

# Interrogating Gender Socialisation In *Nervous Conditions*, *The Book Of Not* And *This Mournable Body*

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## ABSTRACT

*This study interrogates the socialisation that boys and girls go through and how it contributes to the inequalities which exist between men and women as presented in the three selected texts. The study traces the trajectory of the characters from childhood in Nervous Conditions to the time when they are adults in This Mournable Body. Employing the STIWANISM theory to the analysis of the texts, the study advocates for gender equality. The study employed content analysis to the trilogy to determine how boys and girls are socialised and how their socialisation results in inequalities between men and women. The study established that education, assertiveness and the struggle for freedom are gendered in the Shona culture as presented in the three novels. The study concluded that apart from socialisation, there are other socio-political factors such as colonial racism and patriarchy which cause the inequalities between men and women.*

## KEYWORDS

*Socialisation, Gender, Equality & Stewanism*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Some scholars have interrogated the inequalities between men and women and they have linked it to patriarchy, a system of society in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it. In pre-colonial African society, which was largely patriarchal, certain norms and behaviours were deemed feminine or masculine. Young boys were socialised to be typically masculine and girls, the weaker sex, were confined to the home space.

Moreover, given that the world has changed from being simply a patriarchal type of society to a more complex society, it is interesting to investigate the extent to which the socialisation of boys and girls in Dangarembga's novels might have had an influence on their self-realisation or self-actualisation at a later stage. The question here is that can patriarchy still be blamed for the inequalities or there are other factors to consider? Hence, despite the laudable critical contributions on these works, this paper argues that gender socialisation concerns in Dangarembga's texts have not generated a significant number of critical responses. This study seeks to interrogate gender socialisation in Tsitsi Dangarembga's trilogy which begins with [1] *Nervous Conditions* (1988), followed by [2] *The Book of Not* (2006) and lastly, [3] *This Mournable Body* (2018).

There is an imbalance in the division of gender roles in the Zimbabwean Shona culture, since society's expectations about gender roles seem to advantage/benefit boys and men. The imbalance is evident in the male and female characters in Dangarembga's trilogy. The study thus sought to question whether the inequalities between men and women are a

result of gender socialisation, or a result of other factors such as socio-economic and political factors. The study therefore, problematised the gender socialisation process to show how it influences male and female characters at a later stage.

## 2. MASCULINITIES AND FEMININITIES IN DANGAREMBGA'S TRILOGY

The Shona society associates specific behaviour with gender. Mutunda (2009) [4] states that unlike maleness, which is a biological state, masculinity is a gender identity category that is constructed socially and interpreted from a cultural perspective. The same definition can be used to explain what femininity is. Unlike femaleness, which is a biological state, femininity is a gender identity category that is constructed socially and interpreted from a cultural perspective. Concurring with Mutunda (2009) [4], Stets and Burke (n.d.) state that "femininity and masculinity are rooted in the social (one's gender) rather than the biological (one's sex). Societal members decide what being male or female means (e.g., dominant or passive, unemotional or emotional)..." (n.p.). The problem with these gender identity categories is that people may exhibit the opposite of what society expects them to be or do as males or as females. For example, not all men are brave, some men are emotional, vis-a-vis not all women are emotional, as some of them are brave. As such, the present study argues that though society defines what is feminine and what is masculine, however, what men can do, women can also do as both feminine and masculine features can be exhibited by one person alternatively, and some of these features are discussed below.

### 2.1. Gendered education

In the Shona society as presented in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) [1], school is categorised as masculine. Nhamo, a boy child is taken to school and Tambu, a girl child is not. Tambu's aunt, Maiguru can relate to the marginalisation that Tambu experiences with regards to her education. Maiguru's husband and family were disapproving of her studies. When Tambu's brother Nhamo dies, Babamukuru raises the question of emancipation of that branch of the family, as he says, "it is unfortunate that there is no male child to take this duty, to take the job of raising the family from hunger..." (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 56) [1]. Tambu's father agrees and says that Tambudzai's sharpness with her books is no use because it will just benefit strangers. More so, Jeremiah and Mai need help from Babamukuru who is educated and is working to take their children to school because they are poor and none of them has finished school. They had already dropped Tambu out of school before Babamukuru returned from Britain. In a flash back, in *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu says that her mother only went to school till grade seven, then she got married and her poor father was glad to marry her off because he was going to get cattle from the *lobola*.

Tambu is not happy with being confined at home, she wants to be somebody in future. She is motivated by her aunt, Maiguru who is a teacher at the mission school. However, when Babamukuru raises the question of who will lift the family from poverty, he overlooks Tambu, a girl child; he seems to forget that Maiguru, his wife, is a teacher. This is proof enough that women too are as capable as men of providing for the family if given the opportunity to develop their potential. Taking the boy, Nhamo to school and denying Tambu her right to education is not what Stiwanism advocates for. Her father says Tambu's education will benefit strangers because he reasons that she will eventually get married into a different family. This is the concern of the theory of Stiwanism, because education will not just benefit others, it will benefit her as it will enable her to be independent. More so, education is a human right and the girl child is a human being who deserves to have her own life as well and that is what Stiwanism advocates for. This

theory contends that the mentality that girls should only go to school when there is money to waste and no work to be done at home or in the farms and markets should be changed.

Tambu is only given an opportunity to go to school when her brother dies. She starts her story in *Nervous Conditions* with a shocking statement as she says, “I was not sorry when my brother died” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 1) [1]. Tambu is benumbed in the face of her brother’s death and she is without emotions and human warmth. It pains her that she is denied her right for education on the basis of femaleness. The childhood one receives affects one’s psyche and one’s development as Tambudzai develops hatred towards her father and brother because of the unfair treatment that she is given as a girl child. Before she is given an opportunity by her uncle, Tambu finds an alternative in order to continue her primary school at Rutivi. She makes a garden of maize which she sells in order to raise her school funds and Tambu also has a sharp brain for books.

Tambu sees education as the only way to escape from the suffering of womanhood and from poverty but her father thinks that education will make her quite useless for the real task of feminine living. In *The Book of Not* when Tambu is now at Sacred Heart, it is evident that she has a sharp brain for school, commitment and determination, so she cannot only be left to the kitchen when she can actually do better than that. This relates to the fact that “the girl child is disadvantaged by the fact of her gender. Her role has always been confined to domesticity and excluded from more important pursuits like education” (Pasi, 2012, p. 182) [5]. As a girl child, Tambu is expected to learn the feminine roles from her mother and from women around her. Such roles include child rearing, cooking, cleaning and cultivating the fields; these are the chores that we see Tambu do at home when her brother is going to school and she does not. It is worth noting that Stiwanism is not against girls and women doing domestic chores, however, it argues that these roles should not be forced on them such that they cannot participate in doing other things of their own interest which are beneficial such as getting educated and getting a formal job. Maiguru studied up to master’s level and she is a teacher at the mission school alongside her husband, and that is what Stiwanism advocates for. However, with her qualifications, she should also be considered for a leadership position and not be discriminated against for being female.

With her education as presented in *This Mournable Body*, Tambu gets a job at the advertising agency, then a teaching job, later at Tracey’s tourism company, and all these jobs would not have been possible without education. Even though there are times when she is without a job, it is because of other factors such as racism and the economic system in postcolonial Zimbabwe. Denying a girl education and allowing a boy education means inequality which results in inequalities between men and women. It means that only men will be employed in the formal labour markets and it also means that only men will have the knowledge to take decisions at home and at national level. Therefore, in order to achieve equality between men and women, girls should be given their right for education.

## 2.2. Gendered assertiveness

Apart from education, to be assertive or assertiveness is a character which is categorised as masculine. Nyasha and Lucia are very assertive hence they are considered to be deviant by the Shona society. Nyasha is outspoken, and so is Lucia. In their patriarchal culture, women are expected to be silent and to be passive members of the society and let the men to be in control of everything. Babamukuru, Nyasha’s father, considers this assertiveness as “a disease which must be cured even if it meant violent intimidation” (Wendt, as cited by Respaut, 2007, p. 9) [6]. Similarly, Babamukuru physically abuses his daughter in an attempt to silence her but she does not conform.

Nyasha is an open minded, brilliant and assertive girl. She is well aware of women's plight which is perpetuated by the Shona patriarchal culture and she knows that her mother, Maiguru, is entrapped in her marriage even though she does not speak out. Ogunديpe-Leslie (1994) [7] states that "African women need to educate themselves about the rights and responsibilities of liberal democracy in a modern nation-state for the woman as an independent individual and not as a dependent" (p. 211). Nyasha rebels against the societal expectations about how a good woman should behave. Girls are also socialised to be passive whereas boys are socialised to be dominant and Nyasha is very much aware of these things.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Nyasha comes back late at night from a dance and her father condemns her to whoredom. She does not accept it and as a result she answers back and he gets furious and beats her severely, saying that, "You must learn to be obedient, Babamukuru told Nyasha and struck her again...If Nyasha was going to behave like a man, then by his mother who was at rest in the grave he would fight her like one" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 117) [1]. After the fight Nyasha stands up and walks out of the room as a proud girl but Tambu who is present when all this happens thinks that Nyasha is victimised for her femaleness, just as she felt victimised when Nhamo went to school and she grew her maize. She thinks that the victimisation of women is universal and it transcends class levels and educational levels, seeing that Babamukuru also does it, even though he is highly educated.

Lucia is different from all the other women even though she is socialised within the Shona culture. She is a very outspoken woman and her society does not accept her. However, with time, Lucia manages to win Babamukuru's respect because of her firmness and outspoken manner. This shows that, in spite of favouring the male, the community's culture is not rigidly dogmatic, thus it can accommodate change. Babamukuru finds her a job at the mission and she goes on to register herself in grade one so that she can learn how to read and write and improve herself.

### 2.3. Gendered struggle for freedom

*Nervous Conditions* is set in the 1960s when the country is still under the British colonial rule. In this novel, the reader is shown the damages which colonialism has done to the land and resources of the indigenous people and the reader is shown how it was before and after the coming of the colonisers. The indigenous people have decided to fight back in the hope of restoration and young men and young women from Tambu's village and around left their villages to join the liberation struggle, a struggle for freedom. However, even in fighting for freedom, women are still serving the men and the women who remain in the villages and those who have gone to war have both taken the responsibility of cooking for *vana Mukoma* (the brothers). Tambu's sister Netsai has also gone to war, she has been taken by *vana Mukoma*. *The Book of Not* opens with Netsai's leg being torn apart and it is ironic that a woman loses her leg from a land mine, but a man does not. Even though both of them left the village in the name of fighting the enemy, *Mukoma* has a gun and Netsai does not. Clearly, Netsai and other young women's role in the liberation struggle is to cook for the men and to fulfil their sexual desires. These young women just live their lives as they were socialised to do, to serve the men. One questions the kind of freedom a woman like Netsai fights for when she is already colonised by the brother. Similarly, Uchem and Ngwa (2014) [8] compare this situation to slavery as they argue that:

A correlation of women subordination and slavery thus indicates that these continuous gender biased activities against the female gender are not different from the ones confronted by the black African race in the epoch of the slave trade. This therefore leaves

one with the question as to whether all these do not amount to a newer form of slavery or whether they are just aimed at sustaining culture. (Uchem & Ngwa, 2014, p. 144) [8]

Gender seems natural to many people and this is exemplified by Netsai who does not see the gender violence in her life but her sister Tambu sees it and she sympathises with her. It is not easy for Netsai and for other women to see the gender violence in their own lives as they have internalised it since childhood and have accepted the disparities between men and women. Netsai and the other women who are supporting the liberation struggle by cooking sadza for *vana mukoma* do not challenge their position “because in the African traditional beliefs pots and kitchen means woman” (Kwatsha, 2009, p. 144) [9]. This situation is not what Stiwanism advocates for as the theory argues that a woman’s body is her inherent property that is not to be owned, used and dumped by men. However, poor Netsai does not even know that she is being used as her upbringing has prepared her for this position.

The things that are considered masculine are actually those that give men and boys an upper hand over women and girls but these boundaries are arbitrary, they are not natural. Moreover, Maiguru is just reduced to a house keeper because of the feminine/masculine differences and as such, her rich ideas are not heard. More so, Nyasha’s childhood experience back in Zimbabwe is a difficult one because of feminine/masculine differences whereas Chido, on the other hand, is happy because boys are not pressured to be masculine, but only girls are pressured to be feminine. This kind of socialisation of children leads to gender inequality, and it is not fair. However, Chido can also sympathise with his discriminated sister, which all the more shows that the ways in which gender has shaped the world, including through law, have been unjust. Gender consists not just in differentiation but in domination, oppression or discrimination thus both men and women need a mental shift on the issue of boys and girls and how they socialise them. They cannot continue discriminating girls and/or placing boys in positions which they are not comfortable with just because of the norms and beliefs which are arbitrary.

### **3. Inequalities between men and women**

The inequalities between men and women are seen in different structures of the Zimbabwean society and in the Zimbabwean Shona culture. Girls and women are marginalised while boys and men are advantaged. The Stiwanist theory which is used to analyse the inequalities between men and women is not against men but it advocates for gender equality. According to Angula and Menjono (2014) [10], “gender inequality is manifested in the roles and resources that are determined by the legal setup, cultural norms, societal practices, societal beliefs and opinions as well as power and decision-making in households and communities” (p. 227). In the same vein, the present analysis is done in the trilogy, tracing the characters from childhood to adulthood, in their homes, in the community, at schools and in their work places.

#### **3.1. Colonialism and patriarchy**

Colonialism and patriarchy are the causes of inequalities in the Shona culture as presented in the trilogy as colonial racism and patriarchy both reinforce the notion of the self and other. The novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988) [1] is set during the 1960s when Zimbabwe is still under the colonial rule of Britain. In this novel, Tambu, the protagonist, in a flash back takes the reader to the past when her grandmother tells her how the colonisers came to Zimbabwe and how their coming impacted the lives of the indigenous people. Tambu’s grandmother tells her that “wizards well versed in treachery and black magic came from the South and forced the people from the land ... there was less and less land for the

people” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 18) [1]. The indigenous people had to settle on barren land which the wizards would not use. This also means that black people now had to depend on the white people who now dominated their land. This situation also has an influence on how black people view themselves. Nhamo and his sister Tambu think that their tradition is inferior and the English ways are superior hence they each enjoy their stay at Babamukuru’s house at the mission respectively.

The inequalities between men and women that already existed increased with the patriarchal system which was brought by the colonisers. They also came with their religion hence the missionary schools which were run by the Christian church. The Nigerian feminist scholar, Ifi Amadiume (1987) [11] argues that patriarchy within traditional institutions was strengthened by the introduction of patriarchal religions such as Christianity. Colonialism itself was a masculine system and because of economic and food insecurity, men went to work on the wizards’ farms but “the white wizard had no use for women and children. He threw my grandmother and her children off the farm” (Dangarembga, 1988, p.18) [1]. This also meant that Tambu’s grandma had to struggle to feed herself and her children in a country where all the fertile land now belonged to the white people.

Men and boys were favoured by the colonisers. When the European missionaries came to Zimbabwe, they took boys like Babamukuru to work for them on their farms and also educate them at the mission school which they set up. “They set him to work in their farm by day. By night he was educated in their wizardry” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 19) [1]. This practice of educating boys while women were left to work in fields and at home continued even in the post-independent Zimbabwe. Said (1994, as cited in Hamadi, 2014, p. 1) [12] believes that “the consequences of colonialism are still persisting in the form of chaos, coups, corruption, civil wars, and bloodshed, which pervade many of these countries, mainly because of the residues of colonisation”. Babamukuru’s future was certain compared to any woman of his age or even older. Zhuwara (2016) [13] states that “sandwiched in between patriarchy and colonialism, a black woman’s access to education in Africa took longer than her western counterpart”. This situation where women are excluded in the social and political transformation of Africa is not what Stiwanism calls for.

Patriarchy is very important in the discussion of gender issues. Pilcher and Whelehan (2004, as cited by Mutunda, 2009) [4] relate that patriarchy literally means rule by the male head of a social unit (a family or tribe). Patriarchy is a system of society or government in which the father or eldest male is head of the family and descent is reckoned through the male line. Babamukuru is the head of his family and even Jeremiah’s family, his brother, since he is the eldest son. On a larger scale, the colonisers, the white people, were the rulers of the indigenous people of Zimbabwe, including the black women of Zimbabwe who were already under the rule of men. Hence the women and girls in *Nervous Conditions*, Mai, Maiguru, Nyasha, Tambu, Lucia and Netsai were and are colonised twice, firstly by their men and secondly by their colonial rulers. Mai can testify to this as she remarks that “and these days it’s worse, with the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 16) [1]. Women and girls are ‘othered’ in the Zimbabwean Shona society because the Shona culture is patriarchal. This is evident in *Nervous Conditions*, at Babamukuru’s welcoming party. The invited people move in the house according to their patriarchal status and “behind them danced relatives of the lower strata” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 37) [1]. When Tambu gives them water to wash their hands before they eat, she has to start



with the male relatives first, in the descending order of their seniority and then lastly, she gives the females, beginning with her grandmother and then her aunts. Women therefore suffer subordination in this culture. At Babamukuru's welcoming party, it is the women who cook the food, and the women have to serve the food, starting with the men and lastly to themselves. Even though Tambu and other women work so hard to prepare the food and to serve it, they end up not partaking in meat eating. What is left for them after serving the men and older women is gravy only but they do not complain because they are socialised to understand the situation. Nhamo, on the other hand gets a share of the meat, thereby enjoying the advantages of being a boy whereas women and girls are the 'other' people, and as such there is no equality. Stiwanism therefore seeks to give African girls a sense of self-worthiness and not the opposite.

In *The Book of Not*, Tambu faces colonial racism at Sacred Heart College where she is one of the five African girls who are given scholarships to learn at a white's only school. At this esteemed Christian school, the five African girls are segregated as they have to sleep in what is called the African dormitory, far from the white girls. They are also not allowed to touch the white people, lest they soil them. Even though Tambu becomes the best performer in her class, the award is rather given to Tracey her class mate, the second best performer. One can just imagine how demoralising this is to Tambu who has worked so hard to get the award which has been denied her. This racism does not end here, as it repeats itself again in *The Book of Not* when Tambu is older and is working at the Advertising Agency. This time Tambu deserves an award for writing so well, but alas a male white colleague is given the award for the advert that Tambu wrote. This shows how in a racist society, black women are victims of racial and gender oppression whether they are middle class or working class. When this happened to Tambu, her heart breaks and she quits her job. In both scenarios the white people do not want to accept that a black person, a black woman especially, is equally human, is intelligent and can actually do better than a white person. After leaving her job, even though she is well-educated, she struggles to find a decent job. The next good job she gets is at Tracey's company, her former classmate. However, Tracey uses Tambu to get to the land and resources of the indigenous people at Tambu's village for the profit of her tourism business and it does not materialise because the villagers do not trust the white people. According to Stiwanist perspective, the issue of women has to be looked at within the context of race and the struggles that bedevil the continent of Africa today. It advocates for the liberation of the total continent of Africa, hence, the Sacred Heart environment does not allow Tambu to self-actualise. One may thus argue that gender inequalities are not just an outcome of socialisation but other factors such as racial discrimination and segregation play a significant role in this outcome.

According to Said (1994, as cited in Hamadi, 2014, p. 1) [12], the coloniser depicts the colonised, the "orient" as the primitive, uncivilized "other" in order to justify colonialism and the horror that accompanies it whereas the colonisers view themselves as superior, rational and civil. Similarly, Chousein (2013) [14] states that: The creation of binary opposition structures changed the way we view others. In the case of colonialism, the Oriental and the Westerner were distinguished as different from each other (i.e. the emotional, static, Orient vs. the principled, progressive Occident). This opposition justified the "white man's burden", the coloniser's self-perceived "destiny to rule" subordinate peoples. (para. 16)

Colonialism attempts to deny all attributes of humanity to those it suppressed. In *The Book of Not*, the binary oppositions of black-white, civilised-uncivilised, and rich-poor are created at the Sacred Heart College. Unfortunately, Tambu wants to affiliate herself with whites and the “civilised” as she thinks lowly of her fellow blacks. She regards herself highly because she is from a modern house at Babamukuru but the white people do not see the difference between the black girls, they are all just blacks and that is it. When Tambu uses the white girls’ toilet, she gets caught and she is humiliated for having done this. All of them are called at the principal’s office for a hearing, and this socialisation which Tambu and the other black girls get at this college causes them to have some inferiority complex. This psychological situation can either motivate a person to work hard or it can cause demotivation. It makes Tambu work hard but they do not give her the recognition she deserves. According to the Stiwanism theory, this situation should change as it inhibits the progress of these African girls. Racism removes confidence from these young ones and it has long lasting effects.

In *This Mournable Body*, Tambu is traumatised because of several factors. As a woman her experience of post colonialism is different from that of a man, which agrees with the idea that “gender shapes postcolonial trauma and recovery” (Respaut, 2007, p. 4) [6]. In Tambu and the women of her family is the ‘nervousness’ of the ‘post-colonial’ conditions but with tenacity and bewilderment, they negotiate race, class, gender and cultural change. Tambu struggles to find her identity and she is frustrated by racial inequality. On the other hand, she does not want anything to do with her ‘primitive’ family. She also thinks lowly of her culture hence she does not even accept the mealie meal which her mom sends her in *This Mournable Body* even though she needs it. In *The Book of Not*, she says “I suffered secretly a sense of inferiority that came from having been at a primitive scene” (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 28) [2]. And by this she is referring to the scene where Babamukuru is punished by the villagers for taking her to Sacred Heart College because Babamukuru is suspected to have connived with colonisers.

In *This Mournable Body*, when she is a teacher, Tambu fails to cope with the children she teaches. She seeks to socialise them with principles she was socialised with. However, the children she teaches are different and their world is different and she fails in her self-given responsibility to correct society for they do not listen to her. The reason why Tambu fails to relate with the children is because she was socialised in a Christian school and in a patriarchal society, systems which are both agents for subordinating girls and women. However, the girls in her class are different as they are free willed and empowered. Nevertheless, the empowerment Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) [7] advocates for is not one where young girls get older men as boyfriends to buy them material things as it is with girls in Tambu’s learners, but one that has a positive transformation on society. Tambu comes from a background where children, especially girls do not have choices which is in agreement with Capo-Chichi Zanou, Gbaguidi and Akogbeto (2018) [15] who state that: Parents breed their children in a mood in which they lack self-confidence and feel weak, ineffectual, fearful and unimportant, they have then disempowered them. Most of African women have indeed been victims of disempowerment. (p. 67)

Tambu and Nyasha both struggle to accept, create and understand their identities. There is a conflict between individual desire (self-determination) and expectation (socialisation) that trouble (Derroo, 2015) [16] both. Nyasha does not adjust well to the Shona patriarchal culture and as such, she is always in conflict with her father who wants her to be silent because she is a girl. She is therefore in a state of unresolved and warring emotions and feelings. Ultimately, her ungrounded identity results in isolation and loneliness. Nyasha’s



condition also leads to an eating disorder and mental illness. She is traumatised by the pressure to embrace change and to remain true to herself. Nyasha is alienated, as she does not approve of her Shona culture's patriarchal practice. On the other hand, she is not well accepted by her peers because of her personality. She thus gets a disease called anorexia as a result of not eating well. In this instance it can be realised that Nyasha uses her body to rebel against the patriarchal system.

After the holiday of the meeting ("the primitive scene"), it is difficult for Tambu to relate to anything at school. She becomes traumatised and she does not focus well on her studies. Tambudzai is absent minded in class as she thinks about her sister who now only has one leg and also of her uncle's beating. Tambu realises that while she went on planning her life, her life was planning an insurgence (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 27) [2]. After the meeting at the village, she is now afraid as she imagines her sister hopping on one leg, making an appearance in their class and as she thinks of these, she loses focus on her lessons. To cope, she closes her eyes in class to prevent tears from falling and she also avoids answering questions asked by the teacher, lest tears fall. She says, "If I kept the eyes closed, I would not do well, rather face a lifetime of being nothing, like Mai. This is because of my sister," (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 31) [2]. From this instance, Tambu is not in her normal state of mind and she does things which she herself does not understand, such as fighting with the hostel matron and also with her teacher. The condition Tambu is in is one which hinders one from progressing.

In addition, her mother is unsupportive, she does not give her the emotional support she needs when at school, when being racially mistreated, and when she is alone. Her mother's bitterness is a frustration which stems from the evils of colonialism. She does not see any good in western education and for her, it is a way of colonising the mind of the natives, and a strategy of destroying family relations. From Tambu's angle, her mother is a barrier which stands between her and her education. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Tambu lacks safety needs and love and belonging needs which one needs before reaching self-actualisation. Even though Tambu gets the best education at the mission and at Sacred Heart College, her adult life becomes one that is full of difficulties. She is not a successful woman that she always dreamt to be. She is unemployed, poor, homeless and lonely, and she has no social life. All these problems together culminate in her second breakdown and worse still she becomes mentally ill.

Tambu's condition is multifaceted. Her country is in a bad situation from the damage done by colonial violence, and jobs are not easy to find as the government has done little in that area for the black people. Most black people do not have good housing and the land belongs to the white people. These are the conditions which Stiwanism says should change as they hinder the African girls and women from self-actualising. On the other hand, abandoning her roots is another mistake as the past shapes identities of today. In this regard, Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) [7] states that "African women in general wish to retain certain features of their tradition, those that are positive for women (p. 13), but Tambu is lost in a dual world. Tambu has not measured up to her individualistic rubric and what is glaring to her is the hard fact; "You have failed to make anything at all for yourself" (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 41) [3]. The postcolonial effects, apart from her socialisation have a negative impact on Tambu and the woman she grows up to be.

### 3.2. Gender roles and stereotypes

Gender roles and stereotypes are major contributing factors to gender inequality. In the Shona culture, like in many African cultures, there are certain behaviours and roles which are expected of boys and men as opposed to those of girls and women. Girls are expected to look after children, cultivate fields, to cook and to clean, whereas boys are expected to look after cattle, to collect firewood and to plough the fields. The presented study intended to establish if gender roles and stereotypes in Dangarembga's trilogy are responsible for gender inequalities. In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu is encouraged to learn how to cook and forget her books because she is a girl hence she will not cook books for her husband. This implies that a woman cooks and a man does not cook. Nhamo is not encouraged to learn how to cook even though he loves good food. Cooking is something which can be learnt by both a boy child and a girl child as it is not natural that girls and women should cook and this agrees with the view that "Stereotypes thus do not necessarily reflect reality, rather they represent culturally shared beliefs about what particular individuals will be like" (Kwatsha, 2009, p.132) [9]. This means that Tambu is being prepared to be nothing but a house wife. However, Tambu wants to be someone in life as she does not want to be dependent on a man for everything. Tambu seeks the positive change that Stiwanism advocates for the African girl, to be self-reliant.

In the text, *This Mournable body* (2018) [3], Netsai's children have mastered the art of cooking, cleaning and fetching water which augers with the idea that "it is said that these stereotypes are actually important in socialising women and men to accept inequality" (Kwatsha, 2009, p. 132) [9]. When Tambu comes back to visit her family after many years of being away from home, she finds them cleaning. Like their mother, Netsai, who gave herself to the *mukomas* prematurely, her two girls are likely to end up in premature marriages as children learn from the women around them. Netsai's girls need positive influences and examples in order for them to be freed from the bondage of domesticity, and as such they will need women who are empowered as role models. However, the place of many women is in the kitchen in this culture and this is evidenced as Nyasha says, "I always suspected kitchens aren't what they're made out to be. Poor Mai Taka! It shouldn't be a prison sentence. No woman should have to go in there unless she's willing" (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 124) [3]. Nyasha is of the idea that kitchen responsibilities should not be forced on any woman. Forcing a woman to do domestic chores is not Stiwanism. Stiwanism advocates women's democracy and autonomy. One should pursue an area of her interest so that positive progress to the African society may be made. Nyasha pursues writing as she is an empowered woman. Through her writing, Nyasha is able to empower other women hence bringing about positive transformation in the lives of fellow African women. Nyasha does not become who the Shona society prescribes for a woman, but she follows her dreams and she is happy.

Chores which are done by men and boys are fewer compared to those done by women and girls. Theirs is decision making and to dominate the women. There is an imbalance in the division of gender roles in the Shona culture. Every time and then, Tambu watches her mother work alone without the help of her father, and she says, "the thought of my mother working so hard, so alone, always distressed me" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 10) [1]. Tambu's mom works hard without complaining in order to feed her children. Tambu also joined her mother in working the fields but Tambu's father only worked in the fields when he wished and Nhamo would work after school, yet Tambu and her mother would work every day from morning time. Moreover, women are forced to be silent even when one is married to an irresponsible man like Jeremiah. Jeremiah is unemployed and he also does not work hard as his wife does in order to eradicate poverty from his home and also

take both his children to school. Rather, he drops Tambu out of school on the basis of her being a girl. He does not care how Tambu feels as he has no regard for her. It is this mentality in Jeremiah which Stiwanism seeks to change. Stiwanism strives for gender equality and seeks to give African women and girls a sense of self worthy, as well as effectual and contributing beings. Jeremiah has to work together with his wife, Mai Shingai for the well-being of their children and for the development of the African society.

In the Sigauke homestead, Nhamo, a boy child, feels that he has the right to send her sister Tambu and Netsai around but Tambu is not up for this. Nhamo learns this behaviour from how Babamukuru and his father treat women as the women are always serving men. Through his Shona culture, Nhamo learns in the village to despise his sister hence he treats her with inferiority. This is a culture that is taught to children at an early age. Parents are the first teachers of their children hence they are capable of teaching their boy children to value women so that when they grow up, they will never depart from it. Any individual is a product or the reproduction of the space where they grow, the product of how they are brought up. It is important that children, both girls and boys, should be taught to work so that they may be ready to face the world, to be responsible people and to make positive contributions to the African society.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Nhamo's father and family members consider him to be more important than his sisters, Netsai and Tambu, and Jeremiah thanks God for Nhamo but not for his girls. He says, "I was blessed when I was given that son. Truly I was blessed" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 46), and he goes on to feel pity for him because he goes to school and he still works at home. Tambu goes to school and has house chores as well, even more than those of Nhamo but no one feels pity for her. This is not what Stiwanism advocates for and Tambu feels that she is discriminated against as her name is not mentioned when they talk about school, despite the fact that "girlhood is only a biological condition which does not make the girl child any worse or any better human being" (Pasi, 2012, p. 180) [5]. Girls also deserve to be given equal opportunities as boys and they need to be treated equally like boys, unlike the way Tambu is treated compared to Nhamo. The birth of a girl should give parents the same joy which they feel when they receive a boy. The mentality and attitude that boys are more important is not what is advocated for through Stiwanism, instead such a mentality and attitude should be done away with as it is detrimental to the development of the African continent. Sadly, even some women have gone to the extent of adopting this mentality.

### **3.3. Power distribution and decision making**

Maiguru has the same qualification as her husband, but the status and the position she holds at work differs from that of her husband. Babamukuru is the head at home and at work he is highly esteemed at work and in society due to his education but Maiguru is not accorded the same respect. Women are therefore not only discriminated at family level, but at work places as well. Moreover, men have power and they are always given leadership positions whereas women are always given subordinate positions. Thus, no matter how educated the woman is, she is still treated with inferiority. Stiwanism calls for a mental shift on the issue of gender discrimination so that both women and men can be given equal opportunities. Women can pull together with men towards the development of the African society hence they should be included in social and political transformation of society.

Violence against women is used in *Nervous Conditions* and *This Mournable Body* as a controlling tool. As an example, Tambu remembers that “Nhamo enjoyed taking a stick to her at the slightest excuse (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 10) [1]. Netsai is submissive and her sister, Tambu thinks she is a sweet child, the type that would make a sweet, sad wife. Netsai is internalising abuse from childhood hence she is likely to accept it in adulthood from her future husband. Nhamo feels that is what it means to be a man, to be aggressive and dominant, which agrees with the idea that “Men are not born violent and neither are they inherently so” (Edwards-Jauch, 2016). Therefore it can be argued that Nhamo learns this male domination from how older men treat women. Furthermore, Jeremiah physically abuses his wife with no regard of the presence of his children in the house and as the eldest son, Nhamo is likely to become an abusive husband. Unfortunately, his life is cut short but what can be learnt from this example is that parents should give good examples to their children.

Furthermore, men are seen to be the stronger sex compared to women and a man is a strong person and it is believed that where he is, there is no hunger. When a man fails to find a job and has no money, he is likely to practice gender-based violence because men in particular experience and express stress in different, more devastating ways than women due to expectations around providing for the family (Angula & Menjono, 2014) [10]. Furthermore, alcohol abuse and stress are some of the causes of gender-based violence or domestic violence as men target women and children who are the weaker vessels. For example, Jeremiah is jobless and he resorts to abusing alcohol and abusing his wife in order to stay in charge.

When a woman is beaten or raped, it is argued that it is her fault and that she is to blame for it. In *This Mournable Body* (2018) [3], Gertrude is beaten publicly for dressing in revealing clothes and Tambu is there when it happens. However, Tambu does not help Gertrude, instead she joins the crowd in mocking her and she also picks a stone, wanting to stone her. Even though she joins the women and men who are saying all sorts of bad things to Gertrude and assaulting her, the sight of Gertrude fills her with an emptiness that hurts. When Mako gets raped by Shine at Widow Manyanga’s house where they are renting, Tambu also does not understand it but she is reminded of Gertrude and what happened to her at the market. This is because Mako does and has not done anything to invite being raped as she gets raped in her own room and she has baggy sweats and a long-sleeved T-shirt for cleaning on. “With Gertrude, the reason for what happened was clear for all to see. Yet something similar has happened to Mako. Your heart beats faster. You are a woman alone...will your age and general unattractiveness prevent him from coming for you?” (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 57) [3]. This indicates that the problem is with men and not with the length of skirts which women wear. Mai Taka is also physically abused by her husband who beats her so badly that he causes her to have a miscarriage. He deserves to be arrested for the crime, but if they follow their culture, she will be blamed for being beaten, and for not being submissive to her husband. Therefore society thinks that it is her fault that she was beaten. She also believes that it is her fault that she was beaten because she decides to hide it from Nyasha her boss. All this is because of how women and men are socialised from childhood.

Furthermore, women live in fear and they are not free. Apart from raping Mako, Shine also brings a different woman in his room every day and one of his women is so hurt that she creates a scene in Widow Manyanga’s yard but Bertha seems to be strong. She also knows the situation of women very well as she tells Mako, “Mako, if you ask all women at your workplace, in fact all women, maybe just not Tambudzai over there, then you will know it’s what nearly every one of them puts up with” (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 57) [3].

This situation is not Stiwanism aims for as it hinders progressive conditions for women in the Shona society and in Africa.

In *Nervous Conditions*, when a decision is taken that Nhamo should go to school at the mission, Mai is not called to the meeting because only men and not women sit in decision making meetings. Again, after Nhamo has died, she is not consulted in deciding that Tambu should go with Babamukuru to the mission. In both incidents, Mai is not happy. She says the “Englishness” has killed her son and now they have taken her daughter and it makes her sick. Mai is also sceptical about European education hence it is against her will that Tambu should be taken to school at the mission. However, because she is a woman she is silenced, whereas Babamukuru as the head of the family makes all the decisions and everyone obeys. Stiwanism on the other hand advocates for the inclusion of women and yet in this case women are excluded.

Babamukuru’s wife Maiguru is a teacher at the mission school where she earns a salary, but she is denied the power to make decisions over her money by her husband. Babamukuru decides what to use Maiguru’s money for on the basis of being the head of the house. This corroborates Selasi (2015) [19] who posits that “the chauvinistic trend of perceiving and treating the wife as a chattel is steeped in African societies, and is prevalent among men, whether educated or otherwise” (p. 99). Relatedly, Babamukuru supports his poor brothers and sisters and their families with Maiguru’s money, which makes him get even more respect in the family as the head of the family while Maiguru just submits and nobody recognises her role. This is the attitude and mentality that Jeremiah and all the men in Tambu’s family have. It is the same, mentality that Nhamo was beginning to internalise before he died, the mentality of dominating the women and girls. Maiguru is also submissive but she is not happy with the way things are decided by Babamukuru without seeking her opinion, for example how Babamukuru brings people from his extended family to their house. After tolerating this behaviour for a long time, she plainly stated, “I am tired of my house being a hotel for your family. I am tired of being a housekeeper for them. I am tired of being nothing in a home that I am working myself sick to support” (Dangaremba, 1988, p. 72) [1]. In this regard, Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) [7] states that:

Women should change their mind-sets and challenge these oppressive practices in order to bring positive transformation in the African society. Our dependency complex, built into us from early childhood socialization, is certainly one of the weaknesses to be combatted. (p.163).

In *This Mournable Body*, Nyasha is now a married woman with children. Compared to her mother when it comes to decision making, Nyasha is freer in her marriage because she does not grow up to be a silently submissive wife like the other women in her family. She has always believed in autonomy right from childhood. Her choice of a man is also evidence that she makes her own decisions without much influence from her Shona culture that is why she marries a white man and not a Shona man. Nyasha’s British Shona socialisation makes her conscious about the plight of women and girls in her Shona culture. In her marriage home, Nyasha is involved in decision making together with her husband, unlike Maiguru, Mai and Mai Taka who are voiceless. Nyasha is also able to pursue her writing career and her husband is in support of her. Nyasha’s husband probably comes from a background where masculinity is interpreted differently which can be explained by Mutunda’s (2009) [4] views that “masculinity has multiple and ambiguous meanings, according to context and changes over time” (p. 18). Nyasha and her husband seem to get along very well despite that they live a middle class life. Nyasha and her husband are equal and that is what Stiwanism advocates for. It is thus possible

that when Nyasha's children grow up, they too will emulate their parents in decision making, especially Nyasha's girl. Nyasha's girl is not pressured to be feminine as Nyasha was when she was a child and Nyasha does not socialise her girl child to be submissive and her boy child to be dominant. Rather, she teaches them to reason and make choices. Dangarembga is pointing out that the socialisation of children at family level should uphold the equality of boys and girls in order to bring about positive transformation of society.

### **3.4. Women marginalise other women**

Women also participate in marginalising other women and they do this unconsciously as it has become part of their culture. Culture is passed on to the young ones through socialisation and women are the repository of culture hence they teach their children the norms and values of their society as it was taught to them; they teach them how to conduct themselves and how to behave; and they teach the girls to be silent and to be submissive to men and in this light, "we realize that in our world socialization...consists first of all in the interiorisation of contradiction. The next step being not to 'solve' the contradiction but, rather to learn to live with it, and even transform it into a tool of survival" (Deroo, 2015, p. 4) [16]. The older women have accepted their predicament and it has become normal such that they have connived with men in marginalising the girl child. This situation is compared to what Respaut (2007) [6] established, that: The psychological damage indigenous communities endure during colonialism is often perpetuated in post colonialism by the native population against themselves. This "native on native" destruction can become gendered as colonised men aim to displace their own anxiety of legitimacy on other "inferior" groups. Women, unfortunately, feel the worst of this displaced angst as they are continually discredited and subjugated by men and even other women. (p. 6).

### **3.5. Land ownership**

In *Nervous Conditions* Tambu remembers how things were before the colonisers came. "The river, the trees, the fruits and fields. This was how it was in the beginning. This is how I remember it in my earliest memories, but it did not stay like that" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 3) [1]. A lot of changes happen in their village as colonisers build their offices and houses in order to enable the administration of the area. A lot of other developments come, such as shops, bars and roads which also change the native people's culture. Tambu recalls events from childhood when they would go bath at the river but now this place has become a business area. Their village has to move in order to accommodate these developments. The colonialists introduced new methods of exploiting the natural resources, clear-cutting the native forests and undertaking expansive commercial farming. Furthermore, the Shona culture is patrilineal; inheritance and ownership of land, livestock, and perennial crops are gradually transferred to men. It is the reason why Jeremiah considers Nhamo to be a blessing but not Tambu and Netsai. This situation puts women at the periphery in this society and women have nothing of their own. It also means that women are forced to marry in order to survive the poverty and yet the Stiwanism theory states that culture should not be immobilised in time to the advantage of men as most men in Africa want it to be.

Agriculture is very important for food security and as a source of income for many women. The culture which was introduced by the Europeans during colonialism, of only taking boys to school made women to be more involved in agriculture than men. This culture also influenced the Shona people's cultural practices. However, the current research argues that agriculture is also a good source of income, apart from education



which can empower women and reduce inequality between men and women. Women should not only be forced to work their husbands' fields and to accept servitude, instead land rights should be given to women and men so that even women who are not married can have land. Lucia has nothing, and she has no land or property because she does not have a husband. Situations such as this one are the ones Stiwanism argues should change so that women too may be emancipated and women should also have equal opportunities as men for landownership.

Through their gardens, women in Dangarembga's novels are empowered. This study argues that the gardens transform women, making them independent and self-reliant. This is perhaps the transformation that is advocated by Stiwanism; it is inclusive and not exclusive. For instance, Tambu's mother, Mai, has a vegetable garden beside the river. In her vegetable garden, which is close to river, Mai has a variety of vegetables which she grows in order to feed her family. There is onion and rape and other vegetables, and she waters her garden with the water from Nyamarira River. As a result of this agricultural practice that Tambu is socialised into, when her parents fail to pay for her school, she manages to raise school funds by making a maize garden. She sells the maize to get the money which is needed for her school. Women can be empowered with the availability of fertile land and a good climate. Tambu learns from her mother and the women around her how to practice agriculture. However, when she is grown up into a woman and her education does not yield the expected results, she fails to go back to her village where she can practice agriculture as she was socialised. In fact, she becomes poorer than her mother, a fate which she so much tried to avoid by studying hard. At least her mother can send her a bag of mealie meal which she gets from her own maize field. With Tambu's city poverty, she is unable to send anything home to meet her family at their point of need.

Moreover, most women in the Shona culture have gardens. Tambu is taught by her mother how to grow her own food, and they are socialised this way. This is in addition to the big maize fields which are ploughed during the rainy season at the villages, and as long as the rains fall, people have enough food. In *This Mournable Body*, Mai Manyanga, Tambu's land lady has a vegetable garden on her yard from which Tambu survives when poverty strikes her. In addition, the chairwoman of the women's club at the village for which Mai is a treasurer, Mai Samhungu, has completely eradicated poverty from her home through agriculture and that way she is emancipated. When Mai and Tambu visit her home, she offers them tea with sweet potatoes and she says, "there is nothing better than tea with milk and sugar and a dish of sweet potatoes...and these are the very best. We don't put any fertilizer on these ones like they do over there in town, so they are very good" (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 241) [3]. Mai Samhungu is endowed as she also has an orchard where there are a variety of fruits, "lemons and oranges, and bananas, whose broad leaves are as broad as a mat..." (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 241) [3]. This is evidence of what a woman can do with land and a favourable climate. Mai Samhungu is not intimidated by someone who comes from the city, for she has turned her abilities to good account and bit by bit introduced new ways, new mixtures and new crops to the pale village soil until it gave up withholding and her garden thrived, and on account of her prowess, which everyone hoped to share, she was voted a chairwoman (p. 152). Hence, the study's argument is that despite the gender socialisation that results in gender inequality, transformation should include women. Through their gardens, women in the three novels are given opportunities to redefine themselves and explore their potential to the maximum. Instead of being mere victims or spectators, they play active roles in constructing new identities for both men and women. This is in line with Stiwanism

which advocates for both women's and men's positive change of mind-sets for a progressive society.

Most women in rural Africa depend on subsistence farming because they have limited access to education, which results in limited access to employment. Clearly, gender socialisation is influential in Mai Tambu's destiny because of her sexuality. However, the author seems to intimate a new reordering of society through women to achieve healthy relationships. Mai, for example, only went up to grade 7 and got married when she was 15. Nevertheless, the many years of working the land has given women knowledge in agriculture which surpasses that of men, which means that it is important that women should be given land rights in the Shona culture and not only be dependent on their husbands. The Shona society prioritises boys when it comes to education but Tambu's self-motivation kept her going. She tells her father, "If you will give me some seed, I will clear my own field and grow my own maize" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 17) [1], and she goes on to grow her maize on a field which used to be her grandmother's. Tambu draws inspiration from her grandmother whom she says "had been an inexorable cultivator of land, sower of seeds and reaper of rich harvests, literally until, her very last moment" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 17) [1]. When she was a little girl, Tambu would work in the fields, alongside her grandmother and there she would tell her the history of their people and how they came to lose their fertile land to the white people.

In the novel *This Mournable Body*, Dangarembga uses Tambu to bring to the attention of the reader that in the city of Harare, the biggest portions of land belong to the Europeans while the black people are pushed to the periphery and given only a small portion of land even though they are the majority and the true owners of the land. Black people live in shacks and most of them are street merchants that are selling food items to fellow black people. Only in the post-independent Zimbabwe do people (men) gradually get their land back. But big commercial farms are still in the hands of the white people. Tracey, for example, has land on which she does her tourism business and Tambu's village people are also in danger of losing their village land to Tracey who with the help of Tambu extends her business there but she does not succeed.

After looking for a job with no success in a residential area which used to be for whites only, in a combi that returns her to the hostel, a man asks Tambu whether the place she is coming from is hers. Tambu lies to the man that it is hers. The man remarks that "the plots there...when you stand at one end, you can't see the other. It is not just anybody who can find places like that" (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 19) [3]. This is evidence that it is difficult for black people to get land and white people have taken for themselves large pieces of land. The place Tambu comes from belongs to widow Manyanga and her husband had gotten it through connections with the white people, and indeed it is very difficult for a woman to get land, yet it is so important to her. This man that Tambu speaks to once worked in a nursery; he is also unemployed, and he hopes to get land where he will practice agriculture. He seems to have lost his job due to the effects of climate change as he says, "that water and wind haven't left anything to live off, for most of us" (Dangarembga, 2018, p. 20) [3].

With limited access to land, women are the most disadvantaged group. Without land and a favourable climate, Mai's children would have died from hunger and Tambu would not have finished her primary school at Rutivi. Women and men experience climate change differently and people generally experience climate change differently depending on their different situations. Angula and Menjono (2014) [10] have established that climate change impacts are not gender neutral as men and women's vulnerability to climate change is not the same and their adaptive capacities are differentiated. Even though men

also suffer the effects of climate changes, the poor, the elderly, women and children are the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change (Angula & Menjono, 2014) [10]. However, this study argues that by sharing responsibilities with their male counterparts, women are empowered to address the inequalities between them. As such, Ogundipe-Leslie (as cited in Capo-Chichi Zanou et al., 2018, p. 69) [15] argues that “African women need to educate themselves about the rights and responsibilities of liberal democracy in a modern nation-state for the woman as an independent individual and not as a dependent”. This means that by sharing responsibilities with men and complementing each other, women have the power to transform society, starting with their families.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

This study established that masculinity and femininity are societal constructs about how men should behave and how women should behave, respectively. In the Shona culture, education, assertiveness and the struggle for freedom are gendered. The masculinity which is practised in this culture is the hegemonic masculinity. This is a form of masculinity that thrives on the cultural domination of women by men (Chitando, 2016). According to the Stiwanism theory, cultures such as the Shona culture, exclude women in social and political transformation of society and thus should be changed. The African society should be inclusive so that women too may contribute positively to the development of society.

This study concludes that gender socialisation has an effect on child outcomes and self-actualisation. Gender socialisation is a cause of inequalities between men and women in Dangarembga's trilogy. A girl child is disempowered by the way she is socialised whereas a boy child is given social power and dominance by the way he is socialised. However, there are other socio-political factors which cause inequalities between men and women in the Zimbabwean Shona culture as represented in Dangarembga's trilogy.

The study recommends that more studies should be done on the topic of gender socialisation. Future research can be done on gender socialisation in male authored texts. Most of the studies that have been conducted always blame patriarchy and other factors but they do not touch much on gender socialisation. The trilogy can also be analysed by using Africana Womanism by Hudson-Weems (2004).

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