argue that "[...] the utmost aim of feminism is to stand up against male dominance and power as well as free the womenfolk from all forms of societal ills buttressed by patriarchy or systemic institutionalized sexism both in literature and society" (p. 315). Flouli (2017) divides the feminist movement into three waves. From some perspectives of feminism, the present study utilizes radical feminism (second-wave feminism) as a theoretical framework. Adjei (2009) asserts that "radical feminism attempts to draw lines between biologically determined behaviour and culturally determined behaviour" (p. 47). Likewise, Ann (2015) claims that radical feminists "use violence to gain their freedom" (p. 430). Radical feminism as a branch of feminism deals with the issues of patriarchy and female subordination.

The concept of biological differences between men and women from Radical Feminism is exaggerated by patriarchal ideology to ensure that men always played masculine roles, while women always played subordinate or feminine. Hence, patriarchy is used "to refer to male domination [...] whereby women are kept subordinate in several ways" (Bhasin, 2000, p.3). The study utilizes Walby's (1990) idea of private patriarchy because it is limited to the familial domain only. Walby (1990) defines "patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate oppress and exploit women" (1990, p. 20). The dynamics of power and control within the home realm, particularly within families and households, are the focus of private patriarchy. It examines how behaviours and attitudes that uphold men's dominance over women in private contexts perpetuate gender inequity and male domination. Thus, Walby's (1990) concept of private patriarchy and Radical Feminists' concept of biological differences resulting in the tensions between male dominance and female rebellion are the basic concepts based on which the researchers have studied the selected piece of text as a counter-discourse to patriarchy.

## METHOD

Guided by qualitative research design, the present study utilizes qualitative textual analysis methods to examine and interpret the selected text. The source of data for the present study is an African novel, *Nervous Conditions* (1988), written in English and composed by TsitsiDangarembga whose literature is remarkable for its contribution to ending the patriarchal system in African society by highlighting the plight of oppressed females and their resistance to this system. Her literature is claimed to be the "literature of revolt" and "renegade autobiography of resistance" (Androne, 2002, p. 323).

*Nervous Conditions*, the focus of the present study, is one of her texts that strongly speaks back to the unjust discrimination and female subordination by depicting the patriarchal oppression of females and their resistance to it. Mostly concerned with familial domain the novel narrates the story of five female characters whose nervous conditions resulting from patriarchal structures are highlighted and their different reactions towards this male dominance are shown. It is through four male characters, Jeremiah, Nhamo, Babamukuru, and Chido that the writer hints at the working of patriarchal power resulting in the subjugation of the females of the society. The data is collected through close reading; a method proposed by Greenham (2018). This reading assisted the researchers in noting different extracts showing female subordination and resistance against it. These extracts were identified and classified based on the emerging patterns which resulted in the categorization of data according to identified themes. The data is analyzed about identified patterns with the relevant extracts. The findings and results of the study are presented in the form of words and sentences instead of numerical data. Figure 1 gives a vivid picture of the way the study was carried out according to the theoretical framework of radical feminism and the private patriarchy concept:

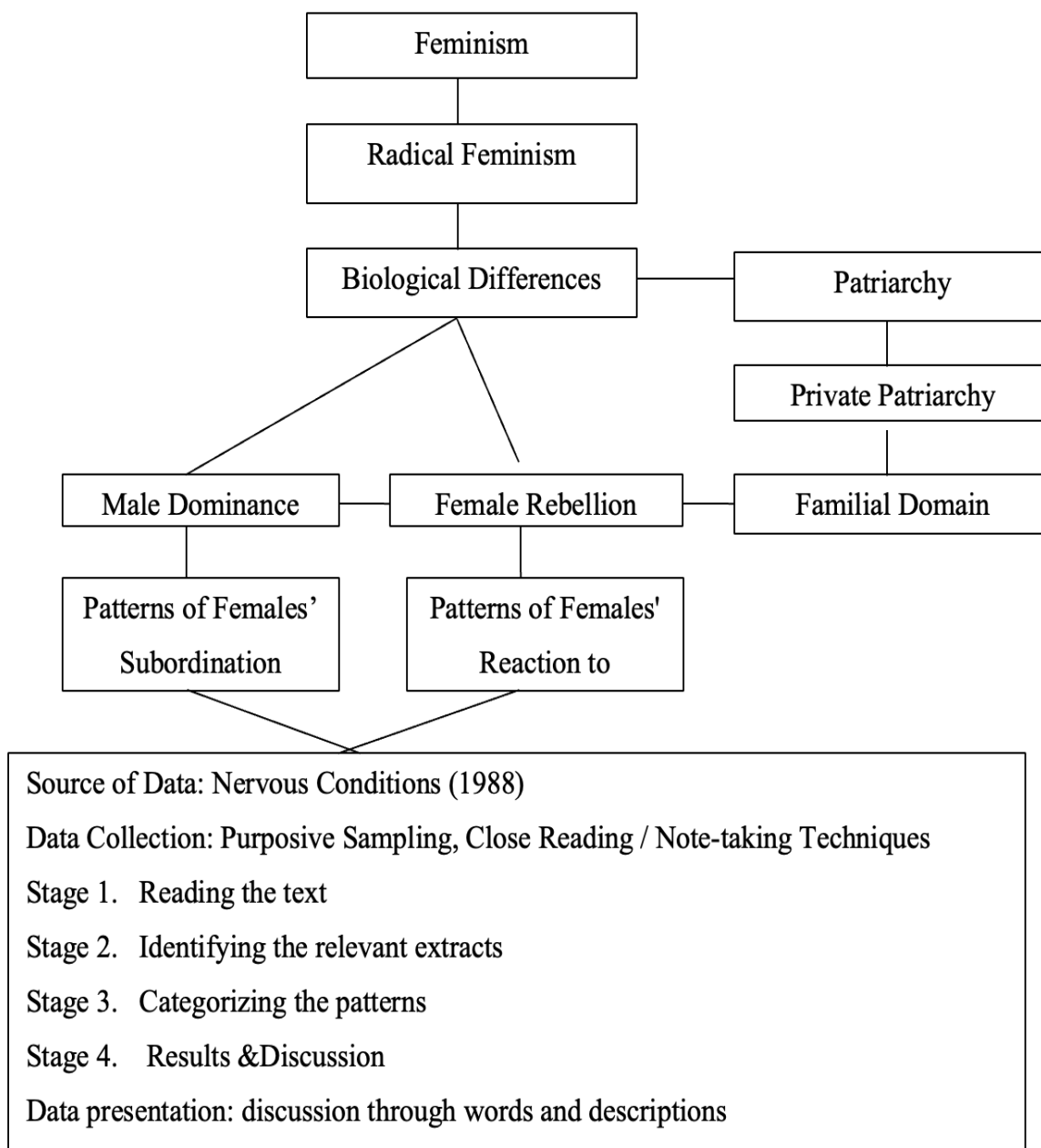


FIGURE 1. Theoretical Framework and Patriarchal Private Concept

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The novel portrays a vivid picture of the patriarchal structure and its working in the familial domain. The following discussion is presented section-wise according to two research questions of the study. Section 6.1 presents an analysis of different patterns of female subordination where these are labeled with names and are elaborated with relevant examples. Section 6.2 discusses the different reactions of the women characters to resist this gender discrimination.



## PATTERNS OF FEMALE SUBORDINATION IN PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

The term 'women's subordination' refers to the inferior position of women to men. Cobuild (2010) defines female subordination as a situation where females are made to believe and accept that someone else is more important than them. The novel presents a story depicting the unequal power relations between males and females in the African familial domain. Hussein (2005) draws a true picture of entrapped women in the social system of African beliefs: "Women have been victims of gender ideology ... Gender ideology contains legends, narratives and myths about what it means to be a man or a woman and suggests how each should behave in the society" (p. 59).

Likewise, Dangarembga (1988) in her novel has shown how African women as a subordinate class are being discriminated against based on their gender in familial domain. Some aspects of this gender discrimination highlighting females' subordination are identified and categorized by the researchers as under:

### DISCRIMINATION IN FOOD DISTRIBUTION

Tambu, the protagonist, highlights gender discrimination when her brother is preferred for only being a male child of the family. Her description of how they used to cook meat when he was expected to visit home from his far-off school is a hint at how society prefers males to be served good and healthy food. Tambu narrates "We also killed a fowl on the occasions that Nhamo came home, whether he came with Babamukuru or whether he came alone" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 8). Hatred is the result of this gender discrimination which is uttered by Tambu in the very opening line of the novel when she says, "I was not sorry when my brother died" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 1). This general trend of the society to serve the males with what is best is highlighted again through the description of the feast event held at Tambu's house where females are served only after the males have been served and with whatever is left by the males. Meat has been served to the males and the women are left with vegetables and gravy only. As Tambu narrates it for the readers:

In the kitchen, we dished out what was left in the pots for ourselves ... As a result, the youngest of us had only gravy and vegetables to go with our sadza. [...] We, who rarely tasted meat, found no reason to complain. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 41)

Dangarembga turns ironic while narrating how the unrefrigerated meat that began to smell and turn green was served to women while men were served fresh refrigerated meat because they are to plan the future of the family. Dangarembga writes ironically: "She took to cooking, twice a day, a special pot of refrigerated meat for the patriarchy to eat as they planned and constructed the family's future" (Dangarembga, 1988, pp. 135-136).

### DISCRIMINATION IN THE BURDEN OF HOUSEHOLD WORK

Another pattern of discrimination shown at work in the novel is the oppression of women through the burden of household work. Women are shown to be the silent workers who give birth to children, look after the home, cook food and even work in the fields. They are neither paid nor appreciated for this all. Tambu narrates how she with her mother, after working in the fields, rush back to their home to cook the meal well in time: "We would travel as briskly as we could so that we would not be late in preparing the evening meal (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 8). On another occasion, while Tambu's brother is enjoying the company of his cousins and she is carrying a water

pot to get her relatives to wash their hands, she feels this discrimination and says: “I knelt and rose and knelt and rose in front of my male relatives in descending order of seniority, and lastly in front of my grandmothers and aunts, offering them the water-dish and towel” ( Dangarembga, 1988, p. 40).

#### DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Education is the right of every child but in a patriarchal society like depicted in the novel; this opportunity is given to males on a preference basis. Tambu, the female, is denied to be sent to school because she is not a male child. Tambu's wish to go to school is laughed at by her brother:

'But you can't study.'

'Who says? I should know. I go to school. You go nowhere.' 'But I want to go to school.'

'Wanting won't help.' 'Why not?'

He hesitated, then shrugged. 'It's the same everywhere. Because you are a girl.

(Dangarembga, 1988, p. 21)

The logic this patriarchy gives for not sending the girls to school is that it results in making the girls neglectful of their practical lives. In the novel, Tambu is taunted by her father on being caught reading a piece of paper: “He became very agitated after he had found me several times reading the sheet of newspaper[...]making me quite useless for the real tasks of feminine living” ( Dangarembga, 1988, pp. 33-34). This right of education is denied to females based on the idea that their real task is to stay and serve at their homes as can be noted in lines uttered by Tambu's father: “Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 15). However, if a chance is given to females, the parents avoid sending them to high-fee schools. Tambu's male cousin, Chido, is sent to a school with high-fee while his sister Nyasha is sent to a school with low-fee. Tambu tells Nyasha: “Despite our talks, we knew that we would never attend a multiracial school because Babamukuru was already battling to keep Chido at his school, where the fees were so high” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 105). Hence, Tambu's desire to get an education to escape her subordinated position substantiates Peterson's (1994) proposition that lack of education hinders the progress of women in African society.

#### DISCRIMINATION IN FREEDOM OF MOBILITY

Some instances of discrimination in freedom to move to certain places or at certain times can also be located in the novel. Tambu feels discriminated against when her brother is taken to the airport to welcome her uncle and she is left at home to cook and clean for them. Her thoughts spoiled this occasion for her as she says: “Yes, I was very irritable on that occasion,[...] I could not help thinking that had I have been allowed, had I been able to welcome Babamukuru at the airport” ( Dangarembga, 1988, p. 38). Likewise, Nyasha, too, had to encounter her authoritative father when she returned from a Christmas party late at night “I have told you to be home by six o'clock. That is a decent hour for a decent girl to come home '(Dangarembga, 1988, p. 68).



#### DISCRIMINATION IN GENDER PREFERENCE

The novel also highlights how a patriarchal society prefers male children. A male child is considered to be a token of good fortune for several reasons. Male children are preferred as they are helpful to their families in times of hunger and need. On the death of Tambu's only brother, her uncle's comment is noteworthy: "It is unfortunate, that there is no male child to take this duty, to take this job of raising the family from hunger and need, Jeremiah" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 56). The opinion of male folk is again highlighted through the general opinion of the people uttered by Tambu in the following lines:

'Who knows?' they dissented. 'If there had been sons earlier, they would have helped the old man on the land. The family would have been better off than they are now. Besides, [...] a man can't be sure about daughters!' (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 125)

Another typical thinking of the patriarchal society is that there is no need to spend on daughters because no financial benefit can be gained from daughters. This negative attitude of men in a patriarchal society is highlighted through Tambu's father as well. MrMatimba's request to spend money on Tambu's education is rejected by her father. MrMatimba says to her father: "But one day when Tambudzai has done well in her studies, she will earn more than ten pounds a month." (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 30). And her father's response is as under: "Have you ever heard of a woman who remains in her father's house?" growled my father. 'She will meet a young man and I will have lost everything" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 30). On another occasion, he says: "Tambudzai's sharpness with her books is no use because, in the end, it will benefit strangers" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 56).

#### DISCRIMINATION IN DAILY LIVING CONDITIONS

Some glimpses of how males are given the privilege to enjoy better living conditions in the familial domain are shown through Tambu when she comments upon her daily life home routine: "My parents slept in one of the bedrooms, [...] the bed and its mattress belonged to my father. My mother was supposed to sleep on the reed mat on the floor" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 62). Moreover, in case of the arrival of guests, the females were accommodated in the kitchen while the bedroom was reserved for those higher in hierarchy i.e. the male members. Tambu narrates the situation as: "So Babamunini took over the living room and all the unmarried women, including Lucia, slept in the kitchen. There were at least eight of us sleeping there for the whole two weeks that our reunion lasted" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 132).

#### DISCRIMINATION IN FREEDOM OF OPINION/DECISION

The novel depicts how the decision-making power is reserved for males and females are not expected to express their opinion, raise an objection or even to think on their own. Dangarembga highlights it through Babamukuru's praise of Tambu when she writes about it:

I hardly ever talked unless spoken to, and then only to answer with the utmost respect whatever question had been asked. Above all, I did not question things. It did not matter to me why things should be done this way rather than that way. I simply accepted that this was so. [...] As a result of all these things that I did not think or do, Babamukuru thought I was the sort of young woman a daughter ought to be. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 155)

The above extract shows how the female is silenced and praised for not questioning things. Under the guise of this praise, she is marginalized further. The findings of this section regarding patterns of gender discrimination hint at no serious physical violence against women but through highlighting these identified patterns of patriarchal oppression, Dangarembga (1988) has challenged this female subordination prevalent around her in her society. The novel presents the women as men's property whose job is to serve men, cook, wash and do cleaning and even work in fields. They are depicted as creatures with less wisdom and power and are a victim of discrimination at different levels deprived of their basic rights. The extracts from the novel have highlighted the workings of this patriarchal society where females are expected to submit themselves to the routine practices of male dominance. But the very act of realization of this discrimination on the part of the women, and then putting it on the paper by Dangarembga, is in itself a strong resistance to this oppression.

### PATTERNS OF WOMEN'S REACTION TO PATRIARCHAL OPPRESSION

In *Nervous Conditions*, five women differing in age, matrimony status and educational background are shown to be fighting against female subordination in their way. Our reading of the novel conforms to the division of female characters into three categories as given by the writer herself through Tambu "about my escape and Lucia's; about my mother's and Maiguru's entrapment; and Nyasha's rebellion ..." (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 1). By this division of women into three classes about patriarchal oppression, the following discussion comprises three sub-sections. Section 6.2.1 discusses the struggle of two ladies, Tambu and her aunt, Lucia, who try to escape from this discriminating system. Section 6.2.2 presents an analysis of the resistance on the part of two entrapped ladies, Tambu's mother and her aunt. Section 6.2.3 discusses the rebellion of Nyasha, Tambu's cousin, to see how the writer writes back to patriarchy and its resultant gender discrimination. The discussion is supported by quoting relevant extracts from the novel.

#### FEMALE SUBORDINATION AND ESCAPE

Two female characters, Tambu and Lucia, come under this category. Tambu cooks the food, looks after her younger sister, fetches water from the river and even works with her mother in the fields. She receives a ridiculous response from her father and brother on her wish to be sent to school. Even her mother teaches her to learn to compromise with her being a woman. Dangarembga propagates her idea of equal division of labor through Tambu who says: "If he wants to eat chicken, he will catch it and kill it. I will pluck it and cook it. This seemed a fair division of labor" (Dangarembga, 1988, p.12).

Tambu again shows her resistance to this system when we find her challenging her mother's traditional views regarding the role of women in that society. As Tambu says "My mother said being a woman was a burden because you had to bear children and look after them and the husband. But I did not think this was true (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 16). Tambu again gives vent to her hurt feelings in the following lines where Dangarembga gets a chance to condemn the gender discrimination prevalent around her:

The needs and sensibilities of the women in my family were not considered a priority, or even legitimate. [...] In those days I felt the injustice of my situation every time I thought about it, [...] this is how I came to dislike my brother, and not only my brother: my father, my mother — everybody .  
(Dangarembga, 1988, p.12)

Tambu's hatred towards this injustice didn't make her passive but she devised to come out of this state with a healthy state of mind. Her advice to other women is a call of resistance by the writer when Tambu says: "It was up to them to learn the important lesson that circumstances were not immutable, no burden so binding that it could not be dropped" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 58). Thus we find in Tambu an escapee who despite being female, manages to break out the silence that was imposed on her by patriarchal structures around her.

Lucia is poor and uneducated but a very strong and bold woman. The text narrates how the male is "excited by the thought of possessing a woman like Lucia, like possessing a thunderstorm to make it crackle and thunder and lightning at your command" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 127). Lucia boldly challenges the male authority by dragging Takesure as Tambu narrates it: "In two strides she was beside him and, securing an ear between each finger and thumb, she dragged him to his feet" (Dangarembga, 1988, p.144). On another occasion, Lucia challenges Babamukuru when she says:

Maybe when you marry a woman, she is obliged to obey you. But some of us aren't married, so we don't know how to do it. That is why I have been able to tell you frankly what is in my heart.  
(Dangarembga, 1988, p. 171)

These strong lines put in the mouth of Lucia, are very important as these announce a marriage to be a bond or a shackle if it puts the females in a position to obey all the time in all conditions with no freedom of opinion. Lucia's financial security and independent life give her a voice to speak her heart in front of others. Lucia's realization of herself to improve her life goes rightly with Ruthven's (1984) claim that African women writers represent women with a sense of realization in them to improve themselves.

#### FEMALE SUBORDINATION AND ENTRAPMENT

Entrapped in the bond of marriage, two female characters are shown to be suffering from patriarchal oppression. Their reaction to this oppression is different from other characters. MaininiMa'Shingay, Tambu's mother, is a silent worker who carries on her daily labor without any complaint as narrated by Tambu: "My mother, lips pressed tight, would hitch little Rambanai more securely on her back and continue silently at her labours" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 7). Again Tambu's other utterance shows Dangarembga's reaction to patriarchy: "The thought of my mother working so hard, so alone, always distressed me" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 10).

Mainini, a silent sufferer, becomes a very strong tool in the hand of the writer to resist this patriarchal system. Her advice to her daughter to follow the way of the common women compromising with patriarchal set-up in the following lines appears to be a loud cry against this female subordination: "'This business of womanhood is a heavy burden,' [...] And these things are not easy; you have to start learning them early, from a very early age. The earlier the better so that it is easy later on..." (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 16). This extract shows how typical mothers try to cultivate thoughts of obedience and hard work in their daughters from a very early age. Tambu's resistance and inquisitive nature about this gender discrimination are not encouraged by her mother as she says to her daughter: "And do you think you are so different, so much better than the rest of us? Accept your lot and enjoy what you can of it. There is nothing else to be done" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 20).

Another extract showing the subordinated position of women is that of Tambu's mother where she speaks loudly against the decisions made by the male head of the family: "I've had

enough of that man dividing me from my children. Dividing me from my children and ruling my life (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 184). This utterance shows a strong resistance and dislike of the females for being ruled over by the men the way they want. The same suffocation is given relief when Mainini utters her suffocated feelings: “He says this and we jump. To wear a veil, at my age, to wear a veil! Just imagine — to wear a veil. If I were a witch I would enfeeble his mind, truly I would do it” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 184). Thus, Tambu’s mother is suffering from inner rage at her subordinated condition but her marital status compels her to remain an ‘entrapped female’ living in that particular patriarchal society.

In contrast to Mainini, Maiguru, Babamukuru's wife, is an educated lady with a good job and income. But she too is a victim of patriarchy. It is through her that Dangarembga raises another question of importance regarding the role of financial independence and education in females' lives. Maiguru is found to be adhering to the set norms of this patriarchal society when at the dining table she serves her husband by holding a plate for him as Tambu narrates: “Then she picked up a plate from the pile in front of Babamukuru and held it for him respectfully with both hands while he spooned food on to his plate” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 80). Then, hinting at how women serve the males with fresh and hot food, the writer again depicts the patriarchal influence upon the ladies like Maiguru. Mark the following extract from the novel: “Maiguru said that Babamukuru's old meal was no longer fresh. She said she would eat it herself, that Babamukuru should serve himself another portion of food” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 78).

Tambu in the following extract narrates how her aunt is careful in serving her husband, who, considering it his right to be the male member of the family, never bothers what his wife or daughter are taking: “But Maiguru took the serving-spoon from between his fingers and spooned several hefty chunks of beef on to his plate. Despite looking a little nauseous, Babamukuru tucked in manfully; then Maiguru served me and finally herself” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 82). Maiguru's subordinated position is highlighted by Tambu even when she is educated and in a job: “I felt sorry for Maiguru because she could not use the money she earned for her purposes and had been prevented by marriage from doing the things she wanted to do.” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 102). This extract hints at a situation where a married woman with her job and money is not allowed to keep it with her and spend it the way she wants to. This finding goes with Muslim et al (2012) who claim that Malay women with high education and prosperous careers are devoted to the traditional values in the patriarchal social background.

The females who appear to obey the routine practices of patriarchy feel a grudge against this discrimination in their hearts. Maiguru speaks out her rage when she addresses her husband and utters the lines: “And when I keep quiet you think I am enjoying it. So today I am telling you I am not happy. I am not happy any more in this house” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 172). This statement of hers depicts the writer's stance that those who silently continue following whatever is directed by the males are not actually at ease with all this subordinated position of theirs. The homes where they are discriminated against in different ways are not happy places for them to live in. Maiguru's resistance brought some betterment in her life and Babamukuru started taking her opinion to which she responded briefly and respectfully. All this was a hint that Babamukuru's decisions were not the decisions of sole authority to be implemented without any resistance.

#### FEMALE SUBORDINATION AND REBELLION

The strongest challenge to patriarchy comes from Nyasha, Babamukuru's daughter. It is actually through Nyasha, that the writer opens new doors to ponder over the fight of women against female subordination. Nyasha rebels against the existing ways as she is not ready to be discriminated

against merely based on her being female. Although she realizes how the other females are following the traditional ways, she is not ready to act like them. She hates her father's behaviour when he tries to act like God with sole authority. On being called a 'whore' by her father, she in her mental conflict does not hesitate to hit him back even. This physical response on her part is the greatest symbol of challenge to male authority in the novel. This rebellion is further highlighted when Nyasha tells Tambu.

He makes me so angry. I can't just shut up when he puts on his God act. Sometimes I look at things from his point of view, you know what I mean, traditions and expectations and authority, that sort of thing, and I can see what he means and I try to be considerate and patient and obedient, really I do. But then I start thinking that he ought to look at things from my point of view and be considerate and patient with me, so I start fighting back and off we go again.

(Dangarembga, 1988, p. 190)

The upper quoted lines show a tussle between the traditional ways of male authority demanding the obedience of females and the female resistance against this authority. Dangarembga through Nyasha has tried to highlight how the patriarchal gods expect the females to submit to their authority and how the rebellious females like Nyasha challenge this authority by fighting back to it. Her struggle to find out her self-definition results in her physical and psychological degeneration as she finds no support. She uses anorexia to challenge her father's male authority. The writer has reflected upon the fact that it is not the fight of a single woman but it needs the whole lot to stand against this unjust male domination for their equal rights to bring a change in the society.

What is the end of this struggle of women against patriarchy is a question mark as the reaction of the five female characters discussed above has not led us to any final acceptable solution to the matter. The novel does not present a romantic or ideal situation where all gets settled in the end but being based on the ground realities, it talks about possibilities and impossibilities. The work opens up new ways of thinking by challenging both male and female members of such societies to play their part in solving this riddle of patriarchy.

## CONCLUSION

The textual analysis of the extracts found under different patterns has shown that *Nervous Conditions* is a challenging narrative that questions the unjust female subordination in a patriarchal society. The identified seven patterns of female subordination indicate that African patriarchal society discriminates against women in the familial domain. Hence, the findings of the study go with earlier claims that culture plays a crucial role in the subjugation of women (Ruthven, 1984; McEldowney, 1999). Moreover, it has been found that Dangarembga (1988) lets her women characters speak and act by themselves against their oppressed condition. This strengthens Moyana's (1996) claim that Dangarembga's women are portrayed differently from those in earlier Zimbabwean literature in English. The patterns of resistance on the part of women are those of escaped, entrapped and rebellion. The present study by highlighting Dangarembga's stance on an unjustified system of patriarchy intends to inculcate in women a habit of critical thinking instead of compromising this all with their torn mental conditions. The study further brings into light Dangarembga's (1988) stance that while fighting against this oppression, female bonding is also needed. Moreover, this study also substantiates the claim made by Zabihzadeh, Hashim, and Chua Chen Wei (2015) in their respective study that such literary writings by highlighting the domestic violence under patriarchal system serve as a work of activism. The study also suggests some further



areas of inquiry to empower women by analyzing female subordination about their being married/unmarried, educated/non-educated, rural/urban, and financially independent/ dependent in different societies and literary texts. The study concludes with this positive note that both men and women need to live in peace and harmony as this game of escape, entrapment and rebellion is disastrous for humanity as a whole. The conclusion of the present study goes with Ojiakor, Nkwam-Uwaoma, Awaeze and Etumnu's (2023) conclusion that: "Men are groaning under the burden of patriarchy [...]women are also willing to step out of the confines of the social construction [...] there should be interdependency where complementarity and supplementarity are the norms" (pp. 43-44).

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