

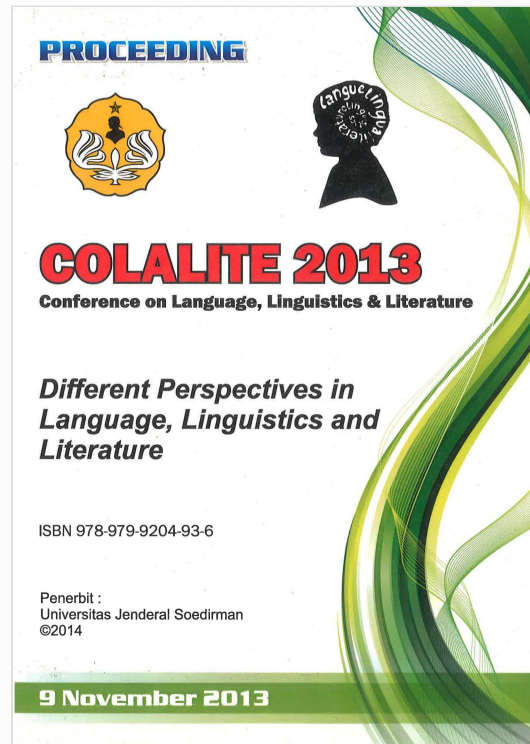


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# WOMEN AS POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISTS

*by* Iskarna Tatang

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# **COLALITE 2013**

**Conference on Language, Linguistics & Literature**

## ***Different Perspectives in Language, Linguistics and Literature***

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Language, Linguistics and Literature*

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UNIVERSITAS JENDERAL SOEDIRMAN  
Jalan Prof. Dr. H.R. Boenyamin 708 Purwokerto  
Kode Pos 53122 Kotak Pos 115  
Telepon 635292 (Hunting) 638337, 638795  
Faksimile 631802  
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## **Foreword**

### **The Chairwoman of 1<sup>st</sup> COLALITE**

**T**o get, to expand, and to share are COLALITE's spirits. By joining COLALITE, the committee, experts, presenters, participants, and students, can expectantly get new knowledge of Language, Linguistics, and Literature. Then, they can hopefully expand the knowledge. Finally, as the conference is the right place to share the knowledge, the committee also hopes that this sharing is going to be continuously conducted through other conferences, seminars, and discussions. Thus, these spirits are going to be carried on anywhere and anytime, so they are going to be alive for years, and contribute to the development of the knowledge especially in Indonesia.

COLALITE is Conference on Language, Linguistics, and Literature. This conference is held by D3 English Language and S1 Language and Literature of Jenderal Soedirman University. The initial intention of holding this seminar is disseminating issues related to various perspectives in language, linguistics and literature. Therefore, it is expected that the seminar will host discussions among researchers, teachers, students, practitioners or anyone interested in sharing ideas or findings on the three fields. Besides, the conference is the realization of the obligation of D3 English Language and S1 Language and Literature of Jenderal Soedirman University as education institution.

Finally, on behalf of 1<sup>st</sup> COLALITE Committee at Jenderal Soedirman University, I would like to express my gratitude to the experts, presenters, and all participants involved in conference. Hopefully this could be a good beginning of productive future for all of us.

Thank you,

Mia Fitria Agustina, M.A

**WOMEN AS POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISTS  
IN EMECHETA'S *THE JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD* AND DANGAREMBGA'S *NERVOUS CONDITION***

by  
Tatang Iskarna  
Sanata Dharma University  
tatang.iskarna@gmail.com

**Abstract**

*Feminist movement gives new perspectives in viewing the position of women. This movement provides advocacy and enlightenment to the women who are marginalized in patriarchal societies. Feminism crystallizes its central goal: changing the degrading view of women, defining themselves, and asserting their own voices in the arenas of politics, society, economics, and culture. However, this movement is questioned for its universality. As this thought is dominantly proposed by Western scholars, feminism is associated with Western idea. Some ideas of feminism can be applied in some societies, while some others cannot represent condition of women in some non-Western societies, especially in the third world countries. Women in such countries experience more complicated than those of Western countries. To understand the condition of the third world women, postcolonial feminist literary work written by the third world women can be used as data. The third world women in some cases are doubly discriminated by their patriarchal and colonial society. They face social and cultural problems concerning not only gender but also race and class. This paper is going to discuss how African women as the third world women are represented and how they can be categorized as postcolonial feminists in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Condition* (1989).*

**Keywords:** *feminism, the third world, postcolonial feminism, race, class, and gender discrimination*

**A. Introduction**

Feminist movement, deriving from Anglo-American thought, brings new insight for many women in perceiving the world, especially in viewing the relation between women and men, women and their society, and women and themselves. This movement succeeds in revealing male domination system, raising the consciousness of woman subordination, and changing the hidden fear into political resistance. The goal of feminism is to change the degrading paradigm of women, as non-significant other, into valuable person possessing the equal rights as men. Through this movement women are enabled to assert their own voices in the fields of economics, society, politics, or culture. Generally feminism is celebrated and expected to change the destiny of women, to create a society where man and woman voices are equally valued, and to define who the women really are and who they want to be. Although feminism seems homogenous, it is no longer considered to have a single set of assumptions recently. Feminism cannot only be associated with white, bourgeois, educated, and heterosexual Anglo-American women. "Evolution of feminism into feminisms has fostered a more inclusive, global perspective" says Ross C. Murfin (2000:301-302).

Recently the universality of (Western) feminism has been interrogated because Western feminists are criticized for having a history of universalizing women's issues and their discourses are often misunderstood to represent women globally. The situation and condition of womanhood in the Western countries are somewhat different from that in the third world countries. The problems and issues the third world women encounter vary and can be more complicated than those of the Western women. The mainstream West feminism sometimes ignores the voices of non-Western women. By using the term *women* as a universal group, they are then only defined by the gender and not by social classes and ethnic identities (Narayan, 2000:91).

Along with the vast progress of feminism, the third world feminism emerges. Some people call it global feminism or feminism of color or multicultural and global feminism, or postcolonial feminism. Postcolonial feminism challenge European and North-American feminism for overlooking distinctions of race, class, and nationality that exist between women. The third world feminists argue that addressing such distinction is more urgent than women's individual rights. Postcolonial feminism needs to be considered because the cultures impacted by colonialism are often different and should be treated differently. Besides, woman oppression relating to colonial experience, such as racism, classism, and ethnocentrism, are not paid much attention in West feminism. Postcolonial feminists need a space to articulate their own voices without being overshadowed by the universality of womanhood raised by Western feminists. Literature, whether it is a novel, drama, or poem, can be used as a means of expressing their voices. Using postcolonial feminist perspective, this article is going to discuss Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and Tsi Tsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Condition* (1989) to show how complicated the problem the third women have to face in comparison with the White women in the West. This article will explore how the African women are described through the characters, theme, or conflict, and how the African women in the two novels can be represented as postcolonial feminists

## **B. Feminism and Feminist Literary Criticism: A Brief View**

Although there is no single and absolute definition, feminism generally can be defined as idea or doctrine advocating social, political and all other rights of women equal to those of men. It is meant to be movement for the attainment of such rights for women. Feminism aims at revealing the oppression of women in a male-dominated society and making women aware of the oppression, fighting against the oppression, and asserting their own voices and defining themselves as women in relation to the men, environment, and society.

Guerin (2011:254-257) states that chronologically feminist movement is divided into three waves. The first wave began in Britain in the late eighteen century with the stirrings of reform in women's rights, among the many reform movement that arose at that time – aid to the poor, abolition of slavery, labor reforms such as legislation against child labor. The primary gains of the first wave feminism were the right to vote and the right the practice birth control for women. The second wave of feminism began after the Word War II. This movement advocated challenging patriarchy. Feminism not only overturned the convention of patriarchal system but also celebrated unique contributions of women, their distinctiveness, and alternate views of their world. This movement can be called as cultural Feminism, in a way that woman culture is more positive and nurturing than patriarchy, and difference feminism, meaning to say that the aim is not just gaining the equal rights but also establishing women's difference from and superiority over men. The third wave feminism began in the early 1990, challenging the second wave feminism's essentialist definition of femininity as a universal female identity while privileging upper-middle-class white women. Third wave feminists expand the interests of feminists in the concerns of women of color, lower-class women, lesbian, and transgendered women, third world women, all which are previously marginalized. Third-wave feminism challenged the first and second wave's essentialist definition of femininity and interrogated the binaries, such as male-female, straight-queer, black-white, and the first world-the third world. The third wave feminists find themselves triply oppressed by class, gender, and race. Thus, the third wave feminism concern much with the subjectivities of women of color.

From the point of view of the label, Rosemarie Putnam Tong in her book *Feminist Thought* (1998) divides feminism into eight labels. They are liberal, radical, Marxist and socialist, psychoanalytic and gender, existentialist, postmodern, multicultural and global, and eco-feminism.

Not only on political, social, or economical realm, but also on art and literature does feminism give critical thought. Feminist literary criticism today is the direct product of feminist movement (Barry, 2002:121). Barry states further that in the 1960s the feminist literary criticism tried to make a study on the significance of the image of women promulgated by literature and saw it as a vital to combat them and question their authority. Feminist criticism in the 1970s analyzed and exposed what might be called the mechanisms of patriarchy, that is the cultural mindset in men and women which perpetuated sexual inequality. Critical attention was given to books by male writers in which influential or typical images of women were constructed. Then in 1980s there was a change in feminist criticism in the way that this criticism became much more eclectic, meaning to say it began to draw upon the findings and approaches of other kinds of criticism, Marxism, structuralism, postcolonialism, linguistics, and so on. It also switched its focus from attacking male version of the world to exploring the nature of female world and outlook, and reconstructing the lost and suppressed records of female experience. Then, the attention was switched to the need to construct a new canon of women's writing by rewriting the history of the novel and of poetry in such a way that neglected women writers were given new prominence.

According to Bressler (1999:188-189) although feminist literary criticisms vary in their direction, they believe in the assumption that women are struggling to discover who they are, how they arrive at their present situation, and where they are going. Their search is political for their aim is to change the world in which they live, a world that must be changed if all individuals, all cultures, all sub cultures, and both sexes are to be valued as creative, rational people who can contribute to their societies and world. As the world has been for a long time filled with the male-centered society, feminist literary critics want to show humankind the errors of such a way of thinking. They declare that women are people of their own right, they are not inferior or incomplete men. To free themselves from such oppression, women must analyze and challenge the established literary canon that has helped shape the inferior images of women and must assert and define themselves through the work of literature.

### **C. African Women in *The Joys of Motherhood* and *Nervous Condition*: The (M) Other**

#### **1. Synopsis of *The Joys of Motherhood***

*The Joys of Motherhood* begins with Nnu Ego's running away from her home in Lagos, Nigeria. She decides to commit a suicide after she finds that her first baby has just died. Then the story flashes back to the story of how Nnu Ego is pregnant. Her father, Agbadi, is in love with a young woman named Ona although he has many wives. Ona refuses to marry Agbadi because she is obligated to produce a son for her father's family line, and not from Agbadi. But when Agbadi has an accident and almost dies in his hunting, Ona takes care of him. She becomes pregnant with his child. She agrees that if it's a daughter, the child will belong to Agbadi. The baby is a girl and she belongs to Agbadi. She is named Nnu Ego. Agbadi loves Nnu Ego very much. She grows into a beautiful young woman. She is married to the son of a rich and titled family.

Unfortunately, the marriage soon grows sour because Nnu Ego fails to have children. Then, her husband takes a second wife. She quickly conceives. Unhappy, Nnu Ego grows thin and worn out. She goes back to live with her father. His father arranges a second marriage for her. Nnu Ego, then, is married to Nnaife, a man who works in Lagos as the washer for a white family, Dr. and Mrs. Meers. For Nnu Ego Nnaife is not her ideal man. However, Nnu Ego becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son, Ngozi. She runs her own business selling cigarettes and matches beside the road. In a morning, she finds Ngozi dead in their home. Distraught and devoid of hope, she rushes to the waterfront to throw herself off Carter Bridge. Nwakusor, an Ibo man coming off his shift at work, prevents her with the help of the crowd that has gathered.

For Nnu Ego, recovering from Ngozi's death is hard and painful. Eventually, Nnu Ego becomes pregnant again and gives birth to Oshia. She decides to focus solely on raising the child instead of making extra income at her market stall. But Nnu Ego faces financial problem when the Meers return to England and Nnaife is suddenly out of a job. Nnu Ego goes on her local trade in cigarettes. To save the family, Nnaife works for a group of Englishmen. While he is away, British soldiers enter the abandoned compound and tell Nnu Ego that she and Oshia must give up the house. Nnu Ego rents a room in another part of town. She gives birth to another son, Adim. Left on their own, the family suffer from malnutrition. Neighbors come to help. Nnu Ego finds that her husband has returned, flush with money. Nnu Ego run a business in a permanent stall in the marketplace and pressures Nnaife to find his next job.

Nnaife's friends come to inform that his brother has died in Ibuza. Nnaife has inherited all of his brother's wives, but only one will come to live with them in Lagos. Adaku arrives with her daughter, resulting in tensions and conflict between the two women. As Nnu Ego tries to sleep nearby, Nnaife invokes his rights as a husband and has sexual relations with Adaku. Nnaife starts a new job cutting grass for the railroad. With less space and more children and wives to feed, Nnu Ego and Adaku become pregnant around the same time. Nnu Ego gives birth to twin girls, while Adaku's son dies shortly after he is born. The women go on strike as they are not given enough money to support the household. Nnu Ego changes her decision, and she cooks a meal for the unity of the family. But Nnaife does not come home to enjoy it. He has to join the army and is shipped off to India and Burma to fight in World War II.

Nnu Ego is pregnant again and takes her family to Ibuza and to the deathbed of her father. After his two funerals, Nnu Ego is unwilling to return to Lagos. However, Adankwo, the eldest wife of Nnaife's older brother, urges her to return to the city to keep an eye on Adako. Nnu Ego returns to find that Nnaife had been home for a brief visit and had left some money for her that she failed to receive. Relations between Nnu Ego and Adako grow worse. This conflict reaches the climax when Nnu Ego gives rude treatment to one of Adako's visiting cousins. When Nnaife's friends come in to resolve the conflict, Adako decides that she and her daughters will move out on their own. Nnu Ego spends the last of her savings before learning she had not been receiving her husband's yearly stipends due to an institutional error. Nnaife returns and spends most of this windfall. Though Nnu Ego is pregnant again, Nnaife decides to return to Ibuza, where he impregnates Adankwo and returns with a teenage bride, Okpo. Nnu Ego gives birth to twin girls.

Then, the family moves to a mud house in another part of town. First Oshia and then Adim propose their intentions of continuing their educations. When Oshia tells Nnaife he has won a scholarship to study in the United States, Nnaife tells him for his neglecting of his filial duty. Taiwo's marriage is arranged to an Ibo clerk, but Kehinde runs away to marry a Yoruba.



Hearing the news, Nnaife is angry and tries to murder Kehinde's father-in-law with his cutlass. Nnaife is imprisoned, and sentenced to five years. He then returns to Ibuza after his release. Nnu Ego has also returned to her homeland, where she dies several years later, alone by the roadside. Oshia returns to honor Nnu Ego with an expensive funeral, suitable for her sacrifices as a mother.

The duty as a mother with her hard duties in the bondage of the patriarchal society and the discrimination of her being woman as the insignificant other become the burden of African women.

## **2. The Synopsis of *Nervous Condition***

The story begins with Tambudzai's rebellion statement: "I was not sorry when my brother died. Tambudzai or Tambu, the narrator, is unmoved by the death of her brother, Nhamo. He is expected home at the end of his term at the mission school, he does not arrive. Tambu feels free as she does not have to kill and prepare a chicken to celebrate his return. Despite the family's poverty, Tambu's parents were able to send Nhamo to school. But he is not able to raise fund to send Tambu as well, so she starts to grow and sell vegetables and raise the money herself. Tambu's teacher, Mr. Matimba, took her to Umtali, a local urban center, to sell corn. A white woman, Doris, and her husband pitied Tambu and gave Mr. Matimba ten pounds to pay for her tuition fee.

Tambu and her family gathered to celebrate the return of Babamukuru, his wife, Maiguru, and their two children, Chido and Nyasha, back from England. Babamukuru gets his education there. Chido and Nyasha, Tambu's cousins, are not able to speak their native tongue, Shona. Maiguru order her children not to take part in the dancing and other festive activities. After the meal Tambu was asked to bring a bowl of water to each member of the extended family so they could wash their hands. Babamukuru's three siblings praised his success. He proposed educating a member of each family, especially Tambu's clan. They chose Nhamo to go to the mission school, but after his sudden death, Tambu is selected to replace him.

Tambu enjoys her new life in her aunt and uncle's house on the mission school grounds. Maiguru warmly welcomes Tambu into her new home. Maiguru serves and help to prepare for Tambu's first day of school. The coldness and emotional distance that once existed between Nyasha and Tambu quickly disappear. Tambu makes vast progress in her studies. She soon learns the rhythms of the household, witnessing Nyasha and Babamukuru's frequent fights. She also learns that Maiguru is highly educated.

Nyasha, Tambu, and the children of white missionaries attend a dance to celebrate the end of the semester. Tambu reluctantly joins the festivities. At the end of the evening is trying to master a new dance one of the boys is teaching her. She doesn't come inside the ouse. When the young people finally enter the house, a violent argument erupts between Babamukuru and Nyasha. Babamukuru accuses Nyasha of impolite behavior. Nyasha strikes her father, who vows to kill her for performing the taboo act of assaulting her own parent. Nyasha feels separated from her family in the following weeks, and Tambu tries to help to calm her down.

Tambu and her relatives head back to the homestead during the school vacation. Maiguru cannot stand the fact that, as senior wife, she is expected to cook and clean for the extended family the entire time. Babamukuru is upset to find Lucia, Tambu's mother's sister, and Takesure, a relative of Tambu's father, still living at the homestead. Lucia is pregnant with Takesure's child. A family meeting is held to decide what action should be taken. Finally the

couple is allowed to remain, as Babamukuru shifts his focus to another moral issue that rankles him: his own brother's unsanctified domestic status. Babamukuru declares that Jeremiah and Ma'Shingayi must be married in a formal Christian ceremony.

Coming to the mission hospital, Tambu's mother gives birth to a son. Lucia soon follows and asks Babamukuru to find her a job. She cooks at the school and begins taking classes. Preparations are being made for the marriage. However, Tambu is opposed to her parents' wedding. When Babamukuru tells her to be ready in thirty minutes, she refuses to attend. When he returns from the wedding, he punishes her by lashing her and forcing her to perform the maid's duties for two weeks. Maiguru argues with Babamukuru over the lack of respect that she gets and the fact that her economic contribution to the family is not recognized. She leaves the next day and stays with her son, Chido.

Tambu is offered a scholarship to continue to study at the mission school. As she goes home, Tambu finds her mother ill. Lucia arrives and takes care of her sister back to health. When Tambu returns to the mission and prepares to leave for school, she cannot find Nyasha anywhere. When she finally finds Nyasha, Nyasha is cold toward her. At school Tambu shares a crowded room with other African girls. As Tambu is too busy with her studies, she doesn't get in touch with Nyasha. Tambu returns to the mission to find Nyasha changed, frightfully thin and suffering from a severe eating disorder. Nyasha is in a psychotic episode. Nyasha sees a psychiatrist and slowly regains her health. Tambu fears she gives up to the negative, colonial influence that made Nyasha mentally ill. Her other cousin, Chido, has a white girlfriend. Tambu begins to question the West influence on her and her family and society.

### **3. Woman Oppression in *The Joys of Motherhood* and *Nervous Condition***

During the process of decolonization most African women experienced discrimination in the African masculine world and the racial Empire. Boehmer (1995:224) states that they are doubly or triply marginalized. That is to say, they are disadvantaged on the grounds not only of gender but also race, social class, and in some cases, religion and caste.

African women are mostly represented as what some scholars called "other", a concept, built on the thought of Hegel and Sartre, which signifies that which is unfamiliar and extraneous to dominant subjectivity, the opposite or negative against which an authority is defined. It is also used by Edward Said to depict the image, idea or characteristics of the orient which is the opposite of the occident (Said,

1979:2). The term "other", according to Simone de Beauvoir, is also applied to women in relation to men:

*Thus humanity is male and man defines not in himself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being.--She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the absolute, she is the Other" (Beauvoir, 1953:xviii-xix).*

In many cases, African male writers always consider women as figures dealing with the domestic concerns, as mothers. The concept of motherhood in Africa as described by some male African writers is dangerous to women because it continues the structure within which females must be women and mothers, and conversely because it denies to females the creation of a subjectivity and world that is open and free (Allen, 1984:315).

These two novels try to expose what African women experience, especially the problems they face and the voices they want to assert. Almost the main characters in the two novels have to encounter oppression from their own society and the colonial influence.

#### **a. African Patriarchal Oppression**

In *The Joys of Motherhood* the woman oppression is represented by the character of Nnu Ego. As a girl, she is taught that her sole functions are to bear and raise children. It can be inferred that in *The Joys of Motherhood* a woman's role in traditional Ibo society is to produce children, and in particular, to produce male children. Her value as a woman is dependent on her fertility. If she is infertile, she is a "failed" woman. If she has only girls, she isn't a failed woman, but she lacks honor. Nnu Ego has absorbed these values, and her life's greatest wish is to be a honored woman. She has child after child, but she finally realizes that the rules of the game were made by men, and that her children have become a chain around her neck.

Instead of an honored and revered figure, Nnu Ego becomes a sacrificial figure, one who gave to her family selflessly while receiving little. Even she gets not nothing in return. Nnu Ego never expected her marriage to Amatokwu, her first husband, to be a failure due to her difficulty to conceive children. As months go by and she has yet to be with child, the main character becomes chastised by her husband and his people and, much to her family's dismay, is taken back to her native village. Consumed with shame she must redeem her father's reputation by marrying Nnaife, who lives in Lagos, miles away from the comfort of Ibuza.

The portrayal of Nnu Ego serves to reveal the truths of motherhood and to illustrate how, through the ages, patriarchal societies established standards for female value. Furthermore Nnu Ego's story illustrates that women often associate gaining merit and respect through selflessness. The main character often compares her life as a mother as that of a slave, in which the "love and duty for her children were like her chain of slavery" (Emecherta, 1979:186).

Men in traditional Ibo society is in a privileged position. Men have the right to several wives and they own their wives' labor, through which they may enrich themselves. But at the same time, they have an obligation to produce male heirs who will contribute to the family line. If they are infertile, or if their wife is infertile, their manhood is in question. The more children a man has, the more he has achieved. There are other privileges associated with being a man, such as drinking palm wine, being at the top of the social food chain, being taken care of by your children as they age.

Each person in *The Joys of Motherhood* has a social role with specific obligations. As a wife, Nnu Ego is obligated to provide for her husband and for children, most importantly for her boys. As senior wife, she is supposed to be a good example to her junior wives, to treat them and her husband, Nnaife, with respect, and not to be jealous. Nnaife, as a husband, is obligated not to neglect any of his wives and to give them children. When his brother dies, he is obligated to assume responsibility for his brother's wives and their children. Nnu Ego's children are obligated to provide for their parents in their old age. Oshia, as the first-born son, is obligated to help pay for his younger siblings' education after he's received his education and has a good job. Nobody in this novel likes their duties very much, and most of the tension occurs when one character fails to fulfill his or her duties. Nnu Ego is the only character who fulfills her duties. However, because Nnaife and her children don't fulfill their duties, her life is not a happy one.

In *Nervous Condition*, the oppression of women is represented by some woman characters, especially Tambu, Nyasha, Tambu's mother, Maiguru, and Lusya. Tambu faces cultural problems since traditional African social practice dictates that the oldest male child is deemed the future head of the family. All of the family's resources are poured into developing his abilities and preparing him to lead and provide for his clan. When Nhamo dies and since no boy exists to take his place, Tambu steps into the role of future provider. However, she encounters the prejudices and limitations that cage most African girls of her generation.

Nyasha, being educated in Britain, has to face strict Shona society in Zimbabwe. She has had the benefit of a British education and knows first hand what kind of lives women in Europe lead. She is ever aware of the differences in the way Shona women are treated compared with the treatment of British women. Unlike her mother, Nyasha has no memories of traditions and customs to silence her voice. Nyasha is truly a woman without a home, and as she struggles to make a place for herself in society, she finds that the effort just may kill her. She refuses to conform to her father's image of womanhood and eventually suffers from a severe eating disorder.

Maiguru is bound both by the laws of her culture and the social stratification of colonialism. She is just a possession of the men in her family even though it is through her labor that her son is able to go to school because of her gender.

Lusya is entrapped in the patriarchal society as she still relies on the men in the family, primarily Babamukuru, to fund her education. Her level of education doesn't mean that she can surpass the men. Her life is determined by her father.

Ma'Shingayi, Tambu's mother, is portrayed as a hardworking figure who has toiled and sacrificed so that her son can have an education. After Nhamo's death, she grows spiteful, angry, and jealous of those around her. Her hard life also makes her apathetic and accept of the limitations with which life has saddled her.

#### **b. European Oppression**

In *The Joys of Motherhood* one of the conflicts is the fact that Ibo men feel emasculated by working for white colonial officials. Nnu Ego is barely able to look at her husband Nnaife when she realizes that he washes clothes for a white woman. Racial conflicts persist even when most of the whites leave to fight World War II, and as Nigeria moves towards independence. The new racial conflicts have less to do with power relations, and more to do with ethnicity and culture. For example, the Yoruba look down on the Ibo. This is why Nnaife is so enraged when his daughter, Kehinde, runs away with a Yoruba man.

Capitalism, Christianity, and European notions of education and conduct all effectively alter and threaten traditional Nigerian culture. The heavy demands of living under colonial control sharply contrast with the slow pace of her village. The woman should deal with the duty of womanhood and motherhood as she is blessed with 8 beautiful children. On the one hand Nnu Ego's financial resources are decreasing and the living conditions in Lagos are difficult, on the other hand she has to manage to educate her sons and daughters. Her children's education and achievements are now becoming the benchmarks of good parenting rather than threats to the repressive traditions that required the next generation to forgo their own goals in service to and respect for the family.

Nnu Ego wants to follow a traditional life. Not only does she want to be seen as a good woman, in the traditional sense, but she also wants to reap the rewards of living a traditional Ibo life. She would have children, who would honor her throughout their lives, and then take care of her as she is growing older. Though she would work hard, eventually, her children would care for her in her old age. However, Nnu Ego lives in Lagos, an urban city influenced by Western culture where she has to leave her traditional values. She tries to raise her kids with traditional values, even while adjusting to modern life. Nnu Ego struggles throughout her entire life to take care of her family, only to find that the rug has been pulled out from under her feet. However she has all the responsibilities of a traditional woman with none of the rewards.

In *Nervous Condition* actually the writer reveals a clash of cultures between traditional African cultures and the cultures of the Western colonial powers. The clash covers social traditions, religious beliefs, the roles of women and children, racial distinctions, and the view that Western culture is more sophisticated. When Tambu moves to the mission, she is able to recognize the way the colonial education system created a culture of subjugation - where Africans learned to believe that they were inferior, and then aspired to live by Christian values. Tambu, who has not had much interaction with white people before coming to the mission, is surprised that she actually likes some of them. However, looking back on that time, she describes the white missionaries with an air of sarcasm: "We treated them like minor deities. With the self-satisfied dignity that came naturally to white people in those days, they accepted this improving disguise." All of the racial tension in the novel stems from Tambu and Nyasha's generation - questioning their society as they move towards discovering a postcolonial identity.

When Nhamo joins the mission school, she begins to feel embarrassed by the poverty of his immediate family. The family members all respect Babamukuru as he is rich and educated. Tambu and Nhamo are both eager to get out of their family home and settle into the comfortable life at the mission. This results in distance between Nhamo and Tambu. Nhamo pretends not to speak Shona language anymore because he associates this language with poverty. Nhamo considers that English is the language of educated people. He considers himself better than his sisters. He forces his sisters to carry his bags and lashes them when they don't obey. While Tambu believes that she will never change the way her brother did, she is startled by the squalor of her childhood home after a year away. Ma'Shingayi is acutely aware of her child's newfound superiority and accuses Tambu of being judgmental. Looking back, Tambu has realized that she was conditioned by colonialism to deify the white missionaries and their educational system.

"Nervous condition", the title novel, refers to the effect of the cultural clash experienced by the woman characters. Tambu is anxious about what it means to be educated, and after leaving for the mission, she is pulled between her Shona roots and her colonial schooling. Tambu's nervous condition manifests itself when she refuses to attend her parents' wedding. She is angry with Babamukuru for categorizing her parents as sinners, and she is simultaneously embarrassed as well. Nyasha's nervous condition can be seen in her severe anorexia. Nyasha has not been raised in the Shona culture like Tambu has, so all she knows is the English way. Returning to Rhodesia makes Nyasha feel like an outsider. Her condition is getting worse after Tambu leaves for the convent school. Ma'Shingayi suffers from depression, and she comes to a conclusion that "Englishness" is the root of what killed her son and took her daughter away from her.



#### 4. African Women as Postcolonial Feminists

*The Joys of Motherhood* and *Nervous Conditions* are novels used by the writers to reveal the woman oppression in African countries, especially Nigeria and Rhodesia. Besides, the writers also assert the voices of African women, the voices of awareness of the oppression and desire to set themselves free from the patriarchal society and the struggle against the oppression. As the women in the two novels fight against the oppression and do not give up to the patriarchal system and colonial hegemony, they can be called as postcolonial feminists.

In *The Joys of Motherhood* the writer uses the character of Nnu Ego to struggle against both patriarchal and colonial domination. Buchi Emecheta, through Nnu Ego, describes on the conditions of women living both on their home continent and abroad. *The Joys of Motherhood* is among her most pivotal works, as it offers critical commentary on colonialism, tradition, capitalism, and women's roles as they come to affect one woman, Nnu Ego, and her family. Nnu Ego is not strictly feminist in the western sense of the term. Nnu Ego does not fully identify with Western feminist ideals. She does not typically view herself as a domestic drudge, confined to the endless domestic cycles of childbearing and child rearing. Instead, she is a woman who has a different cultural understanding of the role and function of work. She identifies herself as a powerful economic force who has always been a significant source of the family's income.

Nnu Ego is used to fight against the repressive attitudes commonly held by many Ibo men of her generation. The Ibo, sometimes referred to as the Igbo, are a group of people who originally settled in southeastern Nigeria. Traditional Ibo culture called for strict regulation of women's roles and a proscribed subservience to men. Through Nnu Ego the writer gives critical of authoritarian Ibos who take advantage of male privilege, citing it as a justification for the oppression of their wives and daughters. The main character seems to defend polygamy because she sees the system as a necessary community that aids in the rearing of children. However, she argues that it is not a presumed right that every man holds, especially when the husband is unable to afford and support additional family members. The repressive attitudes and behaviors as systematically silencing women and barring them from realizing their full potential can be detected by Nnu Ego.

Nnu Ego also is faced with conflicts and change in the colonial influence. Through Nnu Ego, the mostly white Europeans whose governments seize control of various African nations are criticized. European powers turn to developing parts of Africa as a rich source of raw materials, products, and labor. This foreign presence not only brings a new economic order to the colonized nation but influences and alters the values, community standards, and ways of life of the native residents. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, the family is affected most profoundly. The young are lured by the promise of higher education and the temptations of wealth, individual advancement, and personal gain. The colonial influence challenges and effectively erodes the communal and clan value systems that once defined and unified the Ibo. Upon facing this problem, Nnu Ego survives to take her own life style.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu are used to represent the rebellion and resistance of African women towards the patriarchal system and colonial perspective. In spite of her gender role in her society, Tambu fight for an education and a better life. Gender inequality and sexual discrimination form certain paradigm amongst the female characters' lives. Inequality between men and women is like infectious disease and a crippling attitude that kills ambition, crushes women's spirits, and discourages them from supporting and rallying future generations and other female relatives in their society.



Tambu resists by beginning to question patriarchy when she moves in with Babamukuru. Tambu is torn between her reverence for Babamukuru and her growing frustration with his inflexibility. Because he is her benefactor, she cannot show him disrespect, and yet - she becomes increasingly disillusioned by his conservative values, which are deeply tied to Christianity.

Tambu returns to the mission to find Nyasha changed, frightfully thin and suffering from a severe eating disorder. Nyasha is in a psychotic episode. Nyasha sees a psychiatrist and slowly regains her health. Tambu fears she gives up to the negative, colonial influence that made Nyasha mentally ill. Her other cousin, Chido, has a white girlfriend. Tambu begins to question the West influence on her and her family and society.

Tambu is brought up in the traditional gender roles in Shona society. As a child, Tambu feels resentment towards her brother, Nhamo, when Babamukuru offers to pay for his schooling. From an early age, Tambu realizes that "the needs and sensibilities of the women in my family were not considered a priority, or even legitimate." Tambu is, in her words, "not sorry" when Nhamo dies because it means that she will be able to attend a colonial school in his place. When Tambu moves to the mission, however, she feels conflicted between her duty to Babamurku and her burgeoning independence. Meanwhile, Nyasha, who has been educated in England, does not hold back. All of the women in *Nervous Conditions* try to rebel against the male patriarchy with various levels of success - but nevertheless, understand that there is a battle to be fought.

In spite of the bondage of the patriarchal system, Tambu realizes the mission school both provides and represents privileged opportunity and enlightenment. Although her mother warns her objections, Tambu knows the only hope she has of lifting her family out of poverty lies in education. However, the mission school will bring about another problem because Western institutions and systems of thought may cruelly alter native Africans who are subjected to them. She fears that the dominating culture may eventually stifle, limit, or eliminate the long-established native culture of Rhodesia—in other words, she fears that colonialism may force assimilation. Tambu's struggle to confront and integrate the various social and political influences that shape her lives forms her own perspective in facing the oppression of African women.

Tambu sees education as a pathway to financial success, based on the example set by Babamukuru. Babamukuru believes that education is the route to alleviate dependency. Meanwhile, his own wife, Maiguru, has a masters' degree that she has never used. Tambu is desperate to be educated, as it will be her ticket out of poverty. When she arrives at the convent school, though, it becomes clear that her colonial education will continue to subjugate her because she is an African. To the white children, education is a right, and the Africans are taught to see it as a privilege. Looking back, Tambu recognizes that this system enforces a colonial power structure but at the time, it seemed a great opportunity and certainly does allow her to build a life outside of her family's poverty.

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