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SELF-SACRIFICE, FAMILY AND REVOLT: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO GENDER IN TSITSI DANGAREMBGA'S *NERVOUS CONDITIONS* (1988) AND CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS* (2003)

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RESUME

Dans cet article, nous analysons la notion de sacrifice de soi dans l'écriture des romancières de la troisième génération d'écrivains africains. De façon spécifique, s'appuyant sur les romans d'apprentissage *A Fleur de Peau* de Tsitsi Dangarembga et *L'Hibiscus Pourpre* de C. N. Adichie, nous cherchons à savoir s'il est possible d'effectuer une approche du sacrifice de soi qui serait associée ou dissociée de la catégorie sexuelle à laquelle les personnages appartiennent. En effet, dans le contexte des sociétés postcoloniales décrites par les deux écrivaines, hommes et femmes sont confrontés aux mêmes réalités, c'est-à-dire des situations dominées par la misère morale, la violence sociale et l'intolérance religieuse, résultantes d'un chaos politique qui donne le sentiment quasi récurrent que l'épanouissement personnel est presque inenvisageable. Prenant appui sur l'influence judéo-chrétienne sur l'écriture des deux auteures et prenant en compte les contextes historiques, sociaux et culturels du Nigéria et du Zimbabwe, nous analysons les relations de genre dans une perspective holistique, c'est-à-dire une approche globale ne dissociant pas nécessairement les mondes féminins et masculins. Par ailleurs, nous cherchons à savoir si la symbolique de la révolte existentielle est omniprésente dans l'écriture de Dangarembga et d'Adichie et, face aux problèmes tels que la discrimination sexuelle ou la violence conjugale que les deux romans dépeignent, si le sacrifice de soi, s'accompagne nécessairement d'un stoïcisme béat.

Mots-clés : Genre, holisme, famille, révolte, sacrifice de soi, *Bildungsroman*, Christianisme, bouc émissaire, colonisation

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the notion of self-sacrifice in two novels by third generation African women writers. More specifically, it studies personal sacrifice in relation with gender expectations in Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions and C. N. Adichie's Purple Hibiscus. Indeed, in the context of postcolonial societies, women and men are confronted with the same realities which are mainly dominated by moral and social misery, daily violence and political chaos and the feeling that reaching actual self-fulfillment has become nearly impossible. The paper explores how each gender reacts to these recurrent problems of post-independent Africa. Examining the Christian background of the two novels and taking into account Nigerian and Zimbabwean social and cultural contexts, the analysis is based on a holistic approach to gender, in other words, a socio-historical approach referring to male and female characters and specifically the family as the emanation of the writers' global visions of gender relations. Since the two writers discuss the plight of black African men and women, the analysis also refers to African gender theories which have the particularity of articulating the dynamics of the African cultural context and the ambivalence generated by western colonization and patriarchy *in modern Africa. Moreover, the analysis seeks to understand whether the characters of the two novels can be seen as the symbols of revolt or whether the notion of self-sacrifice often goes along with a stoic lack of reaction.*

Key words: *Gender, holism, family, revolt, self-sacrifice, Bildungsroman, Christianity, scapegoat, colonization.*

INTRODUCTION

African literature is marked by pioneer writers of the first generation such as Thomas Mofolo, Sol T. Plaatje, L.S. Senghor and those of the second generation whose leading figures are Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi Wa Thiongo'o and Ayi Kwei Armah. However, recent research shows the advent of a new generation of writers, most of whom live in Europe or the United States or have spent time studying and writing outside of the African countries in which they were born or grew up. These younger authors are at once heirs

to the African literary tradition and symbols of a new creative movement. Like Achebe, Soyinka, Ngugi and Armah, novelists such as Tsitsi Dangarembga, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Moses Isegawa, Biyi Bandele, Leila Aboulela and Jamal Mahjoub explore the cultural and social complexities of their country of origin, but they examine other themes as well, such as immigration to Europe and America. Unlike the first two waves of writers, one may note the remarkable presence of talented female writers whose works put them at the forefront of the younger generation of African fiction writers. The first Zimbabwean woman writer Tsitsi Dangarembga and prolific young Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie are among the most promising fiction writers of this trend. While the two writers give voice to women, initially depicted as voiceless by most African male writers, recent criticism has failed to analyze the ambiguities and ambivalence of the interactions between male and female characters. Using mainly exclusive feminist theories and sometimes underestimating the hybrid nature of African societies, the images of women as transmission belts between generations and that of men as tyrannical and patriarchal figures have been constantly studied; however, the personal sacrifice made by each gender for the well-being of the family and the society as a whole has not been given very careful consideration.

The aim of this article is to analyze the notion of self-sacrifice in *Nervous Conditions* (1988)[1] and *Purple Hibiscus* (2003)[2], two debut novels authored respectively by Tsitsi Dangarembga and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Using a holistic approach and examining the two novels in the postcolonial contexts of Nigerian and Zimbabwean cultural realities and paying a close attention to how the socio-political dynamics of the two countries impact on men's and women's behaviors, this study seeks to identify the circumstances under which characters sacrifice themselves for the sake of family harmony or personal empowerment. It also studies an important aspect which has not received adequate critical attention, that is the symbolic language of resistance and revolt that shows women's struggle against social injustice and gender-based discrimination.

1 Tsitsi Dangarembga, Nervous Conditions, Banbury, Ayebia Clarke Publishing Ltd, 2004. Subsequent references to this novel are given in the quotations by page number and following the abbreviation NC.

2 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Purple Hibiscus, London, Harper Perennial, 2005. Subsequent references to this novel are given in the quotations by page number and following the abbreviation PH.

I. SELF-SACRIFICE AND *BILDUNGSROMAN*: FROM THE CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE TO THE HOLISTIC APPROACH

Many literary critics have attempted to explain African fiction by using various theoretical approaches. However, no approach whether socio-historical, chronological or based on gender theories can fail to take into account the Christian influence that resulted from Western colonialization in Sub-Saharan Africa. Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* are two debut novels that patently illustrate the ideological and literary impact of this period of African history.

I.1. The Christian Background in Tsitsi Dangarembga's and C. N. Adichie's Writing

Though published with a gap of fifteen years and set in two different African countries, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) have many common characteristics. Besides the fact of being postcolonial novels, a term that refers to works by authors from countries formerly colonized by western powers, mainly Great Britain and France, they are debut novels narrated by first person young female narrators. Moreover, they belong to the category of novel that is called the *bildungsroman*, German for a novel of growth or development, or sometimes the apprenticeship novel and which is defined by X. J. Kennedy as "the kind of novel in which a youth struggles toward maturity, seeking, perhaps, some consistent word view or philosophy of life"[3].

The two novels are autobiographical as they sometimes appear as the authors' recollection of their own lives. However, the most striking common aspect of Dangarembga's and Adichie's writings is the religious background, specifically the Christian flavor of their representations of Zimbabwean and Nigerian societies. In that, their novels belong to an African literary tradition whose origins are to be found in colonization. Indeed, as we know, a lot of novels emphasizing the role of religious institutions in directing social interactions abound in African literature. While some of them focus on the importance

3 X.J. Kennedy, *Literature: an Introduction to Fiction, Poetry and Drama*, Third Edition, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1983, p. 186.

of African traditional religions and their belief system, others underline the central role of Christianity in postcolonial societies. In an article published in *Etudes Littéraires Africaines* in 2013, Alphonse Moutombi noted the impact of Christian missionaries on the forming of the Cameroonian intellectual elite in general and specifically on its literature:

> *Protestant and Catholic Churches assumed, directly or not, an important part in the forming of the future Cameroonian social, political and intellectual elite, as well as in the constitution of the national literary field at the time of the first generation of writers. This actually emerges only during the Anglo-French period, in the last decade of the colonial era in Cameroon, and asserts itself more deeply during the next decade. It is these twenty years that will interest us here, a period during which the pupils stemming from the Christian denominational education, so primary as secondary, stand out gradually on the national and international literary scene*[4] *(Translation ours).*

It is obvious that this statement encompassing the first and second generations of Cameroonian writers is not specific to them, for it might be easily extended to most Francophone and Anglophone African writers of the same trends. Without any doubt, the third wave of African writers, though different in style and thematic concerns from the first two generations, perpetuate this literary tradition. Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and C.N. Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* are among the literary works highlighting the impact of Christian education and faith and their correlated effects in Africa. In societies where local religions still play a very important role, it is relevant to note that the ambiguities of imperial civilizing missions coupled with western philosophicaland Christian dynamics in both post-independence Zimbabwe and Nigeria influence the creative output of younger generation of male and female writers.

4 Original French version : « Les Eglises protestantes et catholiques ont assumé, directement ou non, une part importante dans la formation de la future élite sociale, politique et intellectuelle camerounaise, ainsi que dans la constitution du champ littéraire national à l'époque de la première génération d'écrivains. Celle-ci n'émerge véritablement que pendant la période anglo-française, durant la dernière décennie de l'ère coloniale au Cameroun, pour s'affirmer davantage durant la décennie suivante. C'est à cette vingtaine d'années que nous intéresserons ici, pendant lesquelles les élèves issus de l'enseignement confessionnel chrétien, tant primaire que secondaire, s'imposent progressivement sur la scène littéraire nationale et internationale ». Alphonse Moutombi, « Christianisme, éducation, création littéraire et vision du monde chez quelques romanciers camerounais des décennies cinquante et soixante », *Etudes Littéraires Africaines (ELA)*, N° 35, 2013, p. 49.

Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* is set in Rhodesia as Zimbabwe was known during the time the story takes place. As can been seen through the history of Southern Africa, Rhodesia was a British colony ruled by Rhodesian whites who traced their ancestries to England. At the beginning of colonization, they set up white Christian missionaries and schools to provide a Western Anglicized education for black Africans. We can notice that this education has an impact on most characters in *Nervous Conditions*. Somehow, each major character has a tight link with western school and culture which is symbolized by Christian mission schools. For instance, Babamukuru, the English-educated head of the Sigauke family, is the headmaster of a Protestant Christian mission school; Maiguru, his educated wife also teaches at the Umtali mission school and they have taken with them Babamukuru's nephew, Nhamo, to attend school so that he could have a good education. Nyasha, Babamukuru and Maiguru's daughter, has spent her early years of education in Christian schools in England with her parents and speaks fluently British English. And Tambu, the narrator and major character, felt marginalized at the beginning of the story because unlike her elder brother, Nhamo, she was not sent to school. At the end of the story, she succeeded in earning a scholarship and a place at the Young Ladies College of the Sacred Heart, a Roman Catholic convent school reserved for black Rhodesian girls. As illustrated in these examples, Dangarembga has created characters whose focal points progressively evolve around Christian institutions.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's depiction of Christianity is more striking and even more shocking than Dagarembga's representation of western religious institutions in *Nervous Conditions*. Indeed, her award-winning novel *Purple Hibiscus* makes a satire of the postcolonial Nigerian society through the story of a wealthy and Catholic Igbo family whose father, Eugene, is a violent and extremist believer. He frequently beats his wife Beatrice and his children, Kambili and her brother Jaja, brutally imposing his extremist religious views on them. However, the children will find an environment more peaceful, with joy and laughter when they temporarily leave their house for their aunt Ifeoma's home. This brief stay will bring them a new breath of serenity that will lead them to question the too hard education they received from their father.

The plot of Adichie's novel shows how the members of this family depicted as the victims of a radical fundamentalism succeed in getting over all

the trauma caused by the father's authoritarian behavior. It also proves that in this oppressed family, self-sacrifice appears as an unavoidable route to freedom. In this respect, it is interesting and relevant to revisit the biblical vision of the notion of self-sacrifice before studying its possible intermingling and relationship with Dangarembga's and Adichie's writings. While sacrifice can be broadly defined as the surrender or destruction of something prized or desirable for the sake of something considered as having a higher or more pressing claim, self-sacrifice is seen as the giving up of one's own interests or wishes in order to help others or advance a cause. Every attentive reader of the New Testament may easily note that the teaching of Jesus is centered on his appeal to self-sacrifice and his life itself is the striking illustration of his philosophy of sacrifice. As demonstrated in biblical studies,

> *NOTHING is more characteristic of the teaching of Jesus than his insistence upon the duty of self-sacrifice. Again and again he goes back to the same thought, that a man must lose his life to gain his life; that no man can be his disciple unless he denies himself and takes up his cross and follows him; that no man can serve two masters. There were apparently no sayings of Jesus which made a similar impression upon his hearers, and there have been no sayings which have given modern Christians more difficulty. They fit well in an age of martyrs, but they seem entirely out of place in an age of conventional Christianity*[5].

Two remarks can be drawn from Jesus' vision of life. Indeed, he apparently regards things such as wealth, physical comfort, reputation or piety, even life itself as secondary goods. All these things which are considered by the ordinary man as the symbols of success and material comfort are to be sacrificed when they come into opposition with the supreme good. However, his teaching also reveals that sacrifice is a matter of exchange. Anyone who is willing to sacrifice what is precious for him receives something greater, a supreme good that is membership in the kingdom of God. This principle leaves the bible reader with no doubt that "the thing obtained was worth more than the things given. This is Jesus' very simple philosophy of sacrifice. A man surrenders an inferior good for a greater good. He gives for what he gets, but he gets something more valuable than that which he gives. He makes a good bargain. He gives, for instance, physical life; he gets eternal life"[6].

5 "Self-Sacrifice in the Teaching of Jesus", *The Biblical World*, Vol. 21, No. 5 (May, 1903), p. 323.
6 Ibid, p. 324.

With regards to these principles that insist on the dynamics of giving and receiving, any form of suffering with no positive incidence on one's life cannot be seen as a sacrifice but as a kind of self-denial through which one suffers voluntarily or involuntarily the martyr. With that in mind, we can study how male and female characters are portrayed in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. To what extent and in which circumstances do they sacrifice themselves? We assume that a holistic approach to the two novels will help us to find an accurate answer to this question.

I.2. The Relevance of the Holistic Approach to Gender

In the key note address to the 12th General Assembly of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) that took place in Yaoundé, Cameroon, from 7 to 11 December 2008, Tsitsi Dangarembga made it clear that she was in favor of a vision that highlights the African experience, that is any perception of the African society that goes beyond dichotomist and binary divisions. Indeed, talking about the role of the artist in the public sphere, she states:

> *My particular interest in this terrain is to plot a particular trajectory of African experience. My project in plotting this trajectory is that this trajectory should be a single one that does not fall into the trap of binarism, nor the trap of splitting, nor the trap of bifurcation, as that trajectory of African experience which is rooted in neo-liberal discourse does. This departure from a notion of African experience broken up into unrecognizable entities by the discourse of modernity is one crucial objective of my project. And I call it a departure rather than a regaining because my wish is not to regain in a triumph of nostalgia an almost mythical unity, but to transform in an observable way that which is fragmented into a functional whole*[7].

Apprehending the African society as a whole and not as an assemblage of disparate elements, she came back some years later to the notion of wholeness and puts stress on a vision encompassing men and women. Indeed, in an interview with Rosemary Marangoly George, Dangarembga asserts that

7 Tsitsi Dangarembga, "The Popular Arts and Culture in the Texture of the Public Sphere in Africa" (2008), p.2.
Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), 12th Assembly Special Guest Lecture,
Online: http://www.codesria.org/spip.php?article606&lang=en [accessed: 17 July 2015]

her writing goes beyond feminist concerns because she wants to show her preoccupation for society as a whole, gender politics being more important than a reflection solely based on women's condition:

> *I have come a long way in my thinking from really dichotomizing the issue or dividing up the world by gender, because you cannot ignore the other powers that really inform life itself. And is it different from the power which informs gender relationships? So I think it is too simplistic really to just always look at the gender issue as if there is such a pure dimension. I think one has to be much more aware of interactions and try to actually mark out the components of these effects. So I'm always very wary of thinking just in terms of gender*[8].

From the general understanding of her writing and, more importantly, from this background on the necessary interactions between male and female genders, we assume that a holistic approach to her writing would be more relevant than a purely feminist one as it better articulates the notions of wholeness and togetherness on which her gender politics seems to be based. Indeed, "holism", from which "holistic" is derived is a concept coined by the South African Jan Christian Smuts (1870-1950) in his book *Holism and Evolution* (1926). According to this statesman-philosopher, as a means of tracing the evolution of reality, this concept has several advantages:

> *In the first place, as the whole is at once both a specific structure or configuration and expressive of an inner general principle or tendency, its concept is as it were a working model of the natural wholes we find in the universe, and is as near as we could get to that concrete character of reality to which we should have the closest regard. The concept of Holism and the whole is as nearly as possible a replica of Nature's observed process, and its application will prevent us from*
>
> *appearing to run the stuff of reality into a mould alien to Nature. It will, therefore, enable us to explain Nature from herself, so to say, and by her own standards. […] In the second place, the fundamental concept of Holism will bring us nearer to that unitary or monistic conception of the universe which is the immanent ideal of all scientific and philosophic explanation. At the same time it will enable us to bridge the chasms and to resolve the antinomies which divide the concepts*

8 Rosemary Marangoly George, Helen Scott, Tsitsi Dangarembga, "An Interview with Tsitsi Dangarembga", NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction, Vol. 26, No. 3, African Literature Issue (Spring, 1993), p. 313.

of matter, life and mind -inter se. Their absolute separateness as concepts is overcome, and their actual overlapping (in the way we have seen) is explained, by viewing them as phases of the development of a more fundamental process in the universe. The concept of Holism, so to say, embraces the heterogeneous concepts of matter, life and mind as polymorphous forms of itself[9].

This passage clearly suggests that a study based on holism would often be more efficient than any approach centered on or highlighting "separateness". It is also worth mentioning that this term is often used in social sciences to characterize studies encompassing multi-factorial and multi-dimensional aspects[10].

With this in mind, we find it relevant to compare the world Tsitsi Dangarembga depicts in *Nervous Conditions* with that represented by C.N. Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus* so as to delve into their gender politics with regard to the issue of self-sacrifice. Although a chronological analysis of the two novels would be natural and understandable, we find it more relevant to analyze *Purple Hibiscus* before *Nervous Conditions* because the symbolic of female revolt and rebellion seems to us more powerful in Dangarembga's novel than in that of Adichie. As Adichie's holistic vision on gender issues appears apparent, a textual dialog between the two novels can be put in perspective.

II. GENDER, SELF-SACRIFICE AND FAMILY IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

Frantz Fanon noted in *The Wretched of the Earth* that the "spirit of self-sacrifice and devotion to the common interest fosters a reassuring national morale which restores man's confidence in the destiny of the world and disarms the most reticent of observers"[11]. In the postcolonial context of Nigerian society, one can notice through Adichie's writing the same devotion within the family with the difference that the figure of the father has replaced that of the

9 J.C. Smuts, *Holism and Evolution*, Third Edition, London, Macmillan, 1936, p. 107.

10 For instance, read Michel Friedman's and Ray Gordezky's article entitled "A Holistic Approach to Gender Equality and Social Justice", *OD PRACTITIONER,* Vol. 43, No. 1, 2011, 11-16. We can find the definition of the term "holistic" in the following sentence: "The purpose of the OSP is to address women's rights, gender equality, and social justice issues with a multi-factorial (individual, organizational, and societal) and holistic (head, heart, and hands) organization development program", p. 11.

11 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Translated from the French by Richard Philcox, New York, Groove Press, 2004, p. 56.

colonizer and thus plays the role of the victimizer and the family "morale" is sustained by both the maternal figure and the child who variously embody the idea of self-sacrifice.

II.1. Between Personal and Ritual Sacrifice: A Daughter's Self-Sacrifice in an Oppressed Family

Among the various perspectives that Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* offers, the theme of self-sacrifice appears as a topical issue as it is involved in most of its thematic and stylistic aspects. A close reading of Adichie's first novel enables us to notice that it is possible to draw out its different manifestations so as to understand how it emerges through the portrayal of female and male characters. As defined above, a sacrifice is the fact of giving up something that is valuable in order to provide help and assistance to another person and a personal sacrifice can be considered as a self-sacrifice that includes self-denial, for a cause that is supposed to be crucial for oneself and, more importantly, for someone else.

Although early criticism of Adichie's novel failed to be attentive to this issue, one may easily note that images of self-sacrifice appearing through diverse actions are recurrent in the plot of her novel. Adichie depicts characters that distinguish themselves by their capacity to give themselves entirely for the others for causes such as freedom, freedom of thinking or simply family harmony. In a certain way, these various situations which are mostly humiliating for her characters echo Christ's own sacrifice on the cross. However, it is relevant to note that Adichie's writing does not really distinguish between male and female words. On the contrary, she fully incorporates men in her gender politics, which leads her readers to African social, cultural and philosophical realities and enables them to believe that her artistic vision is within the realms of possibility. Indeed, representing a syncretic world where everyday realities encompass Igbo customs and Catholic ritual, Adichie's depiction of contemporary Nigeria is to be read as an example of the African realistic novel. From this point of view, Brenda Cooper is right when she writes that Adichie "embraces the literary traditions of her elders – Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Alice Walker[12]". More specifically, starting the book with a

12 Brenda Cooper, *A New Generation of African Writers: Migration, Material Culture and Language*, Scottsville, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013, p. 110.

sentence that reminds of the title of *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe's first novel, Adichie vibrantly and vehemently pays homage to one of the major voice of African literature whose work has vividly focused on how Africa had been sacrificed on the altar of western imperialism and the way this generated a dire identity crisis on African subjects.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, self-sacrifice appears as one of the alternatives that enable characters (whether female or male) to escape social and family problems related to cultural hybridity and religious fundamentalism. One of the first actions symbolizing self-sacrifice in the novel is performed by Kambili, the first person narrator. Kambili is the youngest child of the Achike family and is the main character of the novel whose story is narrated through her fifteen years old eyes. She is portrayed as shy with no confidence in herself. Indeed, she has been raised under strong religious values that she has adopted and assimilated. At the beginning of the story, through flashbacks, she retells how things seemed so natural before the event that happened on Palm Sunday. She comes into contact with the reader with the following words: "Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère" (*PH*, p. 3). Kambili describes this event as the rising action that brought her family down. However, prior to this, the young protagonist was the first to defy her father when she refuses to get away from the painting of her grandfather Papa-Nwuku that her father broke into pieces:

> *Papa snatched the painting from Jaja. His hands moved swiftly, working together. The painting was gone. It already represented something lost, something I had never had, would never have. Now even that reminder was gone, and at papa's feet laid pieces of paper streaked with earth-tone colors. The pieces were very small, very precise. I suddenly and maniacally imagined Papa-Nnukwu's body being cut in pieces that small and stored in a fridge.*
>
> *"No!" I shrieked. I dashed to the pieces on the floor as if to save them, as if saving them would mean saving Papa Nnukwu. I sank to the floor, lay on the pieces of paper.*
>
> *"What has gotten into you?" Papa asked. "What is wrong with you?"*
>
> *I lay on the floor, curled tight like the picture of a child in the uterus in my Integrated Science for Junior Secondary Schools.*

"Get up! Get away from that painting!"

I lay there, did nothing.

"Get up!" Papa said again. I still did no move. He started to kick me. The metal buckles on his slippers stung like bites from giant mosquitoes. He talked nonstop, out of control, in a mix of Igbo and English, like soft meat and thorny bones. Godlessness. Heathen worship. Hellfire. The kicking increased in tempo, and I thought of Amaka's music, her culturally conscious music that sometimes started off with calm saxophone and then whirled into lusty singing. […]. More stings. More slaps. A salty wetness warmed my mouth. I closed my eyes and slipped away into quiet. (P.H, pp.210-211)

This passage relates one of the most upsetting scenes in Adichie's first novel. In a society where children appear as the most important symbol of family happiness, one may wonder how a father can exert such violence on his young daughter. Though not explicitly stated in the text, this scene has a symbolic meaning that cannot escape the reader. Indeed, the narrator's detailed depiction of Eugene's violent rushes against Kambili resembles a ritual sacrifice through which a father gives his daughter to exorcise his society or more specifically himself from ideological and religious entrapment. This is the reversal paradigm of the biblical Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac without any loving feeling. The whole scene powerfully shows a man struggling against his own demons and using the fruit of his own flesh as the sheep of the sacrifice. This event happened before Palm Sunday, a day where Mass attendance is compulsory for every good Catholic Christian. For the first time, Kambili refuses to obey her father. Through this refusal and knowing what would be her father's reaction, we can assert that the young protagonist sacrifices herself to protect the memory of her grandfather whose picture represents the only image she had. When her father tore up the painting, he wiped all memories of Papa-Nnukwu's image from her mind. This attempt is the only way to create a close relationship with her grandfather since her father refuses any relationship of his children with the "heathen", those who do not believe in his Christian god. Indeed, in the Achike family, the children have in a certain way grown up with the idea that their grandfather was an unbeliever and that it was sinful for a Christian to talk, eat or even share the same house with a heathen.

During a short visit Eugene's children pay to Aunty Ifeoma in the town of Nsukka, Kambili discovered that their grandfather Papa-Nnukwu "was not a heathen but a traditionalist" (*PH*, p.166) and the way he prays his god "Chineke" was quite the same as when Catholic Christians say the rosary. In Nsukka, she envies the close relationship that existed between Papa-Nnukwu and her cousin Amaka. Her refusal to get away from the painting pieces can be perceived as a sacrifice she made to protect her grandfather from her father's last attempt to show disrespect to him and a way for her to restore something she lost when his grandfather died. It is this restoration process that her father ends by beating her violently. This hard punishment nearly kills her and she lands up in hospital. Symbolically, Kambili gives up her body in exchange of Papa-Nnukwu's picture. Here we can see how the notion of self-sacrifice of which Kambili is the subject collides with the idea that she is used as the object of ritual sacrifice.

Along with her sense of sacrifice, the fifteen year protagonist shows a surprising stoicism that recalls Jesus's quiet suffering and his eventual death caused by the Pharisees. Indeed, like Jesus, she does not care about the pain caused by her father's kick. She does not cry and does not even beg him. Despite her father's pitiless reaction, Kambili remains curled around the pieces of the painting. It is the importance she gives to the picture and the physical suffering she undergoes that show the value of her sacrifice. Moreover, her self-sacrifice opens the eyes of the other members of the family and raises their courage to go against the authority of Eugene, the tyrannical father. More specifically, as revealed by the plot, it raises her brother's consciousness to show defiance to his father's authority.

II.2. From Scapegoatry to Self-Denial: Victimizing and Defending Mothers and Children

From a social psychological perspective, scapegoating can be defined as the process through which frustration and aggression are directed at a group that is not the causal agent of the frustration. As for the term "scapegoat", it refers to one who bears the blame for the misdeeds of others. It is instructive to note that this word takes its substance from the Old Testament which reports that on the Day of Atonement two goats were chosen by lot, one was sent alive into the wilderness carrying the sins of the people upon its back whereas the other was offered as a pure sacrifice to the Lord.

A careful reading of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* reveals that scapegoat theory, which emerged during the 1940s in Europe as a way for social psychologists to explain why prejudice and racism occur, and which was later popularized by the French critic René Girard's *The Scapegoat* (1986), can be used to analyze the relationships between Eugene, the tyrannical paternal figure and his family. Indeed, this character can be seen as a victim of imperial ideology that undid his cultural background and substituted it with a truncated westernized one. As a Catholic fundamentalist, he does not understand how African belief system can allow a Nigerian to have a strong relationship with a supreme god. His behavior and the violence he exerts upon non-Catholic believers (including his own father) clearly show that he underwent decades of imperial indoctrination and his religious intolerance illustrates the confusing social and cultural upheaval into which British colonization has plunged Nigerian society. Through Eugene, Adichie describes how the new Nigerian society suffers from the legacy of colonization. Indeed, her novel depicts a cultural chaos in which Nigerian postcolonial subjects are seen as socially and economically impotent. Instead of seeking for genuine solutions to this powerlessness, they turn their frustration into family violence. In this context, mothers and children are turned into scapegoats who undergo both the devilish influence of the head of the family and, more generally, the heavy heritage of British colonization.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, with the exception of Eugene who is primarily perceived as the main victimizer, each member of the Achike family functions in a certain way not only as a victim but also as a scapegoat. However, in the Manichean word described by Adichie, Jaja, the narrator's elder brother, appears as the most patent illustration of the scapegoating process. Unable to take advantage of his religious engagement, his father will crystalize his frustration upon him. In spite of the complexity of this situation, the young man will defy him brilliantly by despising colonial and religious institutions which are deeply incrusted in his father's mind. For instance, he refuses to attend the Palm Sunday Mass, a special day for the Catholic Church that celebrates the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Palm Sunday is considered as a holy day of obligation, that is the Mass is compulsory that day. So one can imagine how Eugene, a devout Catholic, felt when his son did not attend the Mass. He reacts violently against his son's refusal to embrace the Catholic faith.

This defiance is described by Kambili, the narrator, as the event that brings the house down. She explains that things were no longer the same when the family, which lived under the tyranny of Eugene, came back from Nsukka, a town where they paid visit to a member of the extended family: "Perhaps we all changed after Nsukka." (*PH*, p. 209). Indeed, the children started to grow consciously as they started to see things in another way. They unconsciously wanted to show opposition to their father and Jaja's and his sister's defiance is described as the starting point of the change process that occurred within the Achike family. André Kaboré rightly wrote that "Jaja started to build up his courage when he and Kambili went to see their aunt in Nsukka. It is in Nsukka that Jaja's and Kambili's eyes opened toward thinking of freeing themselves from their father's hard ruling as they noticed that their cousins enjoyed more freedom than them"[13]. As a matter of fact, Kambili has in a certain way opened the road to her brother. What happens when she curled herself around the pieces of the painting was the straw that broke the camel's back. With Jaja's defiance, the silence broke and he no longer feared his father. He progressively started to show opposition by firstly refusing to go to communion, then pushing the desk of his bedroom across the door thus preventing his father from entering. Secondly, he refuses to answer to his father's invitation to dinner. These entire events, which happened after his refusal to go to communion, can be seen as a process of protest against his father's violence and radical religious thought.

Most of Jaja's rebellious actions are the illustration of a family consciousness that prompts him to make consistent personal sacrifices. His devotion to free both his family and himself from his father's oppression is apparent through the novel. He responds to his father's violence by taking strict action that is expressed verbally and physically. For instance, when his father asked him why he did not go to communion, he answered: "The wafer gives me strong breath […] and the priest keeps touching my mouth and it nauseates me" (*PH*, p.6). Then, when his father invites him for dinner he refuses and prevents him from entering his room. This can be considered as an act of revolt insofar as it is a way of showing his father that he will no longer let him enter

13 André Kaboré, "Symbolic use of Palm, Figurine and Hibiscus in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*", *Linguistics and Literature Studies* 1(1), p. 35.

into his life and imposes his rule. Jaja consciously behaves in this way, aware of the consequences that this action could engender. Consequently, we can state that he sacrifices himself for something that is valuable to him, namely the freedom of his family. Unfortunately, his action will not bring his father to change since his behavior will lead his wife Beatrice to poison him. Here again, Jaja will show his strong sense of self-sacrifice by taking the blame for his mother's crime to protect his family. By choosing to go to prison, he sacrifices his freedom in order to prevent his mother from suffering.

Another striking example of self-sacrifice occurs in the text through Beatrice's strong devotion for her family. Beatrice is Eugene's wife. Submitted to his hard ruling, she never shows antipathy. Quite the opposite, she shows respect and submission to her husband. She tries to raise her children in another way that is different from her husband's violent temper. She devotes all her energy to the well-being of her family, putting her own well-being second. Beatrice is portrayed as a quiet maternal figure who presents a softer and warmer presence in the home in contrast to the often tyrannical presence of Eugene. She never shows opposition to her husband and very often appears passive and silent. In spite of the domestic violence she is confronted with, she always remains with him. She takes care over the raising of her children and pays attention not to contradict him. She even tries to justify her husband's violence. For instance, when Eugene broke a table on her belly, she lovingly states: "Eugene has not been well. He has been having migraines and fever […] He is carrying more than any man should carry. Do you know what Ade's death did to him? It is too much for one person" (*PH*, p.250)

Beatrice's silent and passive behavior can be justified by her desire to protect her children and her love for her husband. She considers Kambili and Jaja above all and sacrifices her own well-being. This sense of self-sacrifice will be more relevant when she poisons her husband. Even if the sacrifice failed in a certain way, since it is her son Jaja who takes the blame for her, Beatrice commits the murder aware that she could go to prison. But she considers the death of Eugene as the only way to protect her children and herself and to get free from his strict authoritarian presence.

III. FROM SELF-SACRIFICE TO FEMININE REVOLT: T. DANGAREMBGA'S *NERVOUS CONDITIONS*

Cheryl Stobie noted in her analysis on *Purple Hibiscus* that "partly from within, but mainly from without, the patriarchal reign of terror is brought to an end" with the poisoning of Eugene, the tyrannical father[14]. Whereas children's and women's self-sacrifice resulted in dethroning the infallible father in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, women's emancipatory efforts in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* are more directed to social change than a direct challenge to patriarchy. Dangarembga's writing reveals that only a revolt against women's marginalization inherited from British colonization can help Africans, especially Zimbabwean women, to shape a new identity.

III.1. FAMILY, SILENCE AND SELF-SACRIFICE IN NERVOUS SITUATIONS

Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* borrows its title from French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's introduction to the anti-colonial revolutionary theorist Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, in which he states: "Our enemy betrays his brothers and becomes our accomplice; his brothers do the same thing. The status of 'native' is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among colonized people with their consent."[15] Guided by this idea and her experience in Britain and Rhodesia, Dangarembga depicts characters that live in "nervous" situations through which the legacy of colonization is seen as a weighty burden. From a psychological perspective, one must say that most of her characters have altered identities and disassociated selves which are the consequences of the psychological trouble created by colonialism on every colonized person. In that, her novel *Nervous Conditions* has many similarities with Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*.

However, what distinguishes Adichie's writing from that of Dangarembga is certainly the way the characters suffer from the changes brought by colonization. Whereas these changes, which are mainly characterized by religious

14 Cheryl Stobie, "Dethroning the Infallible Father: Religion, Patriarchy and Politics in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*", *Literature & Theology*, Vol. 24, No. 4, December 2010, p. 426.

15 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* ; Translated from the French by Richard Philcox, New York, Groove Press, 2004 [1961], p. liv.

intolerance and violence, are the source of unacceptable moral and physical sufferings in *Purple Hibiscus*, they only impact on the characters described by Dangarembga at the ideological and psychological levels. In so doing, the characters seem to evolve around a traditional accepted scheme with almost no social or domestic violence. This does not mean that the wind of modernism and freedom blows in the represented world without any impediments. On the contrary, Tambudzai, the participant narrator relates the story with the specific idea that women's situation in Zimbabwe is worse than that of men and that the reader should be more attentive to their plight. Though she can be seen as a sympathetic character, it must be admitted that she is an invading and extremely talkative narrator, who does not hesitate to show a subjective position, and who is sometimes (fortunately not always) pessimistic, in front of the represented reality. In the first paragraph of the story, she overtly states:

> *I was not sorry when my brother died. Nor am I apologising for my callousness, as you may define it, my lack of feeling. For it is not that at all. I feel many things these days, much more than I was able to feel in the days when I was young and my brother died, and there are reasons for this more than mere consequence of age. Therefore I shall not apologise but begin by recalling the facts as I remember them that led up to my brother's death, the events that put me in a position to write this account. For though the event of my brother's passing and the events of my story cannot be separated, my story is not after all about death, but about my escape and Lucia's; about my mother's and Maiguru's entrapment; and about Nyasha's rebellion — Nyasha, far-minded and isolated, my uncle's daughter, whose rebellion may not in the end have been successful. (NC, p.1)*

The devastating and arresting nature of the first sentence and opening statement of the novel did not escape early literary criticism on Dagarembga's novel. In the introduction of the book, Kwame Anthony Appiah wonders if there is not "something especially shocking – something inhuman, unnatural – in a sister's coldness in the face of a brother's death" (*NC*, vii) and Nfah-Abbenyi describes it as "an unbelievable statement proffered by an African woman"[16] . However, Dangarembga's narrative strategy simply reflects Edward Said's thesis in his

16 Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi, *Gender in African Women's Writing: Identity, Sexuality, and Difference*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997, p. 61.

seminal book *Beginnings: Intention and Method*[17] that there is a strong link between the narration of the beginning of a fiction story and the main message it vehicles. Indeed, as explained in the opening paragraph that offers itself as a kind of incipit, the point of view of the narrator includes here the future of the characters, mainly the female ones: Lucia, Mainini, Maiguru, and Nyasha.

At first sight, a holistic approach to gender in *Nervous Conditions* seems nearly irrelevant because, as mentioned in the passage above, Dagarembga's narrator warns the reader about her intentions, that is to relate the story of four women whose evolution in the plot is described in terms of escape (Tambu and Lucia), entrapment (Mainini and Maiguru) and rebellion (Nyasha). Though this does not imply that the novel is entirely about the lives of these female characters, it does suggest that Dagarembga's description of the transitional period in Zimbabwe's history would not give major status to male characters and would not probably overemphasize the destructive effects of colonialism and other related themes. This stylistic feature and its impact on the general understanding of the novel are noted in early criticism on *Nervous Conditions*:

> *The story is told entirely from Tambu's point of view, in the first person. This means that nothing can be related that she does not either participate in directly or hear about from someone else. Also, information about all the other characters is filtered through her consciousness. Readers only know what Tambu knows about the other characters and therefore readers only see them through her eyes. What this means is that given Tambu's interest in gender issues, the male characters, especially Nhamo and Babamukuru, tend to get presented in an unflattering light. Babamukuru, for example, for all his accomplishments and sense of duty, comes across as a domestic tyrant. Given the author's decision about how the story is to be narrated, the reader cannot be given direct insight into Babamukuru's own thoughts, which might have made him a more sympathetic character. In contrast, the female characters, such as Tambu's mother, Lucia, Nyasha, and Maiguru, are presented with greater understanding of their plight*[18].

17 Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, New York, Basic Books, 1975.

18 Ira Mark Milne (Ed.), *"Nervous Conditions." Novels for Students*, Volume 28, Detroit: Gale, 2009, pp. 179-180.

Contrary to Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Dagarembga's *Nervous Conditions* frees itself from Manichean polarities and allegories in spite of the complexity of its characters. As noticed by the author herself, this strategy gives the possibility to many different categories of people to "find something to identify with in the book[19]". However, the characters cannot escape from a kind of dualism as they fall into two categories, that is, those benefiting from the privileges of a westernized patriarchal society and those sacrificing themselves for a given reason. Babamukuru and Nhamo clearly represent the first category while the other is made up of Tambu, Maiguru, Nyasha and the other minor female characters. Taking our subject matter into account, we are obviously more concerned about the second category than the first one.

Indeed, Dangarembga's novel reveals that her female characters, with almost no exception, have to sacrifice something in order to be accepted in the society they live in. For instance, to be fully considered as a good future Shona woman, in other words a woman with practical ideas and ready "for the real tasks of feminine living" (*NC*, 34) Tambu is advised by her father to refrain from her ambition to be educated as she will not prepare books for her husband; Nyasha, Babamukuru's anglicized daughter, has to sacrifice her freedom of mind for family harmony and the marginalized and outspoken Lucia, Tambu's aunt, who is variously described by the narrator as a beautiful, promiscuous and wild woman, is called a witch by the villagers because she cannot renounce her sexual freedom.

However, of all these women, only Maiguru, Babamuku's intelligent and educated wife, actually experiences self-sacrifice in the biblical sense of the term. The fifth chapter of the novel gives a detailed background and enables the reader to have more insight on this character who is wholly depicted as a woman who sacrificed herself for the sake of family harmony. In fact, holding a Master's degree like her husband, she has had opportunities in England where both her husband and she were educated. However, family responsibility matters more to her than a bright independent career and she somehow regrets the dilemma which brought her "to choose between self and security." (*NC*, 103). Though this situation disturbs Tambu, the young heroine, it is not so surprising from an African perspective as women are traditionally seen as

19 "Interview with author", *Nervous Conditions*, p. 210.

the symbols of family harmony and stability. And for most of them, in a society where gender roles are restrictive, social consciousness goes along with family concerns. However, beyond this status which undoubtedly maintains a gender hierarchy mostly unfavorable to women and the family unity which is the aspiration of any African woman with a good traditional background, Maiguru's sense of sacrifice is sometimes triggering as we discover that, leaving major family initiatives to her husband, she does not freely use her salary which is recuperated by her husband for the wellbeing of the extended family.

Through this character, Dangarembga certainly dramatizes the situation of African women to whom education opens new horizons but who are not yet given the full consideration and respect they deserve in modern society. Her situation is the more shocking as she also unexpectedly bears the status of a voiceless woman, a woman who often refuses to speak and give her view point in important family situations. And when she dares to speak, her opinion is not taken into account. On the whole, Maiguru is to be seen as a subservient family provider who receives neither appreciation nor recognition from her relatives and what is more pathetic is that, like Christ on the cross, she stoically bears her burdens in silence. In Nfah-Abbenyi's general perception of women as victims of their femaleness and her classification between those who are entrapped and those who have escaped[20], Maiguru certainly belongs to the first category.

Nervous Conditions is to be considered within the period to which it refers, that is the transitional period between white colonization and the independence of Zimbabwe (1980) and the reality represented by Dangarembga may have evolved extensively. Indeed, unlike Adichie, Dangarembga's holistic vision is less apparent. However, this does not mean that she is ignorant and unconscious of African family realities and the values they convey. Dangarembga shows through her novel that she is not only concerned about the description of women's plight, the whole Zimbabwean society (and more specifically the family) is also at the heart of her literary creation. Indeed, she defends African family values such as unity, solidarity and togetherness. For instance, though Maiguru feels oppressed and seems to be reduced to silence by her husband, her rebellious attitude against him will be aborted.

20 Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi, *Gender in African Women's Writing: Identity, Sexuality, and Difference*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997, p. 61.

She stated that she was "tired of being nothing in a home" and that she was working herself "sick to support" the family (*NC*, 174). However, after a few days outside the homestead, she freely comes back home without being asked to. This brief show of partial independence highlights her capacity of freeing herself from gender expectations but this return is above all illustrative of her sense of self-sacrifice for the sake of family harmony.

III.2. Beyond Self-Sacrifice: Social Change and the Symbolism of Female Revolt

A social change refers to any significant transformations over time in behavior patterns and cultural values and norms. In the face of the implacable necessity of multidimensional changes, social transformation appears as the most recurrent representation of the transition from colonial to post-independence society in Zimbabwe. Many possibilities are envisaged through the portrayal of female and male characters in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. Unlike Maiguru, whose aborted revolt against Babamukuru suggests a kind of status quo in the challenge to patriarchy in Zimbabwean society, some female characters symbolize the emancipation of African women from strict traditional rules. This aspect of Dangarembga's literary achievement has received in-depth critical attention. Indeed, previous research on *Nervous Conditions* has shown that she has created female characters with strong possibilities of empowerment and above all a subversive will to challenge a social determinism that presents women as "the wretched of the earth" as Fanon would put it. Such is the case of "Negotiating Social Change in Tsitsi Dangerembga's *Nervous Conditions*" a collective article by D. A. Odoi, Lesibana Rafapa and E. K. Klu that analyses the concepts of "change" and "choice". Defining the purpose and the key terms of their research work, the three authors write:

> *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[21].

Though the article clearly states that it intends to demonstrate how the two concepts are central in Dangarembga's work, Tambu, the participant narrator and major character of the novel who forcefully symbolizes and embodies both the ideas of change and revolt has been surprisingly omitted and simply put at the margins. Of course, it is obvious that Lucia, Tambu's aunt, and Nyasha, Babamukuru's anglicized daughter, symbolize the African woman's quest for freedom in post-colonial African societies. Both of them are depicted as women challenging traditional order and established gender hierarchy. For instance, Nyasha comes into conflict with Babamukuru because she often talks back to him. She constantly refuses his absolute authority over her life, an attitude that infuriates him and results in a beating for her. Eventually she becomes so full of emotional conflicts connected with her need for independence from her authoritarian father that she develops an eating disorder. This is certainly synonymous with her refusal to absorb ideological subtracts from the patriarchal Shona society described by Dangarembga. For Grace Eche Okereke and Itang Ede Egbung, Nyasha's anorexia nervosa is "a physical reaction to her traumatized psychological state"[22]. However, taking her young age into account and her rebellious attitude, one can state that she is one of the female characters who relevantly symbolize the revolt against patriarchal order, a status she shares with Lucia.

Though Lucia is not central to the story, her portrayal certainly responds to the politics of visibility conveyed by African female writers since the end of the sixties. In spite of her indecent life and despite her social status, she does not hesitate to challenge the patriarchal order and would like her family to show respect to her in any circumstances. As an illustration, when ignored by Babamukuru, the head figure of the Sigauke family, she vividly and publicly reacts without reservation:

21 D. A. Odoi, Lesibana Rafapa & E. K. Klu, "Negotiating Social Change in Tsitsi Dangerembga's *Nervous Conditions*", *J Soc Sci*, 38(2), 2014, p. 152.

22 Grace Eche Okereke and Itang Ede Egbung, "Significant Others, Family Responsibility and the Freedom of the African Child in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*", *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol 5 No 20, September 2014, p. 2062.

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? (NC, 127)

Indeed, in the patriarchal culture represented by the author, speaking in such a way simply highlights a strong desire to challenge an established order. Lucia is a character refusing any compromise with societal values; she does not want to sacrifice anything for the sake of family harmony or for the defense of traditional moral values. Her defiance of the accepted order goes along with a challenge to traditional and gender hierarchies. As a matter of fact, in a society where male infidelity is widely tolerated and female fidelity highly required by moral standards, she changes sexual partners sleeping both with Takesure, her habitual companion, and Jeremiah, her sister's husband, both men belonging the same extended family. It stands to reason that this sexual freedom is described against the African conception of ethical behavior in which women have to sacrifice their freedom where men are given a kind of sexual licentiousness. Lucia can be apprehended as a symbol of a revolt against African (and specifically Shona) sexual values. Even if this seems to be out of the focus of Dangarembga's story, her portrayal enables us to envisage the idea that modern changes in sexual ideologies and practices are part of the whole process of female emancipation in post-colonial African societies.

Using Alice Walker's gender theory of *womanism* in *In Search of Our Mother's Garden*, one may describe Lucia as a womanist character, a term usually referring to the "outrageous, audacious or willful behavior" [23] of a woman. However, though certainly relevant, a womanist reading of Dangarembga's novel would probably limit the meaning of her message insofar as her vision, though not apparent, might be seen as a holistic one. Indeed, in spite of her rebellious nature and her great desire to freedom pushing her to break moral and social boundaries, Lucia will find a job as a cook at a girls' hostel only with the intervention of Babamukuru, the patriarchal figure whose authority

23 Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden: Womanist Prose*, London, The Women's Press, 1983, p. xi.

she seemed to defy with relative success. Through this action, one may be authorized to think that Dangarembga's perception of gender relations is not exclusive of women's cooperation with men in African modern societies. Her novel also highlights the importance of family and more importantly that of the extended family whose place should not be underestimated in social mutations undergone by African post-colonial societies.

With this in mind, we can put into perspective Tambu's relationships with her extended family, specifically with her uncle Babamukuru, and see how she is portrayed against stereotyped female representations in African women's writing. Refusing the status of illiterate woman that was predestined to her because of her being a female, she grows maize to raise funds for schooling and finally succeeds in reaching her goal thanks to the help of her uncle. As a participant narrator, she cannot be seen as an appendage to the story insofar as she is portrayed with an inner strength. More interestingly, one cannot complain that she could have been given much fuller realization insofar as she is not at the margins of visibility in Dangarembga's novel. On the contrary, her portrayal shows that the feminine subject cannot be defined in African women's writing by her passivity and silence as this was the case in male writing of the first two waves of African writers. However, while Nyasha's excessive freedom of mind isolates her from her family and Lucia's defiance of ethical values tends to marginalize her, Tambu's sense of respect gives her a family consciousness that allows her to have a deeper understanding of Shona social realities. We may agree with Nfah-Abbenyi when she writes about Tambu: "The fact that she is gendered female excludes her from education, to the boy's comparative advantage. Tambudzai's education can be suspended or terminated just because she is a woman, since women's education is thought to be purposeless"[24]. This analysis is relevant insofar as it reflects Tambu's own statement that "the needs and sensibilities of women in [her] family were not considered a priority, or even legitimate" (*NC*, p.12) and that women's oppression is universal. For instance, in a scene where her uncle reprimands his daughter for her tendency to spend too much time with men outside the family, she comments:

> *I followed her to the servants' quarter, where we sat, she smoking a cigarette held between shaking fingers and I feeling bad for her and thinking how dreadfully familiar that scene had been, with Babamukuru condemning Nyasha*

24 Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi, *Gender in African Women's Writing: Identity, Sexuality, and Difference*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997, p. 62.

to whoredom, making her a victim of her femaleness, just as I had felt victimised at home in the days when Nhamo went to school and I grew my maize. The victimisation, I saw, was universal. It didn't depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition. It didn't depend on any of the things I had thought it depended on. Men took it everywhere with them. Even heroes like Babamukuru did it. And that was the problem. (NC, 117-118)

If one might be allowed to put western feminist theories into relation with African women's representation of black women, one can assert that Tambu's words echo Simone de Beauvoir's thesis on *The Second Sex* on the universality of women's conditions. She thus demonstrates a striking feminist consciousness that cannot escape the attentive reader. However, despite her various statements that unfortunately extend women's image as passive agents in the double process of victimization from colonial to African male authorities, one might think that her image as the symbol of feminine initiative and above all the family consciousness that prompts her to collaborate with everyone in the extended family remain the most powerful of the symbols that she bears. Through them, her depiction goes beyond women's recurrent portrayal as sacrificial victims. More importantly, one can think that in spite of what the narrator

asserts in the passage mentioned above, her revolt against poverty (which initially denied her access to education) and her description of the destructive effects of colonialism, which reinforced women's marginalization and voicelessness, are more moving than her challenge against gender hierarchies.

CONCLUSION

Postcolonial Nigerian and Zimbabwean literatures are parts of the dynamic mainstream of African literature and share with the continental literature a concern to illuminate the direction for social change. Though this change is revealed through the depiction of social realities, it is the behavior of its actors that better illustrates the passage from a traditional society to a modern postcolonial one. Using a holistic approach that encompasses scapegoating and gender theories, we aimed to understand the interactions between Adichie's male and female characters in *Purple Hibiscus* and Dangarembga's vision of gender relations in *Nervous Conditions*. More specifically, we studied how each author's gender politics is related to the notion of self-sacrifice in their depiction of two

postcolonial societies which are largely influenced by Christian institutions. In Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, a variety of scenes illustrating the idea of self-sacrifice have been perceived through different characters that carry out significant rebellious actions leading to changes. Jaja and Kambili's personal sacrifices are characterized by actions of revolt against their father's authoritarianism and their mother's personal sacrifice is expressed through her devotion to take care of her family and her hopeless action that results in poisoning her husband. In the end, the family succeeded in dethroning the infallible father but at the same time, it is dismantled since Jaja goes to jail and his mother is unable to cope with her guilty feeling. In this novel, whether undertaken by men or women, self-sacrifice appears as an unavoidable route to overcome social and family status quo. The ambivalence and complexity of Adichie's characters and the way they achieve their realization certainly reveals Adichie's attempt to portray Nigerian society as a complex and syncretic entity.

Though comparatively showing a similar level of revolt, Dangarembga's characters in *Nervous Conditions* embody the principle of self-sacrifice which is more oriented to social changes than challenging oppressing gender hierarchies. Indeed, women such as Lucia, Mainini, Nyasha directly or indirectly help Tambu to escape from the burden of womanhood by the interface between colonialism and the traditional Shona patriarchy. Most of them show that freedom can only be reached through self-sacrifice. Unlike Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, *Nervous Conditions* offers many viable alternatives for social change insofar as female characters are offered means of resistance to patriarchy that take into account the historical and cultural contexts of Zimbabwean society. Moreover, these characters symbolizing revolt are shaped in such a way that one feels they have better learned the value of survival and relative empowerment over enactments of dramatic protest.

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