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Literature's Role in Revealing the Disproportionate Oppression of Men and Women in a Colonized Nation

Literature allows for humans to investigate their conception impactful situations through a fictional world. When analyzed, important lessons and messages can be discovered. *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga is an example of a piece of literature that contains many valuable lessons pertaining to the effects of an oppressive nation, colonization. The book follows Tambudzai Siguake and her family's attempt to survive and succeed in colonized Rhodesia in the 1960s and 1970s. Throughout the book, Tambudzai or Tambu is pursuing an education. Specifically, she is pursuing an education at the private school that Tambu's uncle, Babamukuru, is headmaster of on the mission near their village. For this family, getting an education means emancipation from their lives on their farm and poverty. However, during the pursuit of an education, multiple characters experience mental and internal oppression while embracing or rejecting the roles of the ideal national family that is placed on them in both the public and private spheres of the nation. This oppression manifests differently between men and women, from small physical effects on Tambu's brother Nhamo to the harsh effects of Bulimia on Tambu's cousin Nyasha.

I will be analyzing the characters Babamukuru, Nhamo, Maiguru, Ma'Shingayi, Nyasha and Tambu in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* as a critique of the roles, and their effects, the colonized government places on the people. It is through the use of nationalistic concepts as tools that the colonized government establishes control over the native population. The first concept is Benedict Anderson's theory of nations and nationalism as political communities that are "imagined as inherently limited and sovereign" (6). A nation is an "imagined community" because citizens will never know every single other member of that nation, so their conception of their community and its members are imagined (Anderson 6). This is relevant to *Nervous Conditions* because the white "dominant" community and the "subordinate" native community within this book don't interact that much, except for on the mission which is a predominantly white environment. This imagined community also contributes to the hierarchical difference between the native and the minority white population of Rhodesia because, "the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship" (7). To be clear this comradeship is a perception that prefers citizens to follow certain expectations and roles that will add to the "togetherness" that keeps the nation thriving. However, this perception allows the oppressive roles placed onto the natives in *Nervous Conditions* to thrive even when characters try to defy and rebel against them. The bonds that form from this comradeship are what support the hierarchical rank between natives and non-natives and men and women within this nation.

Anderson provides a basis for Thomas Hylland Eriksen's analysis of gender symbolism within the nation and the nation's association with the domestic sphere in his article, "The Sexual Life of Nations: Notes on Gender and Nationhood." Specifically, each member of the family- mother, father, daughter and son - assists in creating certain roles every citizen of a nation is expected to follow. I argue that these roles created through gendered conceptions of the nation

are oppressive for the native citizens within a colonized government, explicitly they are disproportionately oppressive for the native women than the native men.

The disproportionate effects of these roles between men and women are apparent within both the public and private spheres of the nation. These spheres are used and defined by theorist Elizabeth Grosz in her book *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism.* Grosz defines the private sphere as "remain[ing] sexually polarized insofar as sex roles, especially reproductive roles, remain binarily differentiated" (15). In other words, the private sphere is seen as a domestic domain for women and their reproductive role to bear and raise children inside the home; the public sphere is a social and political domain that is outside the home and is expected to be for men. Grosz analyzes how commonly among scholars the human subject is viewed as "two dichotomous characteristics: mind and body" (14). This dichotomy leads to a hierarchy between these two terms, which are assigned/associated with a gender, "Dichotomous thinking hierarchizes and ranks the privileged term and the other is a suppressed, subordinated, negative counterpart" (Grosz 14). The mind and body is correlated with the male and female opposition that men are the higher ranking subject and females are the subordinate, negative counterpart. All because men are associated with intelligence and therefore the superior mind, while females are associated with the body and therefore seen as inferior. In the words of Grosz, "women's corporeal specificity is used to explain and justify the different (read:unequal)..social positions" (14). Due to their association exclusively with the body, women's bodies are used to justify their unequal social positions within both spheres. Meaning, physically women's bodies are "smaller," "weaker" and used to reproduce, therefore they are forced to stay in the domestic, private sphere and have unequal "access to the public/social sphere" (Grosz 15).

This analysis is combined with Anne McClintock's argument in her article "'No Longer in a Future Heaven:' Gender, Race and Nationalism," that the family trope used to figure nationalism, naturalizes a national hierarchy within "a unity of interests" (McClintock 91). Meaning that the family trope of the nation creates a hierarchy between men and women, and is protected under the assumption that it is best for the nation, or rather it is best for the interest of the "family" as a whole for these hierarchies between men and women to remain. In this paper, I will contrast the male and female experiences in both spheres to show how female roles are exclusively represented through their bodies and disproportionately affected by these roles. In the book, the infliction of these roles onto the natives is represented by the education provided by the private school on the mission near the Siguake family's home village.

It is through the character Tambu that the experiences of her family members and the oppressive roles placed upon them are revealed. Tambu's perspective is important in these revelations because she has both the perspective of an insider and an outsider when describing the changes and effects she sees in her family members. She has an insider perspective because she is a member of the family so she knows each member well enough to notice significant changes in them. She has an outsider perspective because when she moves out of her house she simultaneously becomes an outsider on the mission and in her home since she is not at either place all of the time.

Tambu's perspective is also important because through her and her family's experiences she learns to use the role placed upon her to begin to resist the effects of oppression. Elleke Boehmer explains the role of the daughter within the nation in her article "Daughters of the House: The Adolescent Girl and the Nation." The position of the national daughter is expected to be passive and, "inhabits private spaces or the peripheries of public national space" (106). Tambu

represents a character that does not accept her passive role as the daughter and instead seeks to escape that passive role through education. By the end of the book, Tambu ultimately gives hope that she is able to escape the constraints and oppression placed on women in both spheres of the nation after witnessing the same attempts and failures of her family around her. In accordance with Boehmer's analysis that female African author's attempt to rewrite the "authoritative cultural texts of this time, by providing and putting the perspective and story of the national daughter in the foreground," Dangarembga wrote a significant cultural text that also comments on the oppression that comes with colonization by putting the perspective of a "national daughter" in the foreground (106-107).

The idea of nations and nationalism are portrayed through metaphors and symbolisms, such as "fatherland," "mother tongue," "brothers," and "sisters" (Eriksen 53). As metaphors are the way in which humans make sense of the world, it makes sense that the nation is then thought of metaphorically as a family. Eriksen's metaphor is based on a "dominant symbolic idiom...of parents and children" (54). Every member of the typical nuclear family has a role to play within the nation. The father is represented as "a hardworking farmer tilling the land..or as a military officer in command of a troop of soldiers (his sons)" (54). The mother is represented as "the guardian of tradition and the reproducer of the nation" (54). In this metaphor the father is the progressive head of the household that is supposed to lead the rest of the family (citizens) to prosperity. Mothers are responsible for the passing along of traditions and languages because in traditional views they are meant to stay at home taking care of the children. The brother role within the nation represents "fatern[ity] to his other brothers (in horizontal relationships), obedien[ce] to his parents and protective of his sister" (54). Lastly the daughter represents "the

most passive role in this nuclear family of the nation. Her primary task seems to consist in readiness to make sacrifices" (54).

The first character that Dangarembga uses to critique the father role within Eriksen's theoretical family metaphor is Tambu's uncle Babamukuru. Babamukuru is the head of the Sigauke family and in charge of keeping the family name respectable, "When Babamukuru speechified, which as head of the family he had to do often, he had a way of doing it...that while you listened you couldn't help being overwhelmed by the good sense of his words and resolving to do exactly as he suggested…" (Dangarembga 44). Babamukuru exemplifies the qualities of a father who is going out into the world and "tilling the land:" he went out and got an education in Europe, got a job on the mission and he brings Nhamo and Tambu to the mission to get an education. He is doing all of this with the mindset of progressing his family, which the fathers of a nation are expected to do.

This national father role gives Babamukuru success, but it forces him to strip his native identity in the process since it is a role that recognizes his native identity as inferior. Babamukuru fully embraces the qualities that are valued in a white supremist society and government: education from valued, religious, white scholars. The white scholars and priests that take Babamukuru under their wings are referred to in the book as the "white wizards" (Dangarembga 50). Babamukuru grew up under the guidance of white missionaries his whole life and got opportunities to get an education with the help of these "wizards." Through Tambu's description of Babamukuru's success story Dangarembga alludes to his embracing of his role as head of the household and the

hierarchical difference between the native Africans of Rhodesia and the white Rhodesians:

> "For from my grandmother's history lessons, I knew that my father and brother suffered painfully under the evil wizards' spell. Babamukuru, I knew, was different. He hadn't cringed under the weight of his poverty. Boldy, Babamukuru had defied it. Through hard work and determination he had broken the evil wizards' spell. Babamukuru was now a person to be reckoned with in his own right. He didn't need to bully anybody any more...He didn't need to be bold any more because he had made himself plenty of power. Plenty of power. Plenty of money. A lot of education. Plenty of everything...That was why he did all he could for everybody and in this case he had singled out Nhamo for special promotion, as he had been singled out by the good wizards at the mission." (50)

Tambu describes the distinct difference between "evil wizards" and "good wizards," this indicates that there are two paths that natives can take. One is the path of poverty that she describes her father and brother suffering from due to the "evil wizards' spell" and the other is the one her uncle takes, which is to not "cringe under the weight of his poverty" and defy it. However, the intentions of the white men on the mission who gave Babamukuru the opportunities to get an education and job are not genuine, "They thought he was a good boy, cultivable in the way that land is, to yield harvests that sustain the cultivator" (19). As an obedient native, Babamukuru was viewed as someone who - like land - could be "cultivated" and morphed into someone who embraces whiteness, the type of person they thought to be superior. Babamukuru does embrace these qualities and separates himself and his family from his native family in order to do so.

This is the opposite of Tambu's father, Jeremiah, who lives on the homestead, not as educated as Babamukuru and is naïve, ignorant, and superstitious. Jeremiah represents the native that is "unsuccessful" in this colonized country because he does not strip himself of his native identity. This association of nativeness with ignorance, poverty and naïvete adds to Anderson's "horizontal comradeship" mentioned before. By establishing a connection between the two, the nation is providing a perception of ideal roles that every citizen needs to follow within a"unity of interests" for the nation. This unity of interests establishes a hierarchy between white and native and at the same time men and women. Jeremiah represents the path of the native that does not support this idealization of whiteness. However, the segregated and oppressive government of Rhodesia doesn't allow for the natives to fill the roles of a nuclear national family and succeed in their colonized government as they are not white.

The critique that Babamukuru must strip himself of his native identity is revealed through Tambu's point of view. Since she experiences living on the homestead with her family and the mission with her uncle, she witnesses Babamukuru's leadership on both and how he spereates his native identity on the mission to maintain and exercise his dominance over his family. She sees him as someone successful at escaping the inevitable poverty that natives face during this time in Rhodesia, and wants to be like him by getting her education from the "good white wizards" as well. Babamukuru provides an example that it is ok to embrace the role that values whiteness over his native self, because it will be reinforced and rewarded by success. Yet, this "success" was only possible because Babamukuru is a man. He would not have been singled out by the white priests to get a great education if he was a woman because men are associated with the mind and intelligence. Not only does Babamukuru critique the national father role, but he is a

great example of how colonization disproportionately oppresses women since he is able to infiltrate the private sphere of the white dominant society.

Nhamo is a character that critiques the brother role in Eriksen's metaphor of the nation as a family. The brother role is representative of "fraternity" among citizens and being obedient towards the parents and protective of the sister. Nhamo attempts to fit into this role as he is the one that Babamukuru chose to receive the same prestigious education he did to continue to progress the family. He was chosen because he is the first born male of the family and because men are associated with intellect it would make sense that it must be a male that is selected to get an education for the family. Nhamo is fully aware of his privileged position as man, "'Babamukuru says I am so bright I must be taken away to a good school and be given a good chance in life…I shall wear shoes and socks, and shorts with no holes in them...I shall stop using my hands to eat. I will use a knife and fork'" (Dangarembga 48). Nhamo sees his native life as negative and must break it down in order to receive the privileges from the dominant white minority group through schooling, clothes and housing.

Since Nhamo is a man, the effects he goes through after spending some time on the mission are seemingly more favorable to his previous native self. Similar to Babamukuru Nhamo stripped himself of his native identity, but the effects are more physical with the lightning of his skin tone and the smoothing of his hair. These changes are described by Tambu when Nhamo returns home from the mission:

> Then when Nhamo came home at the end of his first year with Babamukuru, you could see he too was no longer the same person. The change in his appearance was dramatic. He had added several inches to his height and many to his width, so that he was not little

> and scrawny any more but fit and muscular. Vitamins had nourished his skin to a shiny smoothness, several tones lighter in complexion than it used to be. His hair was no longer arranged in rose of dusty, wild cucumber tufts but was black, shiny with oil and smoothly combed. All this was good, but there was one terrible change. He had forgotten how to speak Shona…Father was pleased with Nhamo's command of the English language. He said it was the first step in the family's emancipation since we could all improve our language by practising on Nhamo…The more time Nhamo spent at Babamukuru's, the more aphasic he became and the more my father was convinced that he was being educated. (Dangarembga 52-53)

Nhamo becomes more nourished due to vitamins and this can be seen in his skin and hair. He is experiencing drastic physical changes but they are changes that can be interpreted as beneficial. The seemingly beneficial physical effects of the mission on Nhamo are drastically different from the effects that his cousin Nyasha experiences. However, these physical changes occur alongside other changes like his loss of his native language Shona and less involvement with house work. In Nhamo's father's eyes Nhamo's loss of his native language is a good thing because it is "the first step in the family's emancipation." Due to the importance of his role it is ok that he doesn't communicate with his family as much. Even though his father believes he is becoming educated, I believe this is also due to the arrogance Nhamo gains once he leaves for the mission.

Even though Nhamo experiences seemingly positive changes and embraces his privilege of being educated, he also represents a criticism of this role because it forces him to strip his native identity. Nhamo also doesn't get the opportunity to finish his education because he ends up dying from mumps on the mission, which shows that even with the disproportionate effects of these roles on men and women he still doesn't get to fully "succeed." As Babamukuru

demonstrates, being male means you can immerse yourself in the public sphere and succeed in it and Nhamo realizes that he is favored, however rather it being strictly because he is “so bright” it is because he is male. The important thing to note here is that both Nhamo and Babamukuru are able to take space and be a part of the public sphere of the nation as they are men and hold the roles of progressing the family (the nation). Babamukuru had authority in the public and private sphere through his job and him being the respectable leader of the family. Nhamo has the privilege of being the first born male, so he gets the first opportunity to receive an education and try to succeed in the oppressive colonized government. This is different for the female characters like Maiguru, Ma'Shingayi, Nyasha and Tambu who critique the female roles in this family metaphor. Their roles are within the private sphere of the nation and are defined, almost exclusively, by their bodies.

The mother role in Eriksen’s theoretical family metaphor is responsible for passing along language and traditions of the nation to the children. This responsibility puts them strictly in the house or the private, domestic sphere taking care of the children. As Grosz points out, “...women’s oppression (in agreement with patriarchs) is a consequence of their containment within an inadequate, i.e., a female or potentially maternal, body...a notion that women’s oppression is, at least to some extent, biologically justified insofar as women are less socially, politically, and intellectually able to participate as men’s social equals when they bear or raise children” (16) Women are solely defined by their bodies in both the private, domestic sphere and the public, political sphere in terms of reproductivity. Since they are able to bear children they are solely associated with the body, which is inferior. This association brings disproportionate harmful effects on the native women in *Nervous Conditions*.

Starting with Tambu's aunt, Maiguru attempts to embrace the mother figure in the sense that she spends most of her time and energy pleasing and being obedient towards her husband, and trying to pass this tradition along to her daughter Nyasha. Tambu notices this during dinner when she first arrives at her aunt's house on the mission, "...I chose one small biscuit that did not even have cream in the middle and bit into it slowly so that I would be obliged to take anything else. This made Maiguru anxious. My sweet little aunt who liked to please, interpreted my difference as her own shortcoming" (Dangarembga 73). Her aunt gets value in pleasing others, which is a quality that is strengthened from being constantly undervalued and told that she is not worth something when she is not pleasing others, especially her family. This is reinforced by the fact that Maiguru immediately interprets Tambu's actions as a result of her own faults, or not pleasing her. Tambu also describes Maiguru as "the embodiment of courtesy and good breeding" (Dangarembga 74). Maiguru attempts to perfectly represent the mother role because she is courteous of others at all times in order to please them and she breeds her children to serve the family and their father just the same.

Maiguru represents a criticism to this role because it has not only forced her to strip her native identity along with her husband, but has forced her to sacrifice opportunities of furthering her career and education in order to take care of her children. Maiguru is a very educated and intelligent women, which Tambu is surprised about when she learns of her getting a Master's Degree in England with Babamukuru:

> "'I thought you went to look after Babamukuru,' I said. 'That's all people ever say'…
>
> Maiguru was more serious than she had ever been before. Her seriousness changed her from a sweet, soft dove to something more like a wasp...'Whatever they thought,' she

> said, ‘much good did it do them! I still studied for that degree and got it in spite of all of them… Your uncle wouldn’t be able to do half the things he does if I didn’t work as well!...What it is,’ She sighed, to have to choose between self and security. When I was in England I glimpsed for a little while the things I could have been, the things I could have done if - if - if things were - different - But there was Babawa Chido and the children and the family. And does anyone realise, does anyone appreciate, what sacrifices were made? As for me, no one even thinks about the things I gave up.’” (Dangarembga 102-103)

In the passage above, Maiguru reveals how she has even thought about what could have been if she didn’t have to look after her husband and children. In terms of Grosz’s analysis, Maiguru was forced to make these sacrifices because of women’s containment within a maternal body. Since they are associated solely with the body, the only value that is connected to women in this mother role is bearing children. This is clearly represented in Maiguru’s experiences. Maiguru is a character who tried to infiltrate the public sphere by getting a great education so she could have a career of her own. However, due to the oppressive role of the nurturing mother, placed on her by a system that is meant to make her inferior, she is unable to successfully penetrate the public sphere. This oppression is disproportionately harmful to Miaguru than it is with Babamukuru, because he was able to infiltrate the public sphere successfully: he got a great job after getting his education while Maiguru was forced to give up her career. It is through Tambu’s point of view that this process of Maiguru’s oppression is revealed since she is considered an outsider on the mission from not growing up there but also has an insider perspective as she is a part of the family.

It is also through Tambu’s unique point of view that we can see how Tambu’s mother, Ma'Shingayi critiques this national, nurturing mother role. Ma'Shingayi is a character that

represents a native that doesn't even get the chance of education and career like Maiguru as she is immediately put in the role of mother from a young age. She got pregnant with Nhamo by Tambu's father very young and since then basically never stopped having children. In this way, her body is the defining factor of the role she plays in this society and family. She is a mother and someone who has children to carry on the family name, tradition and language. Ma'Shingayi is fully aware of the role she fills within the national family metaphor, this can be seen when she tries to teach Tambu the reality of their situation as poor, native women in a white supremacist government:

> This business of womanhood is a heavy burden,' she said. 'How could it not be? Aren't we the ones who bear children? When it is like that you can't just decide today I want to do this, tomorrow I want to do that, the next day I want to be educated! When there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one who has to make them. And these things are not easy. And these days it is worse, with the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other... (Dangarembga 16)

Ma'Shingayi is telling her daughter the role they are expected to fill, which is to sacrifice education, career and have children. This is her actively passing along the traditions of the nation. Ma'Shingayi is also saying that her being black on top of being a woman makes the role of women in their society even more oppressive. In this way, Ma'Shingayi is verbally critiquing the mother role she has been placed into and actively critiquing it by showing how disproportionate the oppression native women face compared to men in both spheres.

As mentioned, Ma'Shingayi never got the chance to even get an education like Maiguru due to her being immediately forced into the mother role at a young age, because within

patriarchs women are seen only as bodies that can reproduce. Even when Maiguru attempted to step out of that role by getting a great education she had to immediately give it up once she started having kids. Ma'Shingayi is even more proof that due to women's association with a "inferior" body, they cannot infiltrate the public sphere that is dominated by men. She also represents a criticism that being a poverty-stricken native women in a white supremacist society adds another layer of oppression that attempts to keep the hierarchical dichotomy between men and women and white and native, since she never even got the chance to try and infiltrate the "intellectual" public sphere.

Ma'Shingayi still tries to defy her role through the denial of food. After Ma'Shingayi finds out about Tambu's plan to extend her education at a convent, her physical and mental health declines rapidly, "She ate less and less and did less and less, until within days she could neither eat nor do anything, not even change the dress she wore. She did not go to Nyamarira to wash, or to the garden. On the days that she did get up at all she rose late and did nothing but sit in the sun…" (Dangarembga 187). Ma'Shingayi has realized that her daughter is going farther away to an even more predominantly white environment, and because she blames the mission and Babamukuru for killing her son she denies the fact that Tambu is going by not eating. By physically denying her body nourishment, she is also denying the sole factor that defines her oppression with the public and private sphere.

Tambu's cousin Nyasha is another female character that physically defies the oppressive role placed on her, the passive daughter role. This role expects daughters to be passive, obedient, and to make sacrifices for their family and nation in order to preserve its prosperity. Nyasha grew up within a very colonized native family as she spent most of her time growing up in England and on the mission. Tambu notices mental and physical changes in her cousin after she returns

from being abroad and living on the mission. Dangarembga's use of Tambu's point of view to describe these transformations is important, because it allows the reader to see the direct comparison of these characters' older, native selves that Tambu is familiar with, to the newer, "improved," and "whiter" selves:

> She did not talk beyond a quick stuttered greeting. Nor did she smile any more at all…I missed the bold, ebullient companion I had had who had gone to England but not returned from there. Yet each time she came I could see that she had grown a little duller and dimmer, the expression in her eyes a little more complex, as though she were directing more and more of her energy inwards to commune with herself about issues that she alone had seen. (Dangerembga 51-52)

Tambu describes Nyasha as growing, "a little duller and dimmer" each time that she comes back to the homestead, she compares this "dull" new version of her cousin to the older, "bold [and] ebullient" version that Tambu saw before Nyasha left to get an education. Nyasha's usual happy energetic attitude has shifted to a withdrawn girl who doesn't "smile anymore at all." Her "expression" is described as being "more complex" and directed internally. Tambu's is saddened that Nyasha is separating from her native identity and culture because she misses her old self, and this displeasure is relevant when she grapples with this role. It is also clear how familiar Tambu is with the older, more "native" version of Nyasha, but that means she is unfamiliar with the mission and why Nyasha experiences these changes.

The internal conflict that Nyasha is observed to be having is the conflict of trying to reject the oppressive daughter role within Eriksen's theoretical metaphor. Nyasha is described by Tambu with negative connotations many times. She is described as being disobedient and

"embarrassing" by the way she talks back to her parents and questions everything instead of being a "good" daughter and just doing as they say. Nyasha's questioning is seen as an act of defiance to the oppressive daughter role. This defiance is both verbal and physical like Tambu's mother, however it is amplified. In the scene below Tambu recounts Nyasha being confronted for disobeying her father, who represents the successful, dominating man within this family. Due to Tambu not experiencing these physical changes herself, Tambu acts as an outsider in this situation to reveal this defiance:

> 'You will eat that food,' commanded the man. 'Your mother and I are not killing ourselves working just for you to waste your time playing with boys and then come back and turn up your nose at what we offer. Sit and eat that food. I am telling you. Eat it!'…'Christ!' Nyasha breathed and with a shrug picked up her fork and began to eat, slowly at first, then gobbling the food down without a break. The atmosphere lightened with every mouthful she took.
>
> 'You may go now,' her father said when she had emptied her plate.
>
> She went straight to the bathroom, spent a long time there. Excusing myself from the table, I waited in the bedroom. I could hear her gagging and choking. (Dangerembga 192-193)

Nyasha throwing up her food is not only a reaction, but a self-inflicted action, "'I did it myself. With my toothbrush. Don't ask me why. I don't know'" (Dangarembga 193). The intentional act of throwing up the food she was forced to eat is a symbol of her defiance of the oppressive role as the obedient daughter, and similar to Ma'Shingayi, she is choosing to deny her body the

nourishment it needs so it cannot be used to oppress her within this colonial system that defines women solely through their reproductive attributes.

Nyasha is aware of just how oppressive these roles of an ideal national family created by a society that values whiteness are on the natives due to her education. This is where her desires to defy it arises. Examples of this awareness and the internal conflict that is created are expressed when she is confronted by Tambu after throwing up, "'You know, Tambu…'I guess he's right, right to dislike me. It's not his fault, it's me. But I can't help it. Really, I can't. He makes me so angry. I can't just shut up when he puts on his God act. I'm just not made that way. Why not? Why can't I just take it like everybody else does'" (Dangarembga 193)? Nyasha is fully aware of her problem with embracing the obedient role and letting her father "put on his God act," and she refuses to accept these roles. Although, this physical refusal causes extreme physical harm to her to an extent that she even wonders why she can't just "take it like everybody else." This is how Nyasha critiques the oppressive daughter role of the nation, by verbally and physically showing how this role defines women by their bodies and uses their bodies to confine them within the private sphere. Her awareness of this is due to the privilege of her education, but when she tries to infiltrate the public sphere with this education she is immediately shut down by her father who dominates it. This again proves how disproportionate the oppression of this colonized, white supremacist society and its roles is on women compared to men.

The last character that critiques the nuclear family of the nation is the main character and narrator, Tambudzai. Unlike Nyasha, Tambu embraces this obedient daughter role completely, "Beside Nyasha I was a paragon of feminine decorum, principally because I hardly ever talked unless spoken to, and then only to answer with the utmost respect whatever question had been asked. Above all, I did not question things" (Dangarembga 157). Throughout most of the book,

Tambu tries to be the exemplary and obedient daughter that does as she says and puts her family and other people first. Moments when she does not exemplify this role is in her pursuit of an education since that is a role that is usually meant for the men and sons in this oppressive theoretical family metaphor. It is through her pursuit of an education where even Tambu ends up defying the daughter role by trying to infiltrate the public sphere and be associated with her intellect instead of her body.

The beginning of Tambu's rejection of her passive, obedient role as the daughter started when she was young and her parents couldn't afford to pay for her education anymore so she started selling mealies to raise money for her school fees. When her father tries to convince her that school is no use for her since she should be at home learning to cook Tambu's response is, "His intention was to soothe me with comforting, sensible words, but I could not see the sense" (Dangarembga 16). Here is the first time that Tambu does not accept her situation as being just an obedient daughter who learns to cook, she wants to get an education so she takes matters into her own hands. Her parents let her sell the mealies, but not to really help her get that education instead, according to her mother, to "'Let her see for herself that some things cannot be done'" (Dangarembga 17). They allow her to raise money for her education because they believe she is going to fail and that she must realize that "some things cannot be done," such as a young, poor, native girl getting an education in a colonized country.

Tambu does end up raising the money she needs for school, and this fortifies her desire for an education. When Nhamo dies she isn't sad that he was gone because her brother represented the misogynistic role and barrier that brought her down and stopped her from being able to step outside of her own role. When she found out her brother died Tambu mentions that since she would be the one to take on the task of emancipating her family she, "...was

triumphant. Babamukuru had approved of [her] direction. [She] was vindicated" (Dangarembga 57)! Tambu felt more justified and excited about finally being able to receive the education she desired. This is the beginning of Tambu's criticism against the oppressive, obedient role that is placed on the daughter of the nation, by revealing the disproportionate oppression that she received as a young native woman trying to get an education. It took her own brother dying in order for her to receive the same opportunity as him.

Tambu saw this chance as not only an opportunity to learn but also to completely separate herself from the poverty that is associated with her native self. Tambu believed that this education would emancipate her from that association, this can be seen when she is leaving the homestead for the mission:

> "When I stepped into Babamukuru's car I was a peasant...It was evident from the corrugated black callouses on my knees, the scales on my skin that were due to lack of oil, the short, dull tufts of malnourished hair. This was the person I was leaving behind. At Babamukuru's I expected to find another self, a clean, well-groomed, genteel self who could not have been bred, could not have survived, on the homestead" (Dangarembga 58-59).

Tambu's association of her "calloused" and "scaly" self on the homestead reveals how she associates the homestead with her lesser, native self, while the "new" Tambu that she will find is associated with the mission and is "well-groomed" and "genteel." This association of the mission being the place that will make her into a better version of herself is evidence of her internalizing the" inferiority" that is linked with the native population in this white supremacist society, which again shows that being black in this society adds another layer of oppression.

However, Tambu's expectations of what she intends to find on the mission are different to what she actually finds. Due to her unique position of being both an insider and an outsider on the mission Tambu witnesses many things that shake her confidence in her plan to receive an education and be free of the poverty and oppression she faced on the homestead. As stated Tambu witnesses and realizes the entrapment of her mother and aunt in their roles as mothers and the rebellion and eventual decay of her cousin's body and mind. After one incident of her cousin getting hit, Tambu came to the realization that even when you are getting a great education you are not free from the oppressive roles placed on women, "The victimisation, I saw, was universal. It didn't depend on any of the things I had thought it depended on. Men took it everywhere with them. Even heroes like Babamukuru did it. And that was the problem...But what I didn't like as the way all the conflicts came back to this question of femaleness. Femaleness as opposed and inferior to maleness" (Dangarembga 118). Here, Tambu realizes how women are defined as inferior and less than men. It is through their bodies that women are defined as inferior, because their bodies are seen as weaker and only valued for reproductive purposes.

It is also revealed here that while the ideal nation expects daughters to grow up to be mothers they also expect them to be pure at the same time. As with the case of Nyasha in the scene above, she is being punished for staying out too late and showing too much of her body in her dress and this punishment is a physical beating. We can see how the women characters are defined by their bodies and how their bodies are used in their punishment and oppression. Tambu also begins to really critique not just the oppressive role of the obedient daughter placed on her and Nyasha, but also starts to critique the enforcers of those roles like Babamukuru. Someone who Tambu saw as a savior and someone who could free her from the confining roles of the

private sphere she now sees as someone who victimizes and inflicts the oppression she is trying to escape.

Within all the characters mentioned throughout this paper, the importance of their relationship with the oppressive roles placed upon them by the colonized government trying to preserve its dominance over the natives is consistently revealed through the character Tambu. This is revealed alongside the clear disproportionate oppression on women compared to men. A character that actually critiques the role of the national daughter as always passive and in the words of Boehmer, “inhibits private spaces or the peripheries of public national space” (106). After she witnesses her aunt who tried to succeed academically in order to infiltrate the public sphere, and her mother and cousin who physically defy their confinement in their roles she realizes her ignorance on what this role of being educated means, “I was young then and able to banish things, but seeds do grow. Although I was not aware of it then, no longer could I accept Sacred Heart and what it represented as a sunrise on my horizon...something on my mind began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed, bringing me to this time when I can set down this story” (Dangarembga 208). The realizations that Tambu experienced throughout the book while watching her family suffer under colonization plants a “seed” into her mind that helps her to begin to question the roles and paths that have been placed onto her. A seed that grows into a book that becomes a tool to reveal these oppressive roles.

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