Voicing the Voiceless: An Appraisal of the Aesthetics of Violence
(in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s Nervous Condition and G. D. Nyamndi’s Facing Meamba)

Taku Catherine Arrey-Ngang

B.A. (Hons) English, M. A African Literature, Ph.D in View
PGD Women and Gender Studies, University of Buea
South West Region – Cameroon, Central Africa

Abstract: The burden of being a woman in Africa is a heavy weight to bear. The man claims authority over the woman, and since the woman is economically dependent on the man, she succumbs to all the anguish metted on her. Tsitsi Dangarembga in Nervous Conditions and G.D Nyamndi in Facing Meamba have both shown the African woman as one whom patriarchal impediments have reduced to a voiceless nonentity. Guided by the African feminist approaches to literary criticism, this paper has argued, supported by the selected texts, that the social pressures which silence women in African societies are often the product of patriarchal power. Today, the emphasis by feminists is on creating a society free of economic exploitation and all forms of oppression; a society where there is equality and justice for all; where women have a voice and can transcend socially imposed limitations on them. While it is generally agreed that African women live in the shadow of men, this work contends that through the revolutionary actions of some female characters, women employ violence as one of the strategies to deconstruct themselves as a cultural ideology. Dangarembga and Nyamndi are voicing the voiceless women in Africa by creating a new woman whose voice is ground-breaking and revolutionary.

Keywords: Voicing, Voiceless, Appraisal, Aesthetics, Violence, Tsitsi Dangarembga.

1. INTRODUCTION

Women are valuable in the sight of society. They bear life, they nurse, they cherish, they give warmth and they care for life. All human life passes through their own bodies. In some African societies, women are highly treasured and esteemed as wives, mothers and economic agents. This multiple role of the African woman as mother, spouse, educator, life-giver and peacekeeper, makes her the surest gauge of family dignity and pride. She is the foundational pillar upon which all the family and community structures rely. Directly or indirectly, it is actually the woman who manages the entire community. This is so because the family is the nucleus of every society. She can even be said to be more efficient and proficient than any First Lady or Mme Minister.
According to John Mbiti in *The Role of Women in African Traditional Religion*, women feature very prominently in African Mythology. The woman was highly regarded as the mother of creation and giver of life. Some myths speak about an original Mother of mankind, from whom all people originated. For example, the Akposso (of Togo) tell that when Uwolowu (God) made men, He first made a woman on the earth and bore with her the first child, the first human being.

The main idea here is to link human life directly with God through the woman. She is created by God, and in turn becomes the instrument of human life. She rightly becomes the one who passes on life. This is beautifully illustrated in a myth of the Tutsi of Rwanda. According to this myth, the original pair of human beings was in paradise. But both the man and woman were sterile, and could not bear children. So they begged God to help them. God mixed clay with saliva and formed a small human figure. He instructed the woman to put the figure into a pot and keep it there for nine months. Every day the woman had to pour milk into the pot, mornings and evenings. She was to take out the figure only when it had grown limbs. So she followed these instructions and after nine months she pulled out what had now become a human being. God made other human beings using this method, and these later increased on the earth.

This shows the important place that the woman has even in God's sight. She has to nurture and groom to life. Mbiti opines that:

The pot is here a symbol of the womb of a mother, in which a baby takes shape and after nine months it is born. The woman shares directly with God in a personal way, the secrets and mysteries of life and birth. This role of the woman in sharing in the mysteries of life started already in the mythological time. (6)

Unfortunately, however, the reality for many women in Africa is an ugly picture of impoverishment and battering. Many women are victims of violence and have for a very long time suffered oppression, subjugation and repression. Their basic human rights are violated and many are indeed denied their dignity. Chimamanda Adichie in “Africa’s Women Speak Out”, a *BBC News* programme, perceives the role of women in this modern time as “economic”. She says that women still lack the economic power brought by equal opportunities. The challenge women face, she contends, are caused by the “male dominated societies that are suspicious of change”. However, she maintains that African women have shown that they are “capable of excelling in positions of real influence…the need only to be given the opportunity”. Adichie believes that women can bring about change most successfully by questioning assumptions, by being informed and by speaking out and taking responsibility for their own lives. She queries in her interview with BBC: “who benefits where a woman is silenced in the name of African culture or religion? The men.”

Silence, it is assumed, has an energy to it like no other source. It has the power to get people to think and to act; it can help slow the mind down, and it is a powerful ally in the likes of counselling and making a real breakthrough in life. Silence helps turn our thoughts and focus inwards and we gain the power we need to refuel our minds. Our ego is temporarily switched off or at least made to be quiet for a bit, and we start to see the real world as it should be. Sometimes our thoughts get in the way of our reality and we do not see the beauty of the world around us. So when there is silence there is time for introspection and to allow our true self to speak, not the ego or the conscious mind, but the real person connected to the flow of energy around us.

This is however not the silence that this paper refers to; this work refers to silence as in having no freedom of expression, not allowed to speak out. Silence which means voicelessness; someone who has been indoctrinated to not speak about happenings around him/her. In this article, silence will not simply mean ‘not speaking out’, but will be used in a more dynamic, transitive sense to imply the social pressures exerted on women by patriarchy and culture.

Sexist and gender-based insults are levied by men on women who dare to venture beyond their specified space. To such men, women are inferior creatures and should be denied positions of power and influence. The result is that they are silenced in society. As Mary Eagleton says, when women speak of being silenced, they don't mean they are incapable of adequately speaking a language: rather they are referring to those social and cultural pressures which undermine their confidence and make them hesitant about speaking. (16)
These social and cultural pressures which silence women are often the product of patriarchal power in the African societies. Today, the emphasis by women is on creating a society free of economic exploitation and all forms of oppression; a society where there is equality and justice for all, a society where women have a voice.

As a result of the plight and predicament of women, feminist critics largely agree on three pertinent points: 1) to expose patriarchal premises and resulting prejudices, 2) to promote discovery and re-evaluation of literature by women, and 3) to examine social, cultural and psychosexual contexts of literature and criticism. As feminists re-read male texts, they describe how women in those texts are constrained by culture and society; the second and third purposes thus follow naturally from the first. The male exclusivist and autocratic worldview is beginning to tear up under the surge of female pressure.

In relation to education and power dynamics in Cameroon and Africa, Emmanuel Konde in *African Women and Politics: Knowledge, Gender, and Power in Male-dominated Cameroon* argues that,

The absence of women from political structures of colonial Cameroon resulted from the fact that access to western education was opened to them very late. Colonial reforms introduced to benefit women were few, half-heartedly implemented, and slow in materializing. A major factor that contributed to this outcome was the strong opposition that emanated from the indigenous male community. (3)

This opposition is proof that men do not want women to share in their patriarchal power.

With new perspectives, feminist literary critics quickly find themselves moving towards the study of sexual, social, and political issues once thought to be exclusively the reserve rights of men. Sandra Gilbert’s definition of Feminist Criticism corroborates the point this article sets out to examine, namely that:

Feminist criticism at its most ambitious seeks to decode and demystify all the disguised questions and answers that have always shadowed the connections between textuality and sexuality, genre and gender, psychosexual identity and cultural authority. (36)

The point above is further expatiated by bell hooks who states in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre* that: feminism is “a movement that aims at making women equals of men” (238). Elaine Showalter reinforces the above contention by identifying three historical phases in women’s attempt to regain their voice: the feminine phase, (1840-1880), during which writers imitated the dominant tradition established by men, the feminist phase, (1880-1920) during which women protested and advocated minority rights; and the female phase, (1920 to the present) marked by a turn inward for identity and a resulting rediscovery of women’s texts and women.

This work preoccupies itself with the feminist literary criticism from the late 1980s to the early 2000. It is possible to trace the concept’s gradual development from a vocabulary of silence, absence and hiding to that of revelation, uncovering and revolt against the androcentrism that had dominated literary discourse in African fiction. In America, feminist activism found fertile ground in the Civil Rights Movement. Before this time, women had been subjected to violent oppression and subjugation. One of the Movement's key achievements was the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993. It covers physical, sexual and psychological violence as well as violence both at home and elsewhere in society). This Declaration is the first international human rights instrument to exclusively and explicitly address the issue of violence against women. It affirms that the phenomenon violates, impairs and nullifies women's human rights and their exercise of fundamental freedoms. The Declaration, published by the United Nations Department of Public Information, defines gender-based abuse as:

Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (online).
The scourge/nemesis of violence against women has been emphasized over the last decade through the holding of expert group meetings sponsored by the United Nations and other international bodies to draw attention to the extent and severity of the problem.

Distinguishing between sex as determined biologically and gender as a psychological concept that refers to culturally acquired sexual identity, Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* argues that “...the essence of politics is power... and the most fundamental and pervasive concept of power in our society is male dominance” (qtd in Wilfred L. Guerin, 187). This male dominance is reflected in novels, plays, poetry and short stories by men where women are culturally defined and constructed. Against this backdrop, Helen Chukwuma says:

...the female character in African fiction hitherto is a facile lackluster human being, the quiet member of a household, content only to bear children, unfulfilled if she does not, and handicapped if she bears only daughters....Docility and complete submission of will is demanded and enacted from her. This traditional image of a woman as determinate human being, dependent, gullible and voiceless sticks especially in the background of patrilineage, which marks most African voices. (131)

It is this image of the African woman that African writers like Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo, George Nyamndi, Tsitsi Dangarembga strive to deconstruct. The woman who was represented and presented by patriarchy as inferior, voiceless and good only for work and procreation has been deconstructed here. Woman, who had to be silent, has suddenly burst forth. She has become assertive and knowledgeable; and moved from subservience to eminence.

Before this radicalism and rebellion against patriarchy, literary representations of women came mostly from the pens of men and were nearly always critiqued for their gender prejudices. Literature was seen as a key location for the creation, expression and maintenance of a sexual politics that oppressed women. For this reason, literary analysis has come to be viewed as an essential means of reinstating the woman. This is one of our major preoccupations: to examine women’s place in society and the role they have played in it, the reasons for this role, and the ways that it can be changed.

1.1 Statement of Problem

In Cameroon and Zimbabwe, which are largely patriarchal societies, women live mainly in the shadows of men and are for the most part perceived and treated by them as objects. It is the major contention of this work that the two writers under study decry the injustices done to women and girls in their societies, and challenge patriarchal values that work against women and excludes them from the socio-political, economic and cultural domains. And so having been excluded from public life and still occupying largely peripheral and powerless positions, women have developed a different voice; a voice that is intended to undermine the male dominant voice and sustain their own voice.

From the above stated problem, this paper will attempt to answer the question “What is the place of the woman in a patriarchal society?”

1.2 Hypothesis

In view of the statement of the problem and research question as stated above, this article hypothesizes that in a dominant male society that is patriarchal in perception and execution; women live in the shadow of men and are subjected to many forms of oppression and repression. The work contends that women have been silent for too long and are now fighting to unfetter themselves. One of the strategies that authors employ to bring women's voices alive in a patriarchal system is the use of violence (which may be subtle or overt) by the women against their oppressors. Such violence has its specific philosophy and intentions: the liberation of the oppressed.

1.3 Rationale for the Choice of Texts

Two novels have been chosen for this study, one written by a female author, Tsitsi Dangarembga and the other by a male author, G.D. Nyamndi so as to analyse the women's struggle from both female and male feminist perspectives. The novels are *Nervous Conditions* and *Facing Meamba* respectively.

This researcher chose to analyse *Nervous Conditions* in particular, firstly because Tsitsi Dangarembga was the first Zimbabwean female author to be published and she received such acclaim
for her work and secondly, because we believe that the central themes and problems that are explored in this novel are relevant to the struggles that women in Africa are facing every day.

The choice of Facing Meamba was informed firstly by its relatively fertile ground for exploration since it is newly published; and secondly because its major theme is gender inequality and patriarchy. This theme is at the forefront of all the sub-themes in both novels and is illustrated through the relationships between the men and women in the novels, that is to say both family and spousal relations. Many young girls and women living in both urban and rural communities in Africa choose or are forced to put their education on hold or drop out of school due to family responsibilities or a lack of financial support from their families. It is also a fact that many African families are headed by older men who hold a dictatorship over their families. They are the sole decision makers, making women voiceless and compelling them to live in passive silence, making them victims of emotional and sometimes physical abuse. This is a reality for many women in Cameroon, Zimbabwe and many other African countries. In fact this is how it has always been, is taught and passed down through the customs and traditions of the people. These two novels depict these themes well and open up debate about the happenings that many people are unaware of. In the patriarchal society that we live in, many African women who lack education believe that it is the duty of a good woman to be submissive to her male counterpart and community. This article is thus hoping to make the reader aware of the goings-on of these unjust practices, their physical consequences as well as the psychological impact these biased attitudes have on the women they affect. It is equally to show how African women's problems and struggles are the same whether in East or Central Africa.

The choice of these two novels is determined by the authors' examination of the burning issues of women's subjectivity and voicelessness, and how the female characters adopt survival strategies in order to give meaning to their lives in a dominantly patriarchal society.

2. BACKGROUND

The dual influence of tradition and patriarchy perpetuate the supremacy of men over woman in the traditional African communities. While tradition prevents the woman from carrying out certain functions or being liberal in her behaviour, patriarchy imposes the man's influence over her lingering liberty. As a result, the woman and the girl child live at the periphery while the man takes the central roles. Women are held down by traditions and cultures that keep them from attaining their goals, (including early marriage, motherhood, gender roles etc) and which define spheres and spaces for them. Patriarchy on the other hand gives the man privileges that endow him with authority, power and supremacy over the woman. According to bell hooks,

Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence. (18)

Such violence may take different forms including dowry murder in South Asia and ‘honour killing’ common to Muslims.

2.1 The Male Gaze

The male gaze refers to power relations that imply marginality of the feminine sex by the male. The female sex is often termed the weaker sex and is expected to carry out functions that do not involve the use of force or physical strength; while the man is expected to be physically more powerful and ready to embrace challenges. In his book Masculinity and Power, Arthur Brittan reiterates the interrelation between gender and power when he opines that, “At any given moment, gender will reflect the material interests of those who have power and those who do not (ix).

Laura Mulvey relates the male gaze to watching cinema and ascribing the women in the film to sex objects for men. She argues that cinema provides a visual pleasure through scopophilia and identification with the on-screen male actor. David Allen equally notes that scopophilia is “a desire to look at sexually stimulating scenes especially as substitute for actual sexual participation…”(6). In this study however, we shall take scopophilia to mean treating some people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and/or unobserved gaze. Mulvey argues that Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory is the
key to understanding why film creates a space where women are viewed as sexual objects by men. According to Mulvey, the combination of the patriarchal order of society and looking as a pleasurable act (voyeurism) creates film as an outlet for female sexual exploitation.

The feminist interpretation has, however, modified the importance of the male gaze in the years after 1975 and has formulated certain applicatory conditions for its effective use. At the same time, feminist theory has shown that due to changes in conditions of production and reception, men may also become the object of voyeuristic gaze. The inclusion of the texts by Jacques Lacan and Roland Barthes has opened the possibility to assign subjectivity even to the gazed-atobjects. The masculine look can be reversed, albeit not always as an equal.

While Mulvey perceived the male gaze as a means to present the female body as an object for a voyeuristic and sexist practice of the spectators, Michel Foucault conceptualizes the male gaze as a form of societal power at the brink of modernity. The male gaze in this study will follow the thoughts of Michel Foucault and will be used to mean male power and authority especially over women. Foucault argues that patriarchy serves to put women in a weaker position, making them subject to the male gaze, to male desires and purposes. In the article "Body Politics and the Muscled Woman", Honi Fern Haber posits,

"Women act in collusion with patriarchal power because they are constituted within discourses that give 'woman' meaning as subjects of male gaze. In the classical genres, the female body is sexualised, providing the exotic object for the male spectators…” (141)

The above thought always occurs as a result of socialization. The woman has been so nurtured and groomed to accept the fact that the man is more powerful and has an overriding authority over her to the extent that she accepts to play any role ascribed to her submissively.

This is what happens in Susan Lori Parks’ Venus, a play based on the journey of Saartjie Baartman, an African woman taken from South Africa in 1810 to exhibit herself in London and Paris. It is a story of commercial, scientific and sexual exploitation that reveals the cultural consequences of imperialism. Baartman’s story is that of an exploited young African woman exhibited at a freak show attraction in Europe from 1810 until her death in 1826 under the name Hottentot.

Parks’ Venus reveals the inhumanity residing at the black heart of imperialist culture. For Saartjie Baartman, like many oppressed African women, there could be no salvation, no exit from complete degradation. No redeeming sentimentality can be called forth from this romantic European early-nineteenth-century fantasy of scientific progress during which human beings were reduced to objects for the pseudo-scientific scrutiny of people who used them to slake their sexual desires. This is what Honi Fern calls "exotic object for male spectators." Baartman becomes an object for male gaze and sexual pleasure.

In the world at large, it is assumed that men everywhere and at all times have been women’s superiors and the work men do is more highly valued than that which women do. As such, power, bravery, and authority are mostly attributed to the male sex while powerlessness, weakness, timidity and silence are seen as the qualities of the female sex. Claire Renzetti and Daniel J. Curran in Women, Men, and Society point out traditional traits identified as feminine. If you are a woman, most people expect you to be rather passive and dependent, also emotional and given to crying easily. They will think of you as nurturing and happiest when you are caring for children, preoccupied with your appearance, disinterested in business affairs and world events and inept with things mechanical. It is against such a sexist backdrop that most men ascribe marginal spaces to women. On the other hand, they also identify traditional traits seen as masculine. If you are a man, you must be assertive and independent, always in control of your emotions. They will think of you as ambitious and happiest when pursuing your career, preoccupied with your studies or your job, well informed about business and world affairs and mechanically inclined. (2) All these attributes are found in the male characters of the two texts under study. However, some female characters refuse to stick to the feminine traits prescribed for women; they go out of their way by venturing into male domains in a bid to free themselves from the "burdens of being woman". While Tambudzai in Nervous Conditions is bent on having a sound education, Lemea in Facing Meamba is a no-nonsense girl who fights patriarchy overtly, refusing to be intimidated by boys and rejecting being forced into marriage.
The male gaze in this work will be used to mean male power and authority especially over women. It will refer to those structures of power in patriarchy that perpetuate the “othering” of the African woman in both novels and which cause limitations to their physical and psychological development.

2.2 Culture

In a typical African society, the woman’s place is in the home (kitchen) and the duties ascribed to her are those of child bearing, nurturing, and caring for her family. The woman is expected by culture to be submissive, dutiful, enduring and caring to her husband and his family. This is what obtains in the two novels under study.

Karl Marx believed that all of history could be reduced to two tiny words: class struggle. In any period of time a dominant class exploits a weaker class. Marx defines a dominant class as one who owns or controls the means of production. The weaker class consists of those who don’t (online). In Marx’s day, the age of the Almighty Industry, the means of production were factories. But as a literary theory Marxism needs no factories to act as means of production. All that are needed are words, specifically chosen to justify an official view of a dominating class, in our case, men dominating women. This official view is sometimes disguised as what we might otherwise call culture.

Marxist theory can be applied to Nyamndi’s Facing Meamba. First let us examine the story itself. Facing Meamba tells the story of a little girl who is denied an education, forced to accept early marriage, and groomed by culture to believe that men should dictate the way of life of women. In this fictional world of Nwemba, the dominant class is the male who think that they have a right to control not only the women’s actions, but also even their thoughts. Boys intimidate girls, men beat up their wives and patriarchs dictate the way of life of the women. This is what Marx calls class domination. However, when the members of a class become aware of their exploitation and the conflict with another class, according to Marx, the proletariat will then take action against those that are exploiting the lower classes. So when Lemea realises that her tradition is prejudiced against women, she takes action by fighting back. She refuses to be intimated by boys or to marry someone she has no affection for.

In Nervous Conditions, Tsitsi Dangarembga focuses in particular on a small group of five women who struggle to be heard and to succeed in a world that often aggressively seeks to silence and control them. Though in a way these women are successful in their struggle, their victories are not grand. They do not openly challenge the status quo (patriarchy) or topple repressive systems (colonialism); neither do they alter patriarchal behaviours and men’s ways of thinking. However the female characters stage a fight, that of challenging the notion of culture, gender and even religion.

All the female characters are portrayed as victims of patriarchy. There is the central character, Tambudzai, who is initially denied an education because she is female; Maiguru earns a salary which is spent entirely by her husband; Mainini, by custom, cannot sit in a meeting that determines her children's future because she is female; Lucia is sexually exploited by the men around her because she is female and unmarried - she is perceived as an object for the satisfaction of the men's sexual and libidinal desires; even Nyasha, the westernized kid, is often scolded by her parents for lack of respect to her elders.

The concept of patriarchy has been used within the women's movement to analyse the principles underlying women's oppression. The concept itself is not new. It has a history within feminist thought, having been used by earlier feminists like Virginia Woolf, the Fabian Women's Group and Vera Brittain. The anti-Marxist sociologist, Max Weber, has also used it. Theoretically the concept of patriarchy has been used to address the question of the real basis of the subordination of women, and to analyse the particular forms that it assumes.

At the most general level, patriarchy has been used by Kate Millett in Sexual Politics to refer to male domination and to the power relationships by which men dominate women. Eisenstein on the other hand posits in Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism that patriarchy is a sexual hierarchy of the man, which is manifested in the woman's role as mother, domestic labourer and consumer within the family.
Unlike radical feminist writers like Kate Millett, who have focused solely on the system of male domination and female subordination, Marxist feminists (Marxist feminists are feminists who ally themselves with the philosophical and economic theories of Karl Marx) have attempted to analyse the relationship between the subordination of women and the organization of various modes of production. In fact, Marxist feminists have adopted the concept of patriarchy in an attempt to transform Marxist theory so that it can more adequately account for the subordination of women as well as for the forms of class exploitation. The concept of patriarchy has been used in various ways within the Marxist feminist literature. To take an example: Juliet Mitchell uses patriarchy to refer to kinship systems in which men exchange women, and to the symbolic power which fathers have within these systems, and the consequences of this power for the 'inferiorized... psychology of women'. (402) The defining characteristic of a patriarchal culture for Juliet Mitchell is that within it the father assumes, symbolically, power over the woman, and she asserts that it is fathers and their 'representatives' and not men (as in radical and revolutionary feminist analyses) who have the determinate power over women in patriarchal culture.

Heidi Hartmann equally retains the radical feminist usage of patriarchy to refer to male power over women and has attempted to analyse the inter-relationship between this and the organization of the capitalist labour process in the article 'Capitalism, Patriarchy and Job Segregation by Sex'.

According to Carol P. Christ in ‘Patriarchy as a system of Male Dominance Created at the Intersection of the Control of Women, Private Property, and War, Part 2', she suggests that patriarchy is a method of male dominance that has been rooted in the spirit of war which justifies violence which is approved by religious symbolism, in which men control women and their sexuality, with the purpose of passing wealth and assets to male heirs only thus insuring their dependability and loyalty of their women. Christ also states that men were taught from an early age to be ruthless heroes of war, and this would guarantee their success. They were told to kill men and rape women in order to assert their dominance. They were taught to seize land and steal treasures, to exploit resources and to own and dominate slaves (online).

There have been great attempts to explain the phenomenon of female oppression in biological terms. Sociologist Steven Goldberg suggests in The Inevitability of Patriarchy: Why the biological difference between men and women always produces male domination that men are more competitive than women because of the testosterone they produce. This therefore makes them more aggressive and hungry for power and status and this inevitably leaves women in a more subordinate position. Goldberg further states,

Whether we are referring to woman's response to male aggression or to the emotions underlying woman's universal role as life creator and life sustainer, feminine behavior and the institutions that are related to this behavior are as inevitable as patriarchy and are inevitable for the same reasons. (25)

While this assumption may be feasible, it does not suggest enough to justify the worldwide phenomenon that cuts through class, race, culture or time. In his opinion the dominance over women has a far more deeply rooted psychological cause that is suggested by psychologist and author Steven Taylor in his book Back to Sanity. Taylor suggests that the human race is in a state of insanity suffering from a disorder called “Humania”, and that the oppression of women is one of the main symptoms of this so-called disorder that we have. He claims that it is one thing for men to be biologically ingrained with hunger for power and status, but the brutality that has been inflicted on women at the hands of men, is what no other specie on earth has ever done. Since women are the carriers and nurturers of the young, Taylor sees no reason why men would treat women with such great disrespect. He states that “the oppression of women comes directly from men’s desire to conquer and control”. (74) Thus the theory of patriarchy in this article will be used as an attempt to penetrate beneath the particular experiences and manifestations of women's oppression.

Dangarembga presents a Rhodesian society in which female characters, when young, are dependent on their fathers and other male relatives, and when older become dependent on their husbands for their happiness and economic growth. This is seen very clearly in the images of Tambudzai, Maiguru and Mainini. It is because of patriarchy that Tambu’s brother is sent to school and she is asked to stay at home. When she tries to read loose pieces of papers, her father asked her if she...
can cook books and feed them to her husband. (15) This therefore is to prove that a woman is raised to know how to cook so that she can care and nurture her husband and children later in life. Jeremiah says, “stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables”. (15)

It is equally this repressive culture that pushes Maiguru to dread going back to the homestead during vacations. In spite of her education, tradition demands that as the senior wife she has to cook and take care of every family member who is spending vacation back in the village. Even though fate had taken Maiguru out of the spans of patriarchy and societal oppressions when she travels to England, she remains a victim because of her faithfulness to her culture. This situation thus renders the woman subordinate, marginalized, victimized, and silenced on all fronts. The male gaze is permanently on the woman. Buchi Emeketa puts this very aptly in her novel The Joys of Motherhood when she says “God, when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody’s appendage?” (45)

In Nyamndi’s Facing Meamba, the female characters are equally victims of patriarchy. The novel is set in Cameroon, in a village called Nwemba, during the colonial period. Even though the village itself has not yet experienced colonialism, the villagers have heard about it and even got testimonies from those who have lived and worked with the White man. Thus there are those who are pro-western and those who are anti-West. Banda represents the White man and his western way of life while Tankeh represents African traditionalvalues. Just like in Nervous Conditions, the woman’s place is in the home; reason why Banda, the male child, is sent to school and Lemea, the female, is kept at home to learn how to cook. We are told in the novel that,

He kept Lemea away from the white man, preferring instead that she stay in the house with our mother and spend the day between our small house and small kitchen shed behind. At least that was what she was supposed to do… (51)

Lemea was therefore expected to watch her mother cook, fetch dishes and add wood under the cooking pot while her brother goes to school. This is the fate of young girls in Facing Meamba, in Nervous Conditions, in The Joys of Motherhood and in most African communities. The girls have no say in their education or even in their choice of husbands. When asked what a girl does if a man she doesn’t love ask for her hand in marriage, Lemea’s mother says,

I would have gone where my father sent me, but with a heavy heart...You put your face in your hands and cried, and your mother who was always watching you shouted at you and said how you had no say in the decision that came from your father’s house. (41)

This is the plight of the female characters in Facing Meamba, that of being always marginalised, suppressed, oppressed and silenced. The male gaze is permanently on her, controlling her every move, her choices and even her voice. The rebellious Lemea, after listening to her mother, clearly tells her that if she loves a man, she will not wait for the man’s father to come ask her hand in marriage, she will talk to him (42); and true to her words, she does exactly that when the time came.

Women in Nigeria are not exempted from the male gaze. In Buchi Emeketa's The Joys of Motherhood, Nnu Ego and her husband Nnaifea decide to send their sons to school because they will take care of them at old age and continue their family lineage. No one thinks of educating the daughters.

In both Nervous Conditions and Facing Meamba, culture, tradition and patriarchal structures are the forces that oppress the woman in the form of marriage, motherhood and wifehood. Such oppressive powers are often meted on women by men.

2.3 Colonialism

This will be viewed in terms of Western education and those western attitudes and ways of life that Africans copy which render them oppressed and make them feel like the “other”.

In Nervous Conditions, education constitutes one of patriarchy’s scrutinizing gazes on women. Education is denied the girl child because it is the man who takes care of the family; and her education only comes in when there are no more boys in the family to send to school. Even when a woman is educated, hers is silenced, while that of the man is lauded. It is for this reason that when Maiguru goes
to England to read a Master's degree, everyone in the family contends that she too went so as to take care of her husband and children. In a conversation with Tambu, the following exchange ensues:

'Yes, we both studied, your uncle and I, in South Africa for our Bachelor's Degrees and in England for our Master's.'

'I thought you went to look after Babamukuru,' I said. 'That's all people say.'

Maiguru snorted. 'And what do you expect? Why should a woman go all that way and put up with all those problems if not to look after her husband? …that's what they like to think I did.' (102)

Education in the society of Nervous Conditions is seen as the means to wealth and status. Consequently, Tambudzai is exceedingly enthusiastic and zealous about schooling and learning, and it is not the simple excitement of being able to read and write that pushes her; she is driven by much more than that, by necessity. For Tambu, education is a necessity, a way out of the “poverty of blackness… and the weight of womanhood” (16). It is for Tambu the only means to succeed in life, to lighten certain burdens of womanhood, to challenge and defeat both poverty and womanhood and their attendant problems. Thus she relates:

My mother said being black was a burden because it made you poor, but Babamukuru was not poor. 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 that was true. Maiguru was well looked after by Babamukuru…Maiguru was driven in a car, looked well-kempt and fresh, clean all the time…I decided it was better to be like Maiguru… I shall go to school again (16).

To Tambu therefore, schooling and attaining an education will propel the African woman from poverty and misery to prosperity, and from the stings of male gaze. She is certain that education is the solution to the problems of being black and being a woman in Africa. In her examples, education provides a way of escape from this plight: Babamukuru is black but not poor, thanks to education; Maiguru is a woman but does not appear burdened, she is well-off, well-kempt, and again this is thanks to education. From what she sees in her uncle's family, success, wealth and wellbeing come through education, while abject poverty, misery and shame are reserved for the uneducated like Jeremiah, Tambu's father, and his family.

The general tendency to associate greatness and knowledge with power is what leads people to crave for and strive to attain them, by hook or by crook. As such, the most common phenomenon is for those who have power to do their best to keep it for themselves. Those who do not, try their utmost to be part of those who already possess it, or they succumb quietly to the possessors of power as Foucault argues in “Society Must be Defended” (29). Thus we find Babamukuru doing everything to keep his power and authority over every member of his family, while Tambu strives to attain egalitarianism through education in order to avert herself of the stings of poverty and the burdens of womanhood.

Robin M. Respaut in his thesis titled ‘Gendered Struggle for the Freedom from Violence’, states that in The Wretched of the Earth, Franz Fanon describes three phases that the native intellectual upholds while trying to regain autonomy in a postcolonial society: the first phase involves assimilation into colonial powers under the expectation that the colonial institution, no longer occupied by colonizer forces, will work to give the colonized man authority; the second phase is occupied by the native intellectual who, after returning home from studies abroad, finds himself distanced from his cultural heritage and, in an attempt to counter this alienation, works to remember his origin; the final stage encompasses the whole community as the native, frustrated by the traditional and colonial institutions that block progress in society, works to revolutionize the people and restore cultural legitimacy. (7)

This is actually what happens to Babamukuru, and the reader finds him being too rigid and restrictive, struggling to maintain the customs of his people in spite of the western influence. Babamukuru, his wife, and their two kids have spent many years out of his native country, first in South Africa and later in Britain, in quest of western education. On his return from abroad, however, he finds his children alienated from their customs and tradition, preferring instead the western way of life in which they have been raised. Babamukuru cannot accept this estrangement, and thus resolves to patriarchal authority in order to revert this assimilation.
Dangarembga makes it clear in her novel that Western education offers physical comfort and monetary gains to those who have it. This is what adds to the powers that Babamukuru has over his family members and makes everyone to depend on him. He however uses this financial power to his advantage and deprives even his wife Maiguru of her economic advancement.

Traditional values even force Maiguru to take the place of a subordinate and dependent wife, surrendering her salary to her husband and working only to better his place and that of his family members. She, an educated and well-placed woman, has neither voice nor choice of her own just like Tambu’s mother who is non-literate and not exposed. Dangarembga therefore shows the world that patriarchy is not limited to the uneducated in the society; even the highly educated like Maiguru cannot escape being victims of their femaleness.

Colonial gaze is further seen in Nyasha who goes to England and is so colonized that she forgets her native Shona. On her return she becomes alienated from her cousins and even her friends do not want to be around her. We also find colonial oppression where the same instrument used for emancipation becomes the instrument of destruction. Nyasha uses western instruments of toilet and toothbrush to kill herself gradually and eventually ends-up with anorexia. Nhamo equally gains the White man’s education but this alienates him from his roots to the extent that his mother can no longer communicate with him. She more or less loses her son to the colonialists even before his death. Consequently the women in Nervous Conditions are presented as fighters who try to overcome the double effects of patriarchy and colonialism, that is, the duality of oppression.

In Facing Meamba, the colonial effects are not so strongly felt but they are nonetheless present. By depriving Lemea of her dream of intellectual pursuit, patriarchy, (whose primordial aim is to force the woman into ignorance and a life of dependency) ascertains her muteness and passive nature, and at the same time safeguards the superiority of her brother over her. She questions why she doesn’t go to school and each day spends hours looking at the pictures in her brother’s reader.

Banda’s father equally decides to limit the number of children in his family to two because he admires the Whiteman’s way of life. His thoughts and actions have therefore been completely colonized by the Whiteman. He says;

I looked at the Whiteman’s two children and said I too will remain with two, a boy and a girl, just like him. He never complains that his children are few. We should always watch what those people do. If they complain about something we should turn away from it. If they like something we should look at that thing closely… (32)

He has been so assimilated by the Whiteman to the extent that he does not give a damn what his wife feels. He asks his son, “Is it your mother who makes the children? I make them”. (31) This shows that patriarchy is promoted to institutionalize male power and dominion, an opinion which Virginia Woolf zeroes in A Room of One’s Own where she argues that man protects his position of power by imposing his way of thinking on the woman. (34) It is apparent to Woolf that the woman’s role has been subservient to man. She states that “Women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size”(36). Woolf mocks the overall arrogance of man and their belief that our society has achieved its current status purely on its masculinity and male achievements.

It is the fear of the oppressive effects of colonialism that pushes the people of Nwemba to prefer their traditional way of life to western civilization. They have heard all what the presence of the white man brings - schools, hospitals, roads - but they prefer to remain in their pre-colonial state, reason why Tankeh wins the fishing contest at the end, to prove that colonialism and its vices have been rejected.

In interpreting and evaluating the two texts, the feminist critical theory was adopted. Critical theories to literary analysis generally expound on either the intrinsic or extrinsic factors of a literary work. Feminist criticism has been chosen here because it integrates both. Great Works of art attain greatness when there is a dialectical reconciliation between the two.

Feminist Literary Criticism is the direct product of the women movement of the 1960s. This movement was, in important ways, literary from the start in the sense that it realized the significance of the images of women promulgated by literature, and saw it as vital to combat them and question their authority and their coherence. Thus, in Feminist Criticism in the 1970s the major effort went into exposing what might be called mechanisms of patriarchy, that is, the cultural mind-set in men and
women that perpetuated sexual inequality. Particular attention was given to books written by male writers in which influential or typical images of women were constructed. Some early western feminists include Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir, Alice Walker and Kate Millet, whose approach was to criticize gender power imbalances in different cultures. Raman Selden et al. define feminism as women’s conscious struggle to resist patriarchy (115). They state that it seeks to “assert a belief in sexual equality and to eradicate sexist domination in transforming society” (115).

Patricia Hill Collins in Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment also states that, “Feminism advocates women’s emancipation and empowerment” (9).

The Women’s Rights and Women’s Suffrage movements with their emphasis on social, political, and economic reforms were important determinants in shaping the first-wave feminist criticism. Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex envisages the destruction of patriarchy if women are to break out of their objectification.

Despite this call to destroy patriarchy, Friedan’s The Feminist Mystique argues that white, heterosexual, middle-class American women felt dominated by western first wave feminists because these feminists did not insist on lack of jobs, which was the main reason for women’s subjugation. This led to the creation of the second wave feminism, which sought to expose the complex relations between gender and the economy.

African-American Feminism, otherwise known as Black Feminism, began in 1974 with Alice Walker’s In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens in which she changed the term Feminism and used ‘Womanist’, meaning a black feminist or feminism of colour. Patricia Hill Collins defines black feminism as that which, “aims to empower African-American women within the context of social injustice sustained by intersecting oppressions” (22).

bell hooks’ Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre contends that

Feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all lives... (240)

This is where Marxist Criticism closes ranks with Feminist Criticism in this work, yet for all its misconceptions, feminism at its core is about empowering and celebrating women.

Despite this redefinition, African women still felt ostracized because the American black feminists who championed black feminism did not speak to the concerns of the African woman. As Mary ModupeKolawole says in Womanism and African Consciousness, African women required a theory that "removed gorges without glossing over cultural specificities"(18),

In order to situate feminism in the African context and better analyse the texts under study, we shall take a close look at African feminism.

Gwendolyn Mikell, editor of African Feminism: The Politics of Survival in Sub-Saharan Africa, believes that African feminism differs radically from the Western forms of feminism with which we have become familiar since the 1960s. African feminists are not, by and large, concerned with issues such as female control over reproduction or variation and choice within human sexuality, nor with debates about essentialism, the female body, or the discourse of patriarchy. She posits that:

The feminism that is slowly emerging in Africa is distinctly heterosexual, pronatal, and concerned with "bread, butter, and power" issues...as they fight for access to land, for the right to own property, for control of food distribution, for living wages and safe working conditions, for health care, and for election reform—African women are creating a powerful and specifically African feminism. (4)

From the above, the interest of African feminists is for the policy-makers to re-write the political agenda to encourage pluralism so as to include the interests and needs of the impoverished women and other diverse groups.

As a movement, feminism has mobilised for reproductive rights, affordable health care and improved working conditions amongst many other causes. Hence, one can assume that African feminism as paradigm and movement is shaped by African contexts and experiences. It is feminism tweaked and fitted to African women’s concerns and desires.
African feminist Obioma Nnaemeka feels that although this assumption sounds reasonable, reality seems to contradict it. She says it appears as though feminism is failing to effectively represent and cater for African women and states,

The issue of balance is neglected in the one dimensional Western constructions of African women - usually poor and powerless. We African women have witnessed repeatedly the activities of our overzealous foreign sisters, mostly feminists who appropriate our wars in the name of fighting the oppression of women in the so-called third world. We watch with chagrin and in painful sisterhood these avatars of the proverbial mourner who wails more than the owners of the corpse. In their enthusiasm, our sisters usurp our wars and fight them badly - very badly. (57)

She continues by saying that like women everywhere, African women have problems, and are the only ones who can set their priorities and agenda. Anyone who wishes to participate in African women’s struggles must do so in the context of the women’s agenda.

Carol Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves, editors of *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*, formulated an African Feminist Criticism. Carol Boyce Davies in “Some Notes on African Feminism” summarizes a genuine African feminism as follows:

First, it recognizes a common struggle with African men for the removal of the yokes of foreign domination.

Second, it recognizes that certain inequities and limitations existed (exist in traditional societies and that colonialism reinforced them and even introduced others).

Third, it recognizes that African societies are ancient societies so the African woman must have addressed the problems of women’s position in society historically.

Fourth, it examines African societies in order to accept the institutions that are of value to women and reject those which work to their detriment. It does not simply import Western women’s agendas.

Fifth, it respects African women’s self-reliance and their incessant inclination to cooperative work and social organization; and the fact that African women are seldom financially dependent but instead accept income-generating works as a fact of life.

Sixth, it looks objectively at women’s situation in societies that have undergone a wave of national liberation and socialist reconstruction.

Finally, it looks at traditional and contemporary avenues of choice for women (56). These tenets will help in evaluating the two texts under study.

It is worth noting that both strands of Western and African feminism are important and relevant. It would be difficult to reduce both strands of feminism into a single theoretical context because of their inherent differences. Despite differences, however, movements can unite, as long as there is due respect for these differences and a genuine effort to understand the other.

African intellectual feminists, says Amina Mama, “must listen to the women they try to advise and talk about, because they do not experience the women’s realities first-hand” (22). Ultimately, solutions or any agenda must come from those within the specific context. This is what our selected authors have done. They have let the oppressed females in the novels tell their own stories and experiences, thereby giving the reader a first person perspective and making him/her live the same experience.

Feminist criticism undertook a combative and polemical tone. Again, it questioned the patriarchal society that relegated women to the background and reduced them to objects of male pleasure. Feminist literary theory argues that women’s separate and distinct voices and agendas have not been heard within the Marxist theoretical framework and other paradigms. Paula Nicolson in *Gender, Power and Organisation: A Psychological Perspective* argues that feminism is “especially, but not only, about women, but it is primarily the activity of giving women a voice, an access to power hitherto denied” (21). In line with Nicolson, Feminism is used in this study to chart ways of giving women a voice and access to power. Some African feminists include, among others: Nawal El-Saadawi, the Egyptian novelist, essayist and physician, whose works have had the central theme of women’s oppression and desire for self-expression.

Waangari Maathai: she is the first African woman to win the Nobel peace prize and a spokesperson for ecofeminism. She was also the first East African woman to hold a doctorate degree,
but what she refers to as ‘the tragedy of her life’ was the sexism she encountered at the university in Kenya which meant she was unable to continue her academic work. Her husband is said to have divorced her because she was “too educated, too strong, too successful, too stubborn and too hard to control” (online).


Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie - She is the Nigerian writer who has referred to herself as a feminist who likes to wear lipgloss. A novelist, nonfiction writer and short story writer, she has been called “the most prominent” of a “procession of critically acclaimed young Anglophone authors” (20). Her works include among others: *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), *Americanah* (2013). Lastly, there is Adelaide Casely-Hayford, who says no one but African women themselves can bear the responsibility to protect the histories of African women and to connect them to the situations of today. In ‘A Brief History of African Feminism’, Adelaide posits:

> We have many glass ceilings to shatter. To begin to do so, we must realise that the current situation disadvantages women tremendously. Women are being systemically marginalised within both our local and global societies. As our eyes increasingly open to this truth, we must continue to liberate and defend ourselves from limited notions of womanhood. It cannot be stressed enough how pressing that is. We don’t need to reinvent the wheel; we can and should take inspiration from those who are already reshaping the narrative of African womanhood and the truth is that feminism continues to be the tool of choice for many of us (online).

Adelaide was a Sierra Leone Creole advocate, an activist for cultural nationalism, educator, short story writer, and feminist. She established a school for girls in 1923 to instill cultural and racial pride during the colonial years under British rule.

### 2.4 Patriarchy and Assimilation of women

In *Facing Meamba* the women are seen as servile, held in subjection and very submissive. A man’s orders must be respected to the latter. This is clearly seen after the fight between Banda and Tankeh-Winjala. A group of youngsters are gathered discussing who beat the other in the fight. When Yeisi realizes that she is in the wrong place, she starts running off homeward, but is harshly commanded back to the group:

> Sendelenghi ordered her back just as she was about to disappear in the bend behind them. She returned quietly but determined. Sendelenghi again. She knew where he was going with all that but her mind would not be changed… Yeisi come forward. (72)

The female characters have been brought up to heed male orders without questioning or fighting back. The author expresses Banda’s thoughts about this aloud when he says:

> The ways of men were to him so wanting in appeal. In them there was no invitation, only action! brutal action. The abused women either swallowed the shame or then dumped themselves in Mantum or tied cloths round their necks and allowed their tongues to hangout… Many women in the village were survivors in a wretched race… (80)

Women got so used to harsh treatment that it became part of them; and any man who did not treat his wife harshly was considered a ‘woman’. In fact, anything below brutality is regarded as weak and referred to as ‘woman’. Anyone who calls himself a man is supposed to be harsh, authoritative and even brutal. Anything short of this makes him a woman and whatever thing that cannot stand up for itself is a woman. Winjala the Crude says:
Why do you want me to change our birds into woman birds, nothing birds? That is what the white man does to anything he touches. He changes it into a woman thing. Look at all the people in Meamba. They are like women now … Is that what you want the people of Nwemba to be? (57)

The above expression is proof that the Whiteman takes over everything he comes across or 'touches' in Africa. The people are assimilated into the white man's way of life and culture, and they no longer have a say in their own community. The once active and outspoken people soon become docile like Banda's father.

In *Nervous Conditions*, we find Babamukuru who has just returned from England with his family. His children Chido and Nyasha have forgotten their native Shona. They are now hybrids of two cultures; considered too African for the English and too English for the Africans. Nyasha aptly observes:

…to forget who you were, what you were and why you were that. The process, she said, was called assimilation, and that was what they had for the precocious few who might prove a nuisance if left to themselves. (182)

Nyasha feels that the Europeans selected the persons whom they felt could be a problem to their ruling in Africa and gave them the white man's education which eventually silenced them and turned them to unassuming and submissive beings. The second thematic concern addressed here is patriarchy and violence against women in the two novels.

### 2.5 Patriarchy and violence against women

In Africa, women have been victims of violence for a long time, and the conditions of Afro-American women are not far from those of their African counterparts. Nicky Ali Jackson (ed.) states in the *Encyclopedia of Domestic Violence* that,

From pre-slave days to the present time, Afro-American women have endured hardship and discrimination to provide for their families. This stereotypical role may lead Afro-American women to sacrifice their own needs and safety to take care of others. (222)

Thus the African and Afro-American woman feels that leaving the house will bring destruction for her children's future. She accepts to live in bad conditions and endure all the violence against her just to raise her kids and protect them from the unsafe and dangerous external world.

Nyansakoni-Nku, in a sermon preached on 'The Anguished Cry of Women' in *What Shall I Cry…?* opines that,

In all cultures, women, irrespective of their status and age are most often battered into submission. In Africa, women have been subjected to a horrible abuse rate. Whether in villages or in the cities, African women know those who abuse and oppress them. It's just that as our people say, "When your hand is in some one's mouth, you do not hit that person on the head". (57)

Women have been so oppressed by the patriarchs, but since it is these men who provide for them economically, they cannot react.

Let us look at Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood*. When Nnu Ego delivers her twin daughters she feels more inadequate than ever because all men were interested in were male babies to keep their names going. But did not a woman have to bear the woman-child who would later bear the sons? This leads her to exclaim desperately:

God, when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage? After all, I was born alone, and I shall die alone. What have I gained from all this? Yes, I have many children, but what do I have to feed them on? On my life. I have to work myself to the bone to look after them, I have to give them my all. And if I am lucky enough to die in peace, I even have to give them my soul. They will worship my dead spirit to provide for them: it will be hailed as a good spirit so long as there are plenty of yams and children in the family, but if anything should go wrong, if a young wife does not conceive or there is a famine, my dead spirit will be blamed. When will I be free? (186)
Nnu Ego’s outburst just chronicles the disgust that many women feel about male chauvinism, and also about patriarchy’s unfair and oppressive spank on women. The woman will hardly be free. She says “when I lost my first son I wanted to die, because I failed to live up to the standard expected of me by the males in my life, my father and my husband” (153).

Just like Nnu Ego, many African women are trapped by such social and cultural expectations of male children, male control and living up to male standards.

Feminist theory on violence emphasizes gender and power inequality in opposite-sex relationships. It focuses on the societal messages that sanction a male’s use of violence and aggression throughout life, and the prescribed gender roles that dictate how men and women should behave in their intimate relationships. In his article "ElechiAmadi’s Women: Voices of Reason", George Nyamndi posits that,

The further back one goes in West African fiction as a whole… the more pronounced is society's gender bias in favour of masculinity. This trend is in keeping with the return to the mainspring of traditional culture and ultimately to its patriarchal beginnings. (80).

In the words of Kaleghl Quinn, African societies favour masculinity and many people find absolutely nothing wrong with patriarchy. This is what obtains in society and it is reflected in fiction. There are two major ways to express physical strength. One is resistance through contraction. The other is repulsion of conflicting forces through mental and muscular expansion…(17). This is the type of resistance that takes place in Dangarembga's novel as an approach to challenge subjugation and suppression.

On the question of power, Mackenzie says "Sexism is similar to racism. These are both forms of oppression, where one group uses power over the other group… (26), the struggle in this case being between the male and the female. The female characters are voiceless, but struggling to make their voices heard.

Kurz Demie, one of the proponents of feminist theory, acknowledges that women can also be violent in their relationships with men. However, they simply do not see the issue of women abusing men as a serious social problem, and therefore, does not deserve the same amount of attention or support as violence against women (124).

Subservience at the domestic level is very present in Facing Meamba. Women are expected to be submissive and obedient to their husbands’ demands and commands, and any wife or daughter who disobeys such orders is deemed disloyal and may be punished or even divorced by her husband. The women discuss this in their meeting groups or as they work on their nets:

"My man shows me now that he can drink".
“Do you know what the men call any man who does not drink?”
"He! he! he! aGakobi’ngui.”
"With mine, it is now his hand that talks in place of his mouth"
“Do you know what they call a man who does not beat his wife or scold her?”
“He! he! he! aGakobi’ngui.” (65).

Wife battery is a normal phenomenon in Africa, and other men consider any man who does not exercise some violence against his wives weak or simply female.

Uncle Abua states the imposed submissiveness on the women in these words:

I let my woman do one thing at a time… what I don't take from her is telling me what to do with the children she gives me. Her duty is to give them to me...
What I do with them does not concern her. (21)

This shows how the African woman has no say in either her welfare or the upbringing of her children; her role is procreation and not decision- making. She is just a passive wife and mother. This female subjectivity is what women's emancipation and feminists writers like G.D Nyamndi and TsitsiDangaremba are trying to counteract in their novels as they discuss patriarchal violence.

Such patriarchal violence is equally encouraged asfar as gender discrimination in education is concerned. In both novels under study, women are discriminated against when it comes to educating children in a family. The men prefer sending their male children to school and no mention is even made...
about the girl child. The mother, who has no say in such matters, succumbs to whatever decisions her husband takes. In fact, her opinion is not even sought in such matters.

In Nyamndi’s Facing Meamba, Banda is sent to school while his sister stays at home to learn from her mother and assist her with kitchen chores. Even Buchi Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood exposes the same situation where Nnu Ego and her husband Nnaife give up everything so that their first son (Oshia), and eventually the other sons can go to school. No one mentions educating the daughters; instead the daughters are prepared for marriage. But when these sons become wayward with unbearable behaviour, the fathers reject them. Nnaife even suggests that they won’t remember him or honour him when he dies anyway. He feels no obligation to emotionally support a son who refuses to do his duty to his father. The author says,

Nnaife pointed out to her that the children were her children. "Will they remember me when I am old? No, they will remember only their mother. And have you not noticed that women stay longer than men on this earth? So why should I give up my day's work for a son who has spit in my face?" (45)

Although Nnaife has always favoured his sons because they offer him immortality in the tradition of the Ibos, that is, in passing on his name to the next generation, he rejects them when their behaviour is bad. Therefore a son becomes the child of his mother only when the father finds him unbearable; otherwise sons are always the pride of the man.

Even though Nervous Conditions takes place in an entirely different part of Africa, it reflects the same values of gender education. Tambudzai, the girl child, performs better in school than her brother Nhiamo. The family however prefers to send Nhiamo to the mission school because he is a boy and will return one day to provide for his family and continue with the family lineage. When Tambu questions why she can no longer go to school, her father, Jeremiah asks her: 'Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables.' (15)

This is very close to what Lemea's father does to her in Facing Meamba:

He kept Lemea away from the white man, preferring instead that she stay in the house with our mother and spend the day between our small house and the kitchen shed behind. At least that was what she was supposed to do; watching her mother cook and other annoying things like fetching the dishes and adding wood under the cooking pot (51-52).

While the boy goes to school to learn the white man's way of life, the girl is left at home to learn how to cook and serve men and her future husband.

Patrick Burnett, Karmali Shereen, and Firoze Manji Madatally state in their book Grace, Tenacity and Eloquence: The struggle for Women’s Rights in Africa that the traditional perception of African women is that they toil day and night amidst grinding poverty while facing harsh cultural, traditional and social prejudices. "The situation of women in Africa is indeed shocking"(1), they conclude. This is so true of Nervous Conditions in which we see mother and daughter struggling to survive in the midst of poverty. Mainini is sick and stays at home, waiting for death, until her sister has to come and nurse her back to life with food and simple hygiene. This fate of women in Africa, that of subservience, awaits her eight year old daughter, Tambudzai, who has to clear, plant and harvest maize in order to pay her fees at the tender age of eight. This, because her father prefers sending his son to school, instead of 'wasting' his brother's money on the education of a girl child. Tambu puts it this way:

I shall go to school again… I will earn the fees, I reassured him, laying out my plan for him as I had laid it out in my mind. If you will give me some seed, I will clear my own field and grow my own maize. Not much, just enough for the fees. (17)

Even at that tender age, women have to toil day and night in order to fend for themselves and their family because of traditional and social prejudices against them.

Let us take the case of her parents’ wedding as an example. Tambu cannot vocalize her concern over the wedding because obedient silence is so ingrained in her social behaviour: “There was definitely something wrong with me, otherwise I would have had something to say for myself” (164). Instead of vocalizing her distress, Tambu internalizes her anxiety, feeling “a horrible crawling overmy skin, my chest contracted to a breathless tension and even my bowels threatened to letme know their opinion”
Zambrut

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(149). She becomes anxious and sleepless without knowing exactly why and feels something unnatural slicing her with guilt, somany razor-sharp edges of it. And since Tambu cannot voice out her frustration, thinking Babamukuru should have known better, she recoils to painful silence. She is so overcome with this painful guilt after she realizes she no longer respects her uncle as the patriarchal head of the family.

Such silencing and the unexplained tension is what sometimes lead to female violence. The woman would have contained her silence and oppression to the level that it one day explodes with no warning signs. This is that explosion that Maiguru experiences in the confrontation with her husband Babamukuru, which leads to her abandoning her matrimonial home. It is this same explosion that equally leads Nyasha to hit back her dad after he calls her a whore. In Facing Meamba, Lemea gets so frustrated with being silenced that she decides to stand up for a fight with Njitifuh.

Nyamndi’s Facing Meamba reveals that Nwemba is patriarchal and women live in the shadow of men. These women are subjected to various forms of oppression and repression; they are perceived and treated by the men folk as objects which must be used in fostering their activities; and most of the women have admitted their marginal placement in the patriarchal Nwemba. Fofang in a discussion with other men about the treatment of their wives says:

But who ever gave them (women) the authority to look into the things we do with our children? Fofang asked in anger at the invisible offenders (21).

Ntianop had earlier said, "Me I cut three broomsticks and put in my woman's hand...The three sacred rules: my children, my food, my nights" (20). Such ideologies define women as objects that must be used by men in fostering their needs. Chief Ndelu on his part explains to Ma-Lenghi on the attitude of one of his wives, Na'lla, who complains about their daughter's marriage that,

How can my own woman starve me with talk of my daughter not marrying as a second wife...A man sends his daughter into marriage. It has always been like that; and it will always be like that. And tell the women: nights are for their men, not for kpakpakpa (17).

This is enough evidence that African men see women as baby factory machines, cooks and radiators of their husband’s beds. These are their roles and therefore they have no business meddling with the affairs of their daughters' marriages or any other family decisions. Roselyn Jua in an article entitled “Women’s Role in Democratic Change in Cameroon” argues that men have defined these roles in order “to keep the woman out of the corridors of power so that at all times he may have her under his thumb and behind his bed” (183). Patriarchy does not only encourage marital infidelity, it also encourages physical and sexual violence because of the patriarchs’ knowledge that men are always right and own women’s bodies. In Nervous Conditions, Dangarembga portrays the same category of women as G. D Nyamndi.

In Nyamndi’s narrative, Fofang comes home drunk and beats up his wife terribly for wasting time in saying what she thinks of him “selling his daughter as third wife” (80). The brutality that she receives for no just reason is worth citing here,

The woman had spent some time wiping sleep from her eyes before addressing her husband’s query and that little delay had earned her a battered eye and a swelling in the stomach from two blinding kicks. The village healer had come several times and shaking his head each time and left without uttering a word on her chances. (80)

Fofang’s aggressive alcohol-driven behaviour shows how much women are victimized by alcohol, whose taste they apparently do not know. If their welfare is guaranteed, there will be equal opportunities and an equitable distribution of the means of production and distribution of wealth that will in turn eliminate class differences and bridge the gap between men and women in Africa. Thus, if Maiguru is allowed to have control over her income, she will no longer depend on her husband to buy what she needs or even assist her family because she too will have power over the distribution of wealth. The third concern is “women’s resistance to male domination and oppression in the two novels.

From the arguments raised above, it is evident that culture, which is patriarchy oriented, has a major role to play in African women’s marginalization. Those group of women who are so glued to these cultural norms, and who have accepted the space that has been allocated to them by the
patriarchs, have no problem with the issue of marginalisation because they actually do not realise that they are being marginalised. These are the likes of Lemea's mother, aunt Sabina and Tambu's mother who advise their daughters that since “this business of womanhood is a heavy burden... what will help you, is to learn to carry your burdens with strength”. (16) These are accommodationists.

However, our interest this far has been on those few female characters who believe that man must influence or change his society. This chapter has shown that the enemy of these few is not just patriarchy, but also the silence of the majority, which helps to handicap the efforts made by the few. Such female characters are sometimes termed revolutionaries or radicals.

2.6 Therapeutic violence

Kate Millet in Sexual Politics argues that “the most fundamental and pervasive concept of power in our society is male dominance” while Helen Chukwuma opines that docility and complete submission of will is demanded and enacted from women. These opinions have been forcefully brought out in the two texts under study. The image of the African woman in the novels under study has been that of dependence, innocence, voicelessness and being inferior to men. This article had hypothesized that in a dominant male society that is patriarchal in perception and execution, women live in the shadow of men and are subjected to many forms of oppression and repression. The work equally contended that women have been silent for too long and one of the strategies that both authors employ to bring women’s voices alive in a patriarchal system is the use of elusive violence by the women against their oppressors.

After a thorough analysis of the topic using the two novels chosen (and examining other African novels and plays), the following findings were made:

1. Violence used by men on women is degrading and meant to oppress, victimize and silence the woman. Violence used by the women on their oppressors is aesthetic and therapeutic as it purifies the oppressed, gives her recognition and makes her voice heard; the older generation of female characters in the novels under study have resigned themselves to the treatment given to the women by the domineering menfolk. These women even try to inculcate those cultural norms into the minds of the younger generation. But there is a group of rebellious female characters that has decided to fight back such patriarchal impediments through the use of violence. This strategy has worked in several cases as it makes the oppressor to re-think his stand and either retreat or redress it.

2. That in both Dangarembga and Nyamndi’s societies, the acquisition of knowledge remains a purely male prerogative. Education for women is considered a waste of resources because the woman's destiny is limited to marriage and motherhood. Even when a woman is educated (the case of Maiguru), her literacy is down played and any economic benefits obtained are controlled entirely by her husband.

3. Patriarchy is the root cause of female marginalization in these novels. It places a “male gaze” on women through culture, making the woman unable to reach her potentials. Patriarchy ensures a woman’s subordination to her husband, requires her to be a dutiful wife, passive and obedient to all the dictates of her husband and his family. Daughters are supposed to learn from their mothers and have nothing to do with men’s activities, thus making them silenced on all fronts.

The fact that some men are helpless when confronted by women (the case of Njitifuh and Tankeh in Facing Meamba; and Takesure and Babamukuru in Nervous Conditions) is evident of the fact that male superiority is a myth instituted by patriarchy to give men a controlling edge over women. If sent to school, women will perform better than men and make even better intellectual decisions; and without cultural inhibitions, women will be equal with men. Banda comments:

There was a little factory in Ediki-Mbeng that turned out rubber shoes non-stop. Lemea’s head was like that factory. It turned out ideas non-stop, one idea more explosive than the other, so that looking at her was like looking down the nuzzle of a loaded gun (45).

Even Banda acknowledges the fact that Lemea is very smart and gifted. This shows that girls too are intelligent, even more intelligent than boys; and if given the opportunity to prove their worth in school, they will do better.
4. Another conclusion made in this work is that the assertive women have come to a conclusion that for them to come out of their present state of poverty, assist their own families and stop the men from victimizing and oppressing them, they must become educated. It is for this reason that Lucia leaves the homestead and all the men dying for her to enrol for adult education. Being a mother does not stop her from pursuing her goals of becoming educated. She gets a mean job, but with her education in progress, she hopes to become a better person. Tambu says; “look at Maiguru, she is a better wife than you.” This means that education makes women better wives because they can take superior care of their homes and themselves. She declares “I shall go to school again!” it is this same apprehension that makes Lemea so interested in education.

5. Both Dangarembga and Nyamndi have used their fiction to reflect the actuality of their respective societies in particular, that of Zimbabwe and Cameroon, and the general reality of life in Africa. This goes to confirm the fact that society informs literature, and literature also informs society. They have confirmed that male domination is the order of the day, but if patriarchy is dismantled, women will be equal to men in all aspects.

Violence against women reflects the unequal power relationship between women and men, resulting in the domination and discrimination of women by men. This violence includes physical and sexual violence, as well as economic, psychological and emotional abuses. The study has brought out many forms of violence against women. In Nervous Conditions, violence such as sexual abuse, intimidation, threats, economic deprivation are very prominent; while in Facing Meamba, we have early marriages, wife battery, lack of education for girls and even intimidation (80). The older generation of women in both novels have resigned their fate to such violence perpetuated by tradition and male domination, taking it to be a normal occurrence in life. Tambu’s mother, Mainini, says:

   This business of womanhood is a heavy burden, how could it not be? Aren’t we the ones who bear children? When it is like that you can’t just decide today I want to do this, tomorrow I want to do that, the next day I want to be educated! When there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one to make them. And these things are not easy; you have to start learning them early, from a very early age…what will help you, my child, is to learn to carry your burden with strength. (16)

But the younger generations of women have refused to carry that imposed saddle. These women feel that, in Lemea’s words “all the time people want you to run because that is the custom” (129). They have decided to stage a war against those practices that make them inferior to men. They have decided to be the voice of the voiceless women by challenging those values that chain the African woman to a pigeonhole.

Dangarembga and Nyamndi are also considered the voice of the voiceless in this work. Through their work of art, they are bringing to the lamplight some burning issues which would have otherwise remained unscathed. Through their work, the problems that many women face are discussed and solutions are raised. Those who are silenced in society may find themselves in those characters that are voiceless, but when the assertive characters uncover the mysteries and point out ways that voiceless women can fight back, they are directly helping the voiceless to learn ways of coping. Therefore we’ll say that the voiceless are the oppressed women, those voicing them include the assertive/revolutionary female characters, the authors and even this researcher; and the aesthetic of violence refers to the beauty of achieving one’s goal in any fight.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the hypothesis and summary of findings, the following recommendations are made:

Women should be encouraged to speak out whenever they are faced with issues that violate their rights. Remaining silent will not solve their problems, and so women have to learn to report any cases of violence against them to the appropriate quarters. A lot of education and conscientisation/sensitization needs to be carried out.

Legislative measures should be adopted to ensure the protection and removal of all forms of discrimination against, and empowerment of women, especially those whose circumstances make them vulnerable to violence.
Gender sensitization and public awareness programmes aimed at eradicating violence against women should be introduced and supported in women’s groups. Although this is being done in Cameroon by some female institutions like FIDA, a lot more still remains to be done.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper opines that this article, “Voicing the Voiceless: An appraisal of the Aesthetics of Violence in Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions and G.D Nyamndi's Facing Meamba” was carried out because the problem of violence against women remains one of the burning issues of our times. The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, which brought together 17,000 participants from 189 UN member states from around the globe, had as one of the twelve critical areas of concern the eradication of violence against women. The Beijing Declaration also emphasized the promotion of women's rights and the education and training of women.

Even the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), which was developed following the Millennium summit in 2000, had eight (8) goals amongst which is the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. Both the Beijing Conference and the MDGs had as deadline for realisation of their goals concerns the year 2015; yet very little progress has been made in both the areas of eradicating violence and empowering the African woman - reason why it continues to be a problem.

Paulo Freire equally opines in The Politics of Education: Culture, Power and Education that “Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral”. (122) Therefore anyone who condones with violence against the weaker sex is encouraging the powerful, dominant and controlling group to continue to oppress the voiceless.

On the aesthetics of violence, this researcher was influenced by some scholars in the literary arena who have talked on violence. We all know that violence is always an unjust force, outrage, assault or injury done to someone who is entitled to respect. However, the beauty of violence in this study is that violence is considered to be curative. The researcher followed the ideas below:

Franz Fanon in The Wretched of the Earth (1967) talks about violence being a cleansing force which frees the oppressed from his/her inferiority complex. When one has been oppressed for too long, he/she develops an inferiority complex, but when given the opportunity to retaliate, that inadequacy is cleansed.

Paulo Freire in The Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) even argues that freedom can only be obtained through violence. To him therefore, anyone trapped in a violent condition can only free himself or herself through the use of violence.

Ngugi Wa Thiong’o sums it up in Homecoming (1972) with his recommendation for violence as a means of liberation. He outlines two types of violence- the one used by the oppressor which dehumanizes; and that used by the oppressed which purifies.

Furthermore, Wole Soyinka in Art, Dialogue and Outrage (1988) also appeals for the production of violence if society must progress. To him therefore, the oppressed are stagnant because of the weight on them, and if they can use some notch of violence, then they will become liberated and society will progress.

It is against this backdrop of the various opinions of Fanon, Freire, Ngugi, Soyinka and many others that we viewed violence used by women against their oppressors in this article as being both aesthetic and therapeutic. Women use violence as a tool to fight oppression and make their voices heard in their society and in the world. The aesthetic of violence is used to show the beauty of how authors give women a voice and how oppressed women have some feeling of satisfaction and fulfillment when they stand up for their rights. The violence used by women in the selected works is mostly for self-defense and to drive through a point to their oppressors.

In the words of Mercy Oduyoye in Daughters of Anowa, let us "seek the quality of life that frees African women to respond to the fullness for which God created them." (72) African women have been silenced for too long; they have remained voiceless for the most part in obedience to the traditions and customs that prevent women from expressing their opinions. It is time to stand up and speak out; for power is not given, it is seized. Let us give a voice to the voiceless.
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