

## Negotiating Social Change in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*

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**ABSTRACT** Black African women writers have been publishing for well over five decades. They have, through their works, attempted to lend agency to hitherto objectified female characters within male dominated literary discourse. In spite of this laudable contribution, their works have received little critical attention from both sides of gender. Likewise, Tsitsi Dangarembga has not received enough critical attention, despite her making a distinct and worthy contribution towards an unbiased depiction of the plight of women on the African literary scene. This paper traces how Dangarembga's novel *Nervous Conditions* takes such a cause further by essentially interrogating the concept of agency manifested in choice, together with its attendant social reconfigurations. The means by which Dangarembga's outstanding literary innovation is demonstrated is the investigation of the characters Lucia and Nyasha within the framework of the misrepresentation of Black African women in the fiction of Black Africans writing in English. It will be investigated how the choices of women characters affect the lives of other women characters in the novel in a manner that enriches the discourse of social change/transformation. Thus Lucia and Nyasha show that women can stand up for themselves and become liberated in a male dominated society.

### INTRODUCTION

One woman writer who, despite having not been adequately put under the critical spotlight, has taken the challenge to carve an objective picture of the African woman, is the Zimbabwean writer Tsitsi Dangarembga. She has etched a strong imprint on the African literary scene with her play *She no Longer Weeps* (1987), debut novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and recent novel *The Book of Not* (2006), a sequel to *Nervous Conditions*. Being from the Shona ethnic group, Dangarembga has been concerned about the rectilinear way in which some of the age-old institutions are "worshipped". She studied Medicine and Psychology before turning to write full time. Her first novel *Nervous Conditions* won the African Regional Prize in the 1989 Commonwealth Writers' Prize awards. The innovative texture of her work that reinforces the kinds of themes she explores within the matrix of Black African women's literature warrants attention.

African literature in its broad sense has been branded by some African critics as a "male created, male-oriented chauvinistic art" (Ojo-Ade 1983). Some voices from outside Africa have made significant observations like the following, by an African-American critic:

... as critics and researchers, we have lingered too long under the influence of majority scholarship which has tended to recognize the heroes but ignored the

"sheroes" to emphasise the weakness in Black life rather than its strengths, its sufferings rather than its triumphs, the destruction of the African family rather

than its survival, growth and development (Hill-Lubin 1986:268).

Views of African literature like this one attribute the marginalization of African women writers to a general hegemonic tendency. What this means is that the approach so far has been negatively selective in appraising Black life, which situation the inclusion of women writers would have counterbalanced.

A survey of Black African male literature which, arguably, was popularized by the advent of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) lends credence to the assertions raised above. The novel *Things Fall Apart* is basically the story of Okonkwo and his macho society of Umuofia. The female characters Ekwefi and Nwoye's mother are only appendages to the story in spite of their demonstrated inner strengths and a possibility existing to give them much fuller realization in the story. Such characterization

renders the narrative a “male-oriented” story, as Ojo-Ade (1983) would put it.

Such global character of Black African literature has had implications for the sphere of African women writing. Flora Nwapa with *Efuru* (1966), *Idu* (1970) and many other good works was the first published woman writing in English in Black Africa and she, according to Marie Umeh (1995:23), “has not been given the critical acclaim she deserves.” For as early a writer as Nwapa not to have been considered alongside figures like Achebe is testimony to Hill-Lubin’s (1986:268) point that dominant scholarship favours the “heroes” at the cost of “sheroes”. In keeping with this macro attitude, at the micro level female characters are paid scanty attention while affirming detail is conferred on male characters, exemplified earlier by the depiction of female characters in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958).

Beyond fore-runners like Achebe, female portraiture continues to be problematic in Black African literature written in English. Abena Busia (1986) aptly dubs her article on Ayi Kwei Armah’s works as “Parasites and Prophets: The Use of Women in Ayi Kwei Armah’s Novels.” In it she illustrates that literary representation of Black women is stereotyped. Continued stereotyping of woman characters by Black African writers has led to counter-discourse of the nature started by the likes of Busia (1986) intensifying in later years. One example is Ama Ata Aidoo’s (1988:183) remark in defence of positive female portrayal, in which she asserts that “To try to remind ourselves and our brothers and lovers and husbands and colleagues that we also exist should not be taken as something foreign, as something bad”. This sentiment snowballs from writings three years or so earlier by writers like Marie Umeh (1995:23) signaling the vigilance with which Black African women breaking from the mould of a chauvinistic aesthetic have been neglected. Marie Umeh (1995:23) highlight the blind eye turned on bold woman writers like Flora Nwapa, who delineates woman characters in her works in a new aesthetic of “resistance, a protest against the one-dimensional images of Nigerian women either as wives, mothers, femmes fatales or rebel girls.” Indeed, counter-discursive comments and practical exemplifications by female writers such as Busia, Aidoo and Umeh show that the objective portrayal of female characters is at the core of the

message sent by African women writers as soon as they start to emerge (see also Katrak 2010).

It would be simplistic to ignore the balanced manner in which female critical voices do not discount, in a homogenizing manner, all Black male African writers in their crusade for non-sexist literary representation. Sembene Ousmane, for instance, is acknowledged to have made some good inroads into positive female African characterization in even a small work like “The Bilal’s Fourth Wife” included in *Tribal Scars* (1962). Though at times censured by writers such as Busia (1986), Armah has at the same time been given some credit by no less than Busia herself, in her observation that “women in Armah’s novels have undergone, if not a revolution, then at least a positive reformation through the texts” (Busia 1986:90).

However, it appears that women, more than men, are at the forefront of the battle to liberate female characterization in Black African literature written in English. This is why Tuzyline Jita Allen, a literary critic writing an afterword for Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Changes* has this to say to defend the conviction and passion with which African women writers write: “Women writers in Africa feel as deeply as their male counterparts the need to repair Africa’s fractured image following colonialism. But they also intend to interrogate cultural prerogatives that circumscribe women’s lives. In short, they interpose gender in the pivotal project of African cultural recovery” (Aidoo 1993:173). The paper explores how the accuracy of Aidoo’s (1993:173) late 90s social commentary resonates with the significance of Dangarembga’s literary achievement through the novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988), despite this aspect of Dangarembga’s achievement having not received adequate critical attention (Hlongwane 2009).

One concept that Dangarembga explores extensively is the concept of choice as it effects change in the lives of the women characters. The term “choice” has been defined as “a sufficient number and variety to choose among” and “change” as becoming “different or to pass from one phase to the other” (*Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* 1989). Invariably the two terms used as a concept mean that the ability to decide between alternatives or varieties brings about alterations in life. This paper intends to demonstrate how these two concepts are central in Dangarembga’s work. The pursuit of

change by appropriating choice for oneself seems to drive all the women characters in *Nervous Conditions*. This paper seeks to trace such an inflected pursuit of choice by women characters, especially in the characters Lucia and Nyasha.

### Choice and Change – Lucia

Following nominal mention at the opening of the novel, Lucia is exposed to the reader more fully in the seventh chapter of the novel when she reacts to earlier, mainly male-driven incidents of the plot. Her first significant decision or choice is traceable to a Christmas scene. Lucia and her 'husband' Takesure have previously been ordered off the homestead because of what the head of the Sigauke patriarchs, Babamukuru, describes as indecent life. Lucia defies Babamukuru by staying put. On meeting her for the first time that Christmas season, Babamukuru ignores Lucia but the agency in the latter impels her to confront the former:

*Even if you ignore me... It doesn't mean I'm not here. And anyway, Mwaramu maybe you can tell me plainly: Where do you want me to go? We both know I can't go home. Their sending me here in the first place, it was because there was no food and no work either at that place, isn't it? It is true, you know it. So where do you want me to go? As for Takesure, ha-a-a! I know it's the way you joke, Babamukuru. What would I go to do at Takesure's home? (125)*

The fact that in the eyes of Tambudzai and the patriarchal culture he represents this outburst is "rude" (125), reveals some character traits in Lucia that distinguishes her from the socially stereotyped woman who would otherwise comply docilely. From the point of view purged of patriarchal prescripts, Lucia shows prudence by insisting that she needs to survive and not die of hunger. Congruously with what may be interpreted as some feminist agency, she also asserts her need for economic independence which is negated by lack of work if she were to comply and be bundled off to Takesure's place. Such a reading casts Lucia as having good reasons for staying on the homestead as opposed to Takesure's place. In the light of these redeeming circumstances expressed assertively by Lucia, Babamukuru starts to appear as unreasonable for asking her to leave.

Even from Babamukuru's own conservative patriarchal perspective, such an act ironically comes across as immoral because according to writers such as Johnson and Bernstein (1982: 266), in most Black African communities including Lucia's Shona compatriots the relative instability of the nuclear family can be made up for by the operation of extended family ties. Relatives are called upon for help in finding jobs and housing, in acquiring an education and generally in performing a "social welfare function" (Johnson and Bernstein 1982:266; Mabura 2010). In this way, Babamukuru and the deviant patriarchal section of male villagers he represents is revealed to have a frailty that any man of any race would have, considering that patriarchal cultures do not necessarily condone paternalism or sexism as writers like Rafapa (2010) have shown.

Lucia practically clutches for herself the "social welfare function" (Johnson and Bernstein 1982:266) latent in relatives like Babamukuru, in deciding to stay in the contested space of the homestead (153). Her reclaimed agency enables her to explode the traditional notions of patriarchy, being and belonging in intricately interesting ways. First, there is the fact of her being a barren woman (126). She sleeps with both Takesure and her sister's husband Jeremiah so that it becomes difficult for public opinion to determine who has impregnated her and she falls pregnant against all odds (126). In such a peculiarly stretched sense of feminist/womanist upturning of the conception of ethical behavior unique to Dangaremba among Black feminists/womanists who started this course earlier than she, Lucia's action evaporates both the stereotypes associated with female infidelity and barrenness. If the Black African cultural feature of communalism implies selfless sharing of one's possessions with fellow human beings belonging to your group, can Lucia straightforwardly be accused of infidelity by sleeping with these males of Babamukuru's extended family? Alternatively, if males in the village are tolerated with their multiple love affairs, is it fair not to turn a blind eye with female members of society like Lucia? Again, is it fair for women to be labeled barren when it is actually their husbands, to whom they are loyal, who are barren?

Even if we were to abandon the African cultural perspective from which Lucia lampoons traditional mores, and use a more Western notion

of feminism that would not necessarily have a tinge of womanism, this habit of sleeping with any man Lucia deems fit without any remorse is parallel to the temperament of Sula in Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973). Sula sleeps with many men of her choice including the husband of her friend Nel Wright. Indeed 'prostitution', according to Bujra (1982), is ultimately a defensive measure rather than an offensive one, as it challenges the conditions that give rise to and reproduce the oppression of women. Willey (2002:69) makes comments on the female's body when she says the development of the female post-colonial subject is centered around her body which is subject to the disciplines of tradition and technologies of modernity. Lucia resists such a subjection to tradition and modernity. It should be borne in mind that rather than interpret the disposition of males in Dangarembga's novel as African cultural, a more accurate probe should expose them as cultural charlatans who actually affiliate to modern, cross-cultural philandering that characterizes a large portion of society today. From this point of view, Lucia's example suggests that if men can have women of their choice so can women.

Secondly, Lucia defies the traditional notion of belonging, by 'egregiously' counteracting traditional dominant discourse contesting her belonging to the Babamukuru homestead. By deciding that the expected baby is Jeremiah's though it is Takesure who has impregnated her (126), Lucia dismantles the traditional notion of belonging. In wielding the power of information about the child's paternity now in her hands alone, partly she projects the expected child as belonging to many nuclear families. In this way, Lucia transcends the nagging notion of her not belonging to Babamukuru's household, consistent with her insisting that no one will remove her from it. Partly, she blurs the contours of her own attachment to a single home. Throwing Lucia out becomes even more difficult because Takesure and Jeremiah, who have both slept with her and still want her, are blood relatives of Babamukuru. Moreover, Lucia is the sister of Jeremiah's wife Ma'Shingayi. By casting doubt about her husband Takesure's fertility and ascribing the pregnancy to Jeremiah, apart from burlesquing the traditional notion of barrenness Lucia makes herself even a more inextricable part of Babamukuru's extended family by projecting herself as a de facto junior wife of Jeremiah. Lucia thus

succeeds in transforming the traditional notion of belonging, by rendering belonging pliable.

Lucia's 'war' against the Sigauke patriarchs is further manifested when she tells Maiguru, the wife of Babamukuru, about how she has to deal with the men of the homestead. Lucia explicitly says in the presence of Babamukuru, "You know these men are mad, isn't it Maiguru?" (128). When Babamukuru puts on a peremptory voice to address Lucia, she decides that he is irrelevant. When he asks whether she is not going to help carry the goods into the house or greet him, Lucia snubs him and instead addresses Maiguru saying "Don't worry yourself Maiguru: Takesure and Jeremiah will carry all that when they come back" (128). For Lucia, such menial jobs are for men and not for women, which is diametrically opposed to traditional social norms of stereotyping gendered social roles.

Later, in friction with the expected behavior of someone of low status in this kind of speech act, Lucia decides that the small talk preceding formal greeting as Babamukuru's family members are about to take their seats is a waste of time, and goes headlong into the greetings (131). According to the narrator, "Technically she shouldn't have begun the greetings. Being of such low status, she ought to have waited for her superiors to start enquiring about each other's health before she opened her mouth" (131). By this action, Lucia defies social schisms along status rungs linked to gender. Such a transfiguration of the traditional notions of being afford Lucia a 'new' image in the eyes of agents of aberrant patriarchy like Babamukuru and his fellow villagers.

Lucia's next significant grabbing of the freedom of choice is located in the *dare* scene where the adult blood relatives of the Sigauke family "planned and constructed the family's future" (136). It is important to note that the *dare* excluded all the women married to the Sigauke family since traditionally such women belong to their own family and not the family of their husbands. Lucia, in a fit of rage for not being invited to defend herself in a case which involves her amorous relationship with Takesure, and after failing to rouse the other women of the homestead to action, freely chooses to barge into the *dare* and attacks Takesure for misrepresenting her (144). By attacking Takesure, she inflicts a deep wound in the egos of the patriarchy. Lucia does not cower before the dreaded Babamukuru and

accuses him and his family of presiding over the misery of her sister, Ma'shingayi, because she is a woman (144). At the end of the Christmas holidays Lucia remains on the premises and being a woman of her own choices, goes into Takesure to satisfy her sexual desires (153) which a number of the family members frown upon..

When her niece, Tambudzai, is punished for not attending her mother's church wedding, Lucia chooses to be her advocate:

*When Babamukuru came Lucia was blunt with him. She told him quite openly that I should not be punished so severely. "Did you ask her what was on her mind? ... Did you ask my sister whether she wished her daughter present? Even the wedding. Did you ask my sister if she wanted a wedding? I do not see that the child did you so much wrong. (171).*

This apparent bluntness raises some important issues. Lucia argues for the individual right of association by asserting that Tambudzai has the right to dissociate herself from the wedding because of what the wedding means to her. Further, Lucia argues that Babamukuru should respect the individual's choice because his actions show that he is impervious to what others feel or think. Lucia's arguments indicate some of the hardships that women face.

Compared to Maiguru, Lucia, though uneducated, is aware of the need to balance individuality and communalism that she will not respect decisions that Babamukuru may make through the invocation of communal culture which do not take into consideration the feelings of affected individuals. It is evident from Lucia's actions that had she been Jeremiah's wife she would not have been able to tolerate Jeremiah because Jeremiah always looks up to his elder brother, Babamukuru, for any decision. Lucia's words above multivalently mean that marriage most of the time lessens the right of a traditional African wife to choose freely.

All the attitudinal changes that occur in the other characters of *Nervous Conditions*, especially Babamukuru, are thus brought about by Lucia's forthrightness or choices she makes in order to be regarded as an equal human being. In fact, it would be wrong to see Lucia as not making definite choices but rather having mere reactive confrontations with Babamukuru. Saliba (1995) rightly points out Lucia's subjective initiation of change in the observation that "Lu-

cia's resistance is more successful because she remains outside the bonds of marriage, the privilege of class and traditional male control" (141). At the root of such a revolutionary being of Lucia is choice. It is Babamukuru and the section of society he symbolizes who collide with Lucia's choices in life, and not her who knocks against the former's lop-sided patriarchy. Lucia's choice is to fight abuses of patriarchy in African communities. The male character Babamukuru can be seen as an embodiment of corrupted patriarchy that needs agentive transformation by Africans, which Dangeremba's *Nervous Conditions* asserts women to be stalwarts of.

### Choice and Change – Nyasha

Dangaremba's dexterous handling of the central theme of choice and change plays itself out on yet another female character, Nyasha Sigauke, the cousin of Tambudzai (1). The central character Nyasha is also the daughter of Babamukuru and Maiguru (189). Although she is only fourteen years old she displays a raised consciousness of alternatives in life from which she can opt. As evidence of Dangaremba's ensuring that the central theme of choice and change is sustained throughout the novel, Nyasha structurally carries on the traits of Lucia after the latter is last heard of in the plot.

Like Lucia, Nyasha rebels against the status quo wielding the weapon of reclaimed choice, as when she rebels against her father in the words "We shouldn't have gone ... The parents ought to have packed us home" (18). She is a Shona but has lived in England for such a long time that it has been made difficult for her to shed her anglicization and revert to being an African. Just as Ramatoulaye in *So Long A Letter* finds faith in her friend Aissatou and in *Changes* Esi Sekyi's deepest consolation is the presence of her friend Opokuya, although Nyasha is not given enough time to re-adapt to the African environment she finds re-affirmation in her confidante Tambudzai. Tambudzai confesses that her "relationship with Nyasha" was her "first love affair", the first time she "grew fond of someone" of whom "she did not wholeheartedly approve" (78). Reference to a difference in Nyasha's hybridized cultural identity as an attraction strengthening social bonding reinforces the novel's embracing of difference emanating from assertive choice. Un-

like members of society conforming uncritically to dictates of tradition, custom and culture, Tambudzai clutches the freedom to choose to accept and love Nyasha.

Tambudzai's recognition even at this early stage of Nyasha's uniqueness is a display of true sisterhood which Bell Hooks (in Esmeralda Thornhill 1991:31) explains as "true sisterhood" that "means we must stop playing ostrich and start acknowledging the shared commonness of our human experience, our common oppression as females and our common differences." Such a display of love and understanding by Tambudzai towards Nyasha is what Babamukuru is incapable of.

Babamukuru hides Nyasha's novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* by D.H. Lawrence (83). This and the scolding that follows when Nyasha insists on having her book are filled with commands that demand compliance devoid of choice. Such a negation of the freedom to choose makes Nyasha adamant. Her sense of rights opens her eyes to the fact that at least an explanation is owed her. Nyasha protests by walking out of the dining room, and this is naturally regarded as being ugly or disrespectful (84) because passiveness is expected from a girl or a daughter or female by the section of society epitomized by the traditional Babamukuru. This is what is at the core of what the Algerian female critic Fatna Air Sabbah (in Edris Makward 1986:271-292) is highlighting in the question "Why are silence and immobility which are the signs and manifestations of inertia, the criteria for beauty of the woman?" In addition to Nyasha choosing not to conform to the traditional roles prescribed by the conservative segment of her Black African society, she proves to be some more youthful alter ego of Lucia by refusing to be treated without respect for her right to choose.

Many more incidents occur in the novel, pointing to Nyasha's reclamation of the right to choose. Some examples are when there is affinity between Nyasha and Andy Barker in which Nyasha seamlessly transfers social patterns of England to Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) within the broader context of political tensions between the two races leading to Babamukuru deciding to beat Nyasha (117); unlike Nwoye or Ekwefi in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Nyasha chooses to fight back with all the strength she can muster (115) and Nyasha "eats" all her food as enforced by Babamukuru only to go into the toilet

and induce vomiting, leading to her condition of anorexia nervosa (190).

In the face of social change advanced by Nyasha through her subjective grabbing of the freedom to choose, Babamukuru's state is not only that of disappointment. He is gradually losing control over everything, with this pointing to a gradual breakdown of the negative patriarchy. The preponderance in the dialogue of the first person "I" marks Babamukuru as egocentric, resulting in his feeling acutely Nyasha's cataclysmic socio-cultural assertions. Stylistically, incidents of the novel hoist high the sexist discrepancies commensurate with Babamukuru's egocentrism, effectively evoking sympathy for the cause of female characters like Nyasha. While Babamukuru insists on his authoritative right to be obeyed without due regard for the feelings and rights of others including his wife Maiguru who helps with the provisions of the household, the male child Chido is left alone to go on hunting expeditions and even has a girlfriend called Nyaradzo, who is white and of the same age as Nyasha. In this way Chido's choices are taken for granted.

In contrast, Nyasha's body does not belong to her person but is subjected to the disciplines of tradition and technologies of modernity (Wiley 2002:69). Babamukuru's relationship with Chido and Nyasha is comparable with that of Macon Dead and his two daughters and son, in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* (1977). Magdalena complains about this type of relationship to her brother Milkman when she says of their father, "First he displayed us, then he splayed us. All our lives were like that: he would parade us like virgins through Babylon, then humiliate us like whores in Babylon. Now he has knocked the ice out of Corinthians' hand again. And you are to blame" (Morrison 1977: 216).

In both *Nervous Conditions* and *Song of Solomon*, the young men are given freedom to do as they choose whilst the women are watched with eagle's eyes by their fathers. This leads Nyasha to commit suicide. According to Howse et al. three medical psychologists who investigated real family life in Britain, in *Family Matters* (1988:179), adolescents can do anything to earn their freedom and "where any of these acts are deliberate, they are all forms of 'suicide' or ways of getting back at parents for real or imagined wrongs." The fictional character Nyasha's "suicide" is therefore explainable. This mode of

resistance against anomalies within society has parallels with what happens in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), where the escapee slave Sethe, determined that neither she nor her children will ever be slaves again, embarks on killing her children. Death is the ultimate choice and freedom. The temptation in Nyasha to chose virtual death, the temptation to immolate her conscience, is evident in the course of resisting her father's style of parenting when she remarks to Tambu, "You know Tambu ... I guess he is right, right to dislike me. It is not his fault, it's me. But I can't help it. Really, I can't. He makes me angry. I can't shut up when he puts on his God act. I am not made that way. Why not?' Why can't I just take it like everybody else? I ought to take it, but really, I can't" (190).

Nyasha touches on individual differences. She believes that she is the only one who resists her father's attitude forgetting that Lucia did not also stand Babamukuru's "God act". Nyasha's choice to resist her father intensifies when, apart from bulimic purging, she punishes her own body by studying "fourteen hours a day" (200). This rate of learning and vomiting takes a toll on Nyasha's physique as she slowly 'kills herself'.

Nyasha and Babamukuru's unresolved failure to achieve any form of connection culminates tragically in Nyasha becoming mentally ill, thus choosing to 'die' psychologically. It is from thinking power, that has now expired through dementia, that the action of the novel with Nyasha as one of the protagonists could unfold, carrying with it the plight of women who are forced by circumstances to sacrifice their carefree joy and rather 'die' as long as they make a change in society for posterity to benefit from it. Saliba (1995) explains Nyasha's condition as an 'internalization of and resistance of sexual oppression and colonial domination, and it is symptomatic of the western and class privileges she experiences as a hybrid (138). Zwicker (2002) also interprets Nyasha's condition as a response to the collusion of patriarchal and colonial domination (14).

### CONCLUSION

Lucia and Nyasha in the novel *Nervous Conditions* are very strong characters as opposed to relatively docile women like Maiguru and Ma' Shingayi. Lucia and Nyasha use different methods to arrive at autonomy. Whilst Lucia

successfully battles with the existing order and social structures to arrive at self-worth, Nyasha ends up being mentally ill but, being mentally ill is also a state where the individual is free from influences outside herself. Nyasha's final state is not the least attractive as it teaches the patriarchal order represented by Babamukuru the need to respect the individual's choices, as Ma' Shingayi rightly observes, that and himself, to look at him he may look all right, but there is no telling the price he is paying.

All the attitudinal changes that occur in the other characters of *Nervous Conditions*, especially Babamukuru, are brought about by Lucia's forthrightness or choices she makes in order to be regarded as an equal human being. In fact, it would be wrong to see Lucia as not making definite choices but rather having mere reactive confrontations with Babamukuru. Lucia's choice is to fight the negative aspects of patriarchy in African communities characterized by it. The male character Babamukuru can be seen as an embodiment of negative patriarchy that needs agentive transformation by African women. In fact Lucia's resistance is more successful because she remains outside the bonds of marriage, the privilege of class and traditional male control.

*Nervous Conditions* constructs for us realistic female portraits on the persons of Lucia and Nyasha who take advantage of the choices in their lives to bring about changes in a male dominated world even if the choices are limited. Dangaremba has thus written with great conviction and passion about a place the African woman occupies. By her achievement, in the portrait of realistic and positive female characters, she has questioned the tangential and stereotypical place the African woman has often been assigned. Her work, together with that of other African women writers may be considered as synecdochical for the life of the African woman who has so often been misrepresented or ignored in works of most male writers. Dangaremba has thus taken a stand with other female African literary giants like Ba, Aidoo and Nwapa to question tradition in a modern world by showing that women are capable of standing up to traditions which do not favour them.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Women need to learn from the examples of Lucia and Nyasha and stand up for themselves.

Men, on the other hand, should accept that the era of male dominance is long gone so they should learn to treat women with respect and dignity.

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