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An Asymmetrical Dialectic of Oppression and Act of Political Warfare in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*

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Abstract. The study locates an asymmetrical dialectic of oppression in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. It reveals Nyasha, Tambu, Lucia, Maiguru, and Ma'Shingayi's experiences with racist-sexist dimensions in the context of a typical Shona society in colonial Rhodesia and England. The study locates cultural and political inscriptions on women's body and sexuality and the mutually-constitutive intersections which socio-culturally and politically regulate women characters' beliefs and body. Nyasha goes against existing political dynamics and exhibits subversive body performativeness to claim/redefine her identity and sexuality. It bespeaks of an act of political warfare. She deliberately dismantles the barriers that prohibit entrance to domains reserved for specific gender and race. As such, Nyasha's relation with her society and the hierarchical structure of race and gender in which her identity is embedded unequivocally signify political implications. This is because Nyasha's race, gender, and sexuality constitute her social and political identities.

Key words: gender performativeness, body, witch archetype, tampon, eating disorders

1. INTRODUCTION

Tsitsi Dangarembga's 1988 novel, *Nervous Conditions*, has been explored from various viewpoints, such as autonomy and community, gender defiance, peripheral realism, hybrid identity, African femininities, etc. The attempt to explore Nyasha's biological body as an instrument of power and a site of political struggle is the point of departure of the study. This qualitative research, based on content analysis within the theoretical framework of intersectionality and gender performativity, makes an attempt to show how Nyasha struggles to get rid of the socio-culturally shaped and historically colonized/racialized body. Instead of adhering to politically prescribed code of maintaining her body (as a political entity), she struggles to maintain her body as a self-embodied/regulated entity. What Nyasha eats, how much she eats, what she reads, what she wears, how she dresses, what she uses during menstruation period, how she

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looks at tampon, how she shapes her body, how she pleases her body, her habitual activity, and her daily performance through which she attends to her body account for totality of her body. Though her body is subject to cultural/political specificities, she tries to get rid of imposing specificities. As such, she challenges the maintenance of power relations which might be termed as an act of political warfare. An asymmetrical power dynamics keeps black women at the periphery and men at the centre. Hence, the concept of centre dominance-peripheral dependency is essentially political.

2. INTERSECTIONALITY AND GENDER PERFORMATIVITY: AN OVERVIEW

The study uses Angela Davis and bell hooks' theory of intersectionality to analyze socio-political stratifications which are interconnected and responsible for the discursive oppression and political exclusion of black women from history. Davis (1990, 35-47) maintains that society is characterized by complex structures reflecting an interconnectedness of race, gender, and class oppression. Working class women's experiences necessarily place sexism in its context of class exploitation and black women's experiences further contextualize gender oppression within the realities of racism. hooks (1982, 6) criticizes the way black women are "dually victimized by racist and sexist oppression". hooks (1982, 7) argues that sexism operates both independently and simultaneously with racism to oppress black women. When black people are talked about, the focus tends to be on black men; and when women are talked about, the focus tends to be on white women.

The study also uses Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. Butler (1993, xii) asserts that performativity must be understood as a reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names. Butler (1990, 7-8) claims that gender is not only a cultural interpretation of sex; it is an apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. Just like gender, body is also constructed as are the myriad bodies that constitute the domain of gendered subjects. She asserts that bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender. Butler (2004, 184) maintains that gender is performative and that one can "undo gender in an effort to foreground sexuality". Gender, as Butler (2004, 42) argues, is a mechanism by which notions of masculine/feminine are produced and naturalized. Gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized. The very apparatus that seeks to install the norm also works to undermine that very installation. To keep the term, gender, apart from both masculinity and femininity is to safeguard a theoretical perspective by which one might offer an account of how the binary of masculine/feminine comes to exhaust the semantic field of gender.

3. COLONIALISM, RACE, AND GENDER: A POLITICAL MATRIX OF OPPRESSION

The narrative of Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* unfolds the lives of Nyasha, Tambu, and their family members in England and in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) between 1960s and 1970s. Tambu's narration reveals a pervasive influence of patriarchy and racial hierarchy in the context of post-colonial Rhodesia. The Shona people were forcefully displaced from the centre to periphery by an enactment of law, the Land Apportionment Act of 1930. The law mandated segregation and maintained racial hierarchy. It divided

the territory between whites and blacks. Developed towns were designated as white areas, whereas undeveloped townships were given to blacks on rent. "Education in Rhodesia was patently unequal. Until 1979, the country operated two school systems, one for the Africans, and a second, infinitely better financed one for the non-Africans" (Moss and Valestuck 2000, 299). The Compulsory Education Act of 1939 required all white children to attend school for free; on the contrary, education was not mandatory for the black children. If any black child wanted to obtain an education, his/her family had to pay the school fees. Despite the poverty, Tambu's parents were able to afford school fees for one child (either Nhamo or Tambu). They deliberately chose their son, Nhamo. This is how sexism militates against the interest of a black girl. hooks (1982, 6) says that black women had been asked to fade into the background to allow the spotlight to shine solely on black men. Since the Siguake patriarchal society was gender-biased, it prioritized sons, such as Nhamo, Chido, over daughters, such as Tambu, Nyasha. Tambu, however, wanted to grow and sell mealies, thereby earning money to pay her school fees. That was why Tambu's teacher, Mr. Matimba, took her to Umtali to sell her green corns. There they came across a white woman, Doris, who (out of pity, not out of white guilt) donated ten pounds sterling to pay for Tambu's education. The act, thoroughly laden with racist assumptions, signifies a racial performativeness. It was the white who decided for the black regarding paying mandatory school fees. Again, it was the white who made Tambu feel a sense of inferiority. At this point, some basic questions do emerge: How does it feel like to be a black in white spaces? How does it feel to be a black under the domination/at the mercy of the white? It bespeaks of racial categorization which is produced and perpetuated through discursive power relations.

In the novel, Tambu was only taken from the rural homestead to England for obtaining an education, when Nhamo was died. Unlike Tambu, Nhamo was always pampered as a boy who was thought to be worthy of commendation. Colonialism itself is political in character as it controls the colony by means of a political administration. Colonialism intersects with racism, racism with sexism, or vice versa, and thus, they give rise to triple oppression. Interrelationships of these processes seem to be unrelated. Actually, they are intertwined in the political system. Colonialism is infused with the sense of superiority/inferiority and so are racism and sexism. Colonialism is interconnected with racism in that both drive African people towards self-hatred and perpetuate class differences as well as gender discrimination/gender-based violence. Dangarembga's 2018 novel, *This Mournable Body*, a sequel to *Nervous Conditions*, also reveals class differences which become acute after the destructive guerrilla war lasting over 15 years between the white Rhodesian army and the native black nationalists. Tambu in *Mournable Body* wanted to rent a room from a white woman. The maid of the white woman chased Tambu away. This incident explicitly suggests proliferation of racial differences. A variety of settings in *Nervous Conditions*, like the rural Siguake homestead, Babamukuru's house, Umtali mission school, Young Ladies College of the Sacred Heart in England, reinforce class and other differences. The aforementioned settings corroborate a sexist-racist ordering of the society. The system leaves black students (like Tambu), girls/women at Siguake homestead and Babamukuru's house in a vulnerable/disadvantaged position and victimizes them.

Colonialism undermines African people's struggle for economic and political equality. Neither economic, nor socio-cultural progress, nor racial and gender equality can be achieved while a society is burdened with colonialism/colonial legacy. As such,

the processes are interrelated to affect societal relations. As Davis (1990, 82) claims, “[i]nstitutionalized racism and sexism distort social relations”. Her claim finds a higher degree of commonality in the relationships between Jeremiah and Ma’Shingayi (Tambu’s parents) and Babamukuru and Maiguru (Nyasha’s parents). The sister-in-laws’/female parents’, such as Ma’Shingayi and Maiguru, experiences of sexism incorporate a relatively congruent form of oppression. They were exploited under Siguake patriarchy which prevented them from exercising their basic rights and freedom within their family and society. The Shona society was governed by several customary normativities. The Shona marriage custom of *roora*, bride-wealth, legitimized the husband’s authority/right to his wife’s labor, income, body, her biological children, and as such, her whole being.

The aforementioned customary marriage law deprived the women of their legal and moral rights to their own lives and children as well as the decisions to be made for those children. Ma’Shingayi and Maiguru were no exception in that regard. Unlike the former, Maiguru was highly educated and chose teaching profession. She had a bicultural self (Western and African) which affected her self-perception. She confronted her husband and insisted on getting recognition from the family. However, she failed to get what she wanted. The proliferation of gender-based oppression finds better expression when they were conditioned to unflinchingly obey their respective husbands even at the cost of their identity and dignity in the family. Ma’Shingayi’s forced childbearing one after another, stillbirths in her womb and deaths of her babies in infancy, her refusal to send Nhamo to England, and the juvenile death of Nhamo bear witness to the brunt of complex oppressive forces. Tambu’s mother instructed Tambu to learn how to carry out “womanhood” which was/is/will be “a heavy burden” (Dangarembga 1989, 16).¹ Moyana (1994, 37) criticizes patriarchy as a “real problem” which made lives of women characters miserable. Ma’Shingayi and Maiguru (notice we do not even hear their names) end up locked up in their situations. Being a highly educated woman, Maiguru was left to take a single profession that was teaching. Since she had no right to her salary, she never received her hard-earned salary. Nevertheless, she tried hard to abide by gender normativities. Her gendered identity dictated her to carry out gender performativities without adhering to her desire. She labored to earn money, feed, clothe, care for her children and husband. In these capacities, she contributed to economy by means of her production, reproduction, and consumption. Thus, she became an active laborer within the economy and social world. Her higher education was only restricted to teaching as well as compulsory household activities. Such restriction definitely affirms a racial gap in employment sector. Butler (1990, 3) contends that “gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities”. As such, it becomes quite impossible to separate gender from cultural and political intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained. Butler’s interpretation of gender in its intersection with cultural and political system shares a commonality with Davis.

Davis (1990, 35) argues that working-class women and women of color, in particular, confront sexist oppression in a way that reflects the real and complex objective interconnections between economic, racial, and sexual oppression. Tambu and Nyasha’s lives including multi-racial colonial education remarkably contextualize Davis’ claim. The state-sanctioned curriculum was being sexualized both in racially segregated

¹ Only page numbers will be placed from *Nervous Conditions* onwards.

Rhodesia and England. The girl students had to learn cooking, needlework as well as strict codes of conduct to be good Christian wives to their respective husbands. Tambu's experience of a racist environment at the Young Ladies' College of the Sacred Heart reveals her nervous conditions in the real sense of the term. As Zulfiqar (2016, 120) maintains, Tambu's privileged education becomes a cause for her distress, terror, and torment. This is because Tambu along with a few other African girls were scared of crossing the invisible yet inviolable racial lines. The pervasiveness of racist attitudes made them humiliated and demoralized to a large extent. The white students railed against the black students. The racialized black bodies had been differentiated from the superior white bodies. This might be called a continued perpetuation of racial performativeness. Since such classification was established by law, it was essentially political. Though Tambu stood first at O-level examination, she was deprived of her credit for academic achievement. Instead of Tambu, the name of her white classmate, Tracey, was entered in the honor roll. Tambu became increasingly aware of the system and realized that the white gave her a scholarship (just like Doris' handout for Tambu's school fees at Umtali) not in an effort to show their generosity but to show their racial superiority. Besides, in doing so, the white also wanted proper submission and loyalty from the black. To sustain master-slave binary, the presence of slaves was crucial. If there were no blacks, the whites would cease to keep hold of their superior status. As a headmaster of a racially segregated mission school, Babamukuru arrived at a thorough understanding of racial injustices. Like Tambu, he never raised voice against the prevailing unfairness; he remained obedient and even a nurturer to white laws instead. As by now he internalized racism, just like sexism. Such internalization made him a true representative of racist-sexist society as well as a victim of the system. He was a nurturer of the interconnected system.

4. UNDOING GENDER PERFORMATIVITY AND SEXUAL FLUIDITY

As hooks (1982, 17) maintains, African women are schooled in the art of obedience to a higher authority by the tradition of society. By this, she points out an undeclared association between racist and sexist socio-political ordering of the society. Nyasha's birth in an asymmetrical system (racist-sexist order of society) legitimized the society's or her parents' use of power to subdue her body performativeness. Being a Siguake woman, Nyasha's mother disallowed Nyasha's use of tampon during the latter's menstruation period. More often than not, most of the African mothers refuse to give tampons to their daughters. Maiguru, however, thought that use of tampon was inappropriate. She never said that it was an offensively shaped object like a penis. The use of tampon literally means pushing it to penetrate vagina. In this capability and by implication, it is a phallic symbol. Nyasha's sexual intercourse with the phallus (tampon) has an overtone of a kind of hegemonic apparatus. Butler (1993, 91) calls the apparatus "heterosexualization of identification". Thus, the intercourse/identification crosses gender boundaries and reinstates the body beyond prescribed gender performativeness. Maiguru, however, believed that a virgin must retain her virginity before her marriage. If Nyasha used tampon, she would lose her virginity to a tampon. Maiguru emphasized, "nice girls did not use them [tampon]" (96). Maiguru thought that body performativeness must be regulated to confirm culturally prescribed gender roles. Nyasha, however,

believed in freedom of her body performativeness of course in conformity with her desire. She wanted to decide whens, wheres, and hows to use/satisfy her body of her own free will.

At Babamukuru's house, Tambu was encouraged by Nyasha to use tampon instead of napkins. So, Tambu used it but with discomfort; in contrast, Nyasha used tampons as an act of sex and gender defiance. As Tambu narrated, Nyasha's menstruation period was started nine days early. At this, Nyasha simultaneously felt sad and good-humored and articulated, "I wish I had done it" brandishing a tampon at Tambu. "[T]he only thing that will ever get up there at this rate is this! Honestly, even on my wedding day they'll be satisfied only if I promise not to enjoy it" (118). This statement makes it clear that Nyasha used it as a penetrative vaginal sex toy. Sexual Offences Act of 1957, an act of South African Parliament, prohibited unnatural sex acts, such as sex toys, lesbian sex, among other offences, but with an exception to vaginal heterosexual sex act. The way and the extent Nyasha-Tambu shared a bed/a life/lesbian inclination and the motive with which Nyasha, in particular, used tampons effectively threatened the existing political dicta. On that account, the act was a definitive mark of a political warfare against her family and society. As Davis (1990, 22) argues, the roots of sexism and homophobia are found in the same economic and political institutions that serve as the foundation of racism and the same extremist circles that inflict violence on people of color are responsible for the eruptions of violence inspired by sexist and homophobic biases. The roots of these political institutions/biases are also found in education system. The biased education system creates unjust social relations and perpetuates differences. House constructions (developed vs. undeveloped towns) and painting (white vs. other colors) manifest racial differences. Tambu knows about these differences and mentions, "Nyasha was persistently seeing and drawing attention to things you would rather not talk about" (96).

Drawing on Butler, Nyasha's undoing of gender performativity can be contextualized in particular reference to her relation with a white young man, Andrew Baker (henceforth Baker). Nyasha was capable enough to "undo restrictively normative conceptions of sexual and gendered life" (Butler 2004, 1). Nyasha was a brilliant student who studied a lot. Except her academic excellence, she frustrated her parents, especially her father. The way she talked with people, befriended Baker, the outfits she wore, cigarettes she smoke, and all her social performances were detested by her parents. Nyasha liked to avoid her parents and their friends outside the church "because they were bound to say something offensive, like complaining that her gym-slip was too short" (99). Her parents felt embarrassed for her undoing of gender roles and Nyasha felt indignant at their reactions. Both the parents and the daughter maintained social distance as much as they practically could. As such, sexism gradually increased the gap in their relationships and it also moved forward to take on a threatening shape. hooks (1982, 15) claims, "[s]exism was an integral part of the social and political order white colonizers brought with them from their European homelands". This politically-sponsored system (sexism) disapproved of gender/sexual fluidity. Nyasha performed her bodily acts beyond sexist law; whereas her parents were truly attuned to the systematic specificities of a gender. Baker used to teach Nyasha new dance moves. She splendidly accomplished those moves with her excellent rhythm.

Nyasha enjoyed a lot of time with Baker and she was late to return Babamukuru's house at night. After she reached home, the father with disdain said, "No decent girl

would stay out alone, with a boy, at that time of the night...she has dared to challenge me” (113-115). He thrashed her head and banged it against the floor. On top of that, he leveled her as a “whore” (114). At that, Nyasha defended her reasons and punched him in the face. He declared that there could not be “two men in this house” (115) and threatened to kill her. That was because she played the role reversal and refused to let sexist-racist ordering of the system define her sexuality and body performativeness. As Butler (2004, 9) maintains, gender emerges as a political issue bearing a specific set of social and physical risks. Unlike Baker in his father’s house, Nyasha in her father’s house suffered gender-based violence. She was threatened to perform the established gender role of being “a decent girl” (113). hooks (1982, 7) says, black women were told that they should find their dignity not in liberation from sexist oppression, but in how well they could adjust, adapt, and cope. Against all expectations of the family, Nyasha ceased to adjust with the system and even she went on undoing gender performativeness. Her life was an instance of gender transgression or “undoing gender” in the words of Butler. Being influenced by Nyasha’s transgression, Maiguru realized that she was reduced to a mere domestic/sex slave in her husband’s home in England. Maiguru mastered the courage to argue with Babamukuru as regards Tambu’s parents’ Christianized wedding (ridiculous and frivolous wedding as she said) and his punishing of Tambu for not attending the wedding. In an attempt to protest against the sexist treatment of her husband, one day she left home. She returned home again but at the request of her husband.

Nyasha’s incessant act of undoing gender manifests in her reading of D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*.² People persecuted the novel for its politicized sex and identity. The book explicitly discussed a woman’s freedom of body performativity against the rules/expectations of the society. Thus, the persecution went beyond the textuality and ended up at persecuting free thought, sexual freedom, and politically approved inequity/oppression based on gender. Schwartz (2005, 110) says, Lawrence was a spokesman for the body’s pleasures. Nyasha’s parents found the book in her dresser. It means they were spying on her daily activities as the father spied on her to find that Nyasha was “staying out alone with a boy” (116). They, particularly the father, thought that the reading of such a book was against decency. It would “spoil” (81) their children and stimulate them to break ethical and legal codes of a Shona society.

Values of Shona society disapproved of even uttering sexual taboos, let alone breaking them. Nyasha talked about sexual intercourse with Tambu with the subtlety of an ungendered pronoun “it” as in her expression previously quoted, “I wish I had done it” (118) before (sex act prior to her period). On another level, it becomes difficult to understand whether her partner(s) was/were boy(s), girl(s), or tampon(s) with whom/which Nyasha used to/wanted to have a sexual intercourse. Her father warned her about her wanton behavior with strangers as he said, “Today this one, tomorrow that one (113)”. Her use of “it” again in her confessional reply to her father, “I was doing it, whatever you’re talking about” (113) is ungendered as much as her father’s use of “one” (presumed sex partner(s) of Nyasha) twice. The gender-neutral pronouns clarified nothing

² Weisser 2005, 7-12. This erotic fiction was privately published in 1928 in Italy and in 1929 in France, and an unexpurgated edition was published in the UK in 1960. It was banned for obscenity in several countries like the USA and Canada.

of the gender of the referent. As such, she desexed language and split an intersection of the materiality of her biological body with gender performativity prescribed by dominant politics. As Butler (1993b, xii) argues, bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled. In fact, bodies cannot be gender bound. Her actions, however, were socially restricted. Nevertheless, Nyasha always wanted to be an independent girl who would control her body.

An act of shattering socio-cultural and political signifiability of gender performativeness also finds an instance in the life of Lucia in *Nervous Conditions*. As rumored, she was being a sexual temptress. She lured men, not vice versa. Being an unmarried woman, Lucia (Ma'Shingayi's sister) got pregnant. But, surprisingly she was not repentant. It was against socio-religious and moral code of a Shona society; but, she was not at all worried to legitimize her marriage with Jeremiah and Takesure (a cousin of Babamukuru and Jeremiah). Takesure and Jeremiah were suspected to be the father of Lucia's unborn child. Butler's idea can best be applied in the context of Lucia who transgressed the specified boundary. "[T]he matter of bodies will be indissociable from the regulatory norms that govern their materialization and the signification of those material effects" (Butler 1993, xii). The desire of her biological body ceased to comply with gender specificities. Instead of adhering to established code, she adhered to her passions with which her body materialized the sex act(s) with someone. It was rumored that she had sexual relations with others. Jeremiah wanted to marry Lucia for the prospect of economic success. She was an exceptionally skilled and hardy laborer. When it came to take Lucia as a second wife, a constellation of economic factors, such as production, reproduction, and consumption, was embedded in his mind.

Just as Maiguru's economic service to Babamukuru, Jeremiah dreamt of marrying Lucia for her agricultural skills and her income. Legal rights to Lucia's child would be given to him. Jeremiah said that "the child might be a boy" (127) who would be useful for him as he had daughters only. Jeremiah's desire to marry Lucia was an abstract rhetoric of choice which was shattered by an instrumental rhetoricity of Lucia. She questioned the capabilities of Jeremiah and threatened to take Jeremiah's wife, Lucia's sister, with her. She thought that Jeremiah failed to keep his wife happy; just the same way Takesure failed to give his wives proper lives. Lucia said, "[w]hatever he [Takesure] can do for me, I can do better for myself" (145). Lucia publicly and physically humiliated Takesure by grabbing his ear. Being infuriated, Takesure spread the rumor that Lucia was a witch. It reflects his deep-rooted cultural tensivity about a woman's autonomous choice to defy law and to believe in her own capability. Her denial to take Jeremiah/Takesure as her husband was her victory against her societal battle over commodity production control. She exhibited gender defiance against the Shona law by thinking that a smooth operation of economy could single-handedly be carried out by a woman. Such a transgressive belief/confidence was defiled by fabricating a witch archetype to her being.

As Moss and Valestuck (2000, 297) say, "[t]here is still among the Shona a very widespread belief in witches, who are blamed for illness, death, and other misfortune". Some questions do arise as regards witch archetype: Were/are most of the alleged witches women? Were/are the alleged witches rebels? Were/are the alleged witches inherently transgressive? Was not Lucia a black woman? Was not she a rebel/subversive? Was not Lucia a victim of intersectional oppression? The possible answers to these questions are supposed to be in the affirmative. The answer to the last question must be explained in more depth. That is why intertextual references are deliberately being used so that readers

can connect with witch archetype. Lucia's case in *Nervous Conditions* might be understood in the context of Federici's *Caliban and the Witch*.³ European colonizers brought witch stereotype to Africa. Federici (2004, 13) says that the persecution of the witches in Europe was as important as colonization and the expropriation of the European peasantry from its land was for the development of capitalism. A witch stereotype was essentially aimed at destroying the control that women had exercised over their reproductive function and served to pave the way for the development of a more oppressive patriarchal regime. The roots of colonialism, capitalism, and sexism can be detected in the identical socio-economic and political system that serves as the base of racism. Thus, colonialism, capitalism, and sexism as triple oppressive forces stand in an intersection with racism. They mutually constitute/inflict four-fold oppression/violence on black women. hooks is quite right when she contends that an accurate picture of the status of a black woman cannot be formed by simply/separately focusing on racial hierarchies or gender roles assigned under patriarchy (hooks 1982, 12). Failing to acknowledge Lucia's individualism, autonomy of her body and decision making, spirit of self-dependence, and psychological/ economic strength, the typical Shona society condemned her as an unwed evil mother/witch. With these observations in mind, it can be said that witch image exacerbates the asymmetrical dynamics of oppression.

5. EATING DISORDERS: CULTURAL-SPECIFIC PRACTICE

Sexual temptress archetype came into view in the sexist-racist society. The archetype was used to legitimize sexual oppression on black women. Apart from Lucia, Nyasha was considered to be a sexual temptress because of her disobedience to cultural norms. According to Shona customary law, there were some cultural specifications, related to body image, which a girl had to confirm to be marriageable. When it comes to a girl's fully developed breasts, round buttocks, and overall a curvy body, the girl (as Tambu) fulfils the standard to be marriageable. An opposite frame of body (as Nyasha), such as slender breasts and buttocks, is not an approved body image for a potential Shona bride. As Gordon (2002, 9) puts it, traditional ideal body image among Africans has always tended towards a large and full form. In African religious and cultural symbolism, fatness in the female is closely tied with fertility. Hence, they practiced the ritual of fattening which was applied to pubescent girls in order to make them marriageable. Fatness goal was required to be achieved by Nyasha just like Tambu. Nyasha achieved her fitness goal instead of the one prescribed by Shona law. Fatness vs. fitness brings an ideal Shona eating habit vs. eating disorder (anorexia and bulimia⁴) to light.

At this point, questions do arise like, whether Nyasha was suffering from eating disorder or she was opposed to the maintenance of Shona body image. In an effort to free her body from cultural and political discourse, Nyasha disapproved of a typical body image. She perceived that slenderness was equated with competence, self-control, and body autonomy, thereby dismantling the barriers that prohibited entrance to domains

³ Federici 2004, 239. Witch-hunting took hold in Africa, where it survives today as a key instrument of division in many countries especially those once implicated in the slave trade, like Nigeria and Southern Africa.

⁴ Alexander-Mott and Lumsden 2015, xv. Anorexia and bulimia represent distinct diagnostic categories of eating disorders.

reserved for specific sex (male) as well as specific culture (white race). Thus, a political warfare was being waged over the autonomy of her body performativeness. Nyasha was opposed to Shona law which sanctioned a curvy body. By implication, she revolted against the sexist crystallization of the Shona culture. That was why when everyone expressed an admiration and approval of Tambu's body (ideally a plump body), Nyasha expressed an aversion to her large body and also felt pity for Tambu. As Tambu narrated, "She [Nyasha] felt pity about the backside [Tambu's buttocks]. It's rather large" (91). Nyasha was on diet and was against any sexualized and racialized attitudes which could define her body. As Szabo (2002, 26) contends, if the central dynamic of an eating disorder is an identity struggle, then this struggle could be defined as a desire to embrace a newfound pride in being African. For Nyasha, eating disorder was her own choice to regulate her body. To her, anorexia and bulimia could never be culture specific - a contention that reversed the arguments of the white psychiatrist in *Nervous Conditions*.

From the beginning, Babamukuru was disappointed to see Nyasha's anorexic and bulimic tendencies. As Bordo (2004, 54) maintains, eating disorders emerged as an overdetermined crystallization of cultural anxiety. A gradual shrinking of Nyasha's body into a skinny figure perturbed her father with greater reasons. At Siguake homestead, he sighed in real distress and said, "Is she [Nyasha] the type to bring us a son-in-law? No, she is not the type. And even if she did, it would be a question of feeding the cattle [*roora*] - the man would soon want them back" (131). In spite of her parents' suppression and dismissal, she tried to use her body according to her will. As a result, Nyasha's proclivity for anorexia and bulimia made her psychologically and physically debilitated still more than ever. Maiguru's brother who stayed in Salisbury managed to make an appointment there and then with a white psychiatrist. As Tambu said, "But the psychiatrist said that Nyasha could not be ill, that Africans did not suffer in the way [pinpointing her anorexia and bulimia]" (201). He stated that Nyasha "was making a scene" (201) and suggested the parents that they "should take her home and be firm with her" (201). On that score, the white psychiatrist labeled a black girl like Nyasha as a racialized body/subject. The way by which a racialized body becomes a politicized object itself is engrafted with an asymmetric dialectic of oppression on a black girl.

Bordo (2004, 40) states that we are swaddled in culture from the moment we are designated one sex or the other, one race or another. These racialized and sexualized hierarchies involve several axes of power relations. Bordo (2004, 37) maintains, an escalation of eating disorders into a significant social phenomenon arises at the intersection of patriarchal culture and postindustrial capitalism. In particular reference to eating disorders (as a social practice), Bordo asserts that patriarchal construct and postindustrial capitalism stand in an intersectional relation. In addition to this/ in the case of Nyasha, here it is germane to add hooks' (1982, 12) argument that "race and sex are inseparable". The white psychiatrist refused to treat Nyasha as he believed that eating disorders were culture specific. He racialized the disease as he thought that eating disorders were superior (white) culture bound. He did not treat Nyasha and even did not allow her admission in a clinic. Thus, he deprived Nyasha of getting her basic right to health, because she was a girl and a black on top of that.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Sexual and racial categorizations and their mutual consistency spell out an upsurge in particular reference to the intersectional experiences of the women characters in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous conditions*. A political arbitrariness made the hierarchies asymmetrical and perilous for black women characters like Nyasha, Tambu, Lucia, Maiguru, and Ma'Shingayi in the novel. Nyasha and Lucia effectively undid gender performativity and threatened the socio-politically prescribed laws of Shona society. That was why they were chastised by their family and society. Nevertheless, they never ceased to stick to their passion/desire. Their autonomous bodies, as they believed, never complied with established specificities/normativities by which their materialization was obligated. Thus, a political warfare was being waged over the autonomy of their body performativeness. Tambu's scholarship from colonial white authority and the white psychiatrist's refusal to treat Nyasha's eating disorders manifest the white's racialized treatment of black girls. As hooks (1982, 6) puts it, black women victimized by the dual impact of sexist and racist oppression were seen as insignificant. Women's suffering however great could not take precedence over male pain. In accordance with this argument, it can be deduced that black women's social status and tribulation could not take precedence over the status and pain of white men. To sum up, the roots of colonialism and racism are conjoined with the same socio-economic and political systems that serve as the cornerstone of sexism.

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