

TRABAJO DE GRADO

UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA

FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA

DEPARTAMENTO DE FILOLOGÍA INGLESA



Hybrid Education as a Source of Contradiction in the Way to  
Womanhood in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*

Irene Pagola Montoya

Dirigido por Dra. Olga Barrios Herrero

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La directora:

Trabajo que para optar al  
Grado de Salamanca presenta  
**Irene Pagola Montoya,**  
dirigido por la Dra.  
**Olga Barrios Herrero**

2006

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*This essay is gratefully dedicated to my parents;  
for their unconditional love  
and constant support*

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the whole world is witnessing too many cases of gender-based violence. The terrible consequences of this kind of incidents, both physical and psychological, have caused alarm among the population and the role played by instruction in the prevention of this social problem has become more prominent than ever. Besides, sad events such as the mistreatment of women have highlighted the importance of female emancipation, since it is still an unresolved matter in many political programmes and women are everywhere quite far from gaining access to it, partly due to their impossibility to receive an education that encourages them to demand their essential rights.

However, if Western women have difficulty in attaining full freedom in certain spheres of life, which is the situation of those who live in the so-called *Third World*? If anybody pays attention to Africa, frustrated attempts at Safiya's and Amina's executions by stoning immediately spring to mind as well as many heartbreaking testimonies related to the performance of clitoridectomy or infibulation. Westerners regard these and many other similar episodes as cruel and macabre. Nonetheless, it is necessary to consider the perspective from which the true protagonists confront this type of acts. Many Western people attribute these rituals to African primitivism, but this conclusion arises from an Occidental point of view. Although these traditions are undoubtedly primitive due to their inhuman nature, it is not fair to deem a whole culture as savage and obsolete as many Westerners are used to doing. This biased approach to foreign societies results from the European habit to assume the position of the coloniser, whose discretion always turns to be beyond dispute, but that often emerges from an ignorance that cannot be repaired with schooling, but with a much more tolerant attitude toward difference. Therefore, in spite of the fact that Africa has been invaded by Westerners, this continent is still unexplored as far as its peoples and cultures is concerned and a way of reversing this tendency is to read and analyse in depth those works that Africans write.

As for the difficulties to come into contact with African Literature, the most evident one is that related to the scarcity of texts that are translated into languages that are different from those spoken in the continent. This undertaking, that of translation, involves several points of reflection: how can certain realities of the source culture be translated into the target one, when they are non-existent in this latter context? Do



translators have to adapt the unknown culture for the recipient to grasp it or it is better that they leave it just as it is for readers to appreciate its particularities? Scholars such as André Lefevere, Lawrence Venuti and Susan Bassnett among others have concentrated on the study of these questions and they also devote their efforts to denounce a series of translations that are so prejudiced as to foster the creation of false stereotypes. It is a fact that the perspective adopted by cultural translators seriously affects the final product and, of course, the image that of Africa is conveyed to readers. As a consequence, it is necessary a previous process of research on both African languages and the different cultures that these communicate.

In the case of Spain, there are only a few people showing some interest in African Studies. What is more, when it comes to deal with native literature written by female authors, the number of scholars who focuses on this area of knowledge is really low. Besides, it is very difficult to find works written by African women that have been translated into Spanish. Hence, this is a clear hindrance to the promotion of a special type of folklore that is often committed socially. The following list indicates the few female writers of African origin, whose books can be read in Spanish: Calixthe Beyala (Cameroon), Amma Darko (Ghana), María Nsué and Raquel Llombé (Equatorial Guinea), Paulina Chiziane (Mozambique), Buchi Emecheta and Ken Bugul (Nigeria), Mariama Bâ (Senegal), Ellen Kuzwayo and Bessie Head (South Africa) and Yvonne Vera, Nozipo Maraire and Tsitsi Dangarembga (Zimbabwe). As a result of this short roll of names, it is only a little part of the African universe that Spanish readers get to know through the eyes of women. Then, it proves to be essential to resort to the analysis of works written in other languages in order to discover a female reality that is almost unknown in the Western part of the world or misunderstood due to a lack of first-hand sources of information.

As regards this essay, it mainly concentrates on the subject of education in Africa. It is not a limited study only referring to the colonial introduction of schooling into the continent, but also to the special preparation that natives receive for life according to their original tradition. Women deserve special attention in this paper, as their experiences both as pupils and educators are perfectly captured in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. This novel proves to be a good instance of how a particular background can both shape and destroy female identity, especially if it relies on certain racist or sexist basis for its sustenance and subsequent perpetuation. Therefore, education is represented in the book as a key for tracing native women's

significance in the past, present and future of African communities as well as for examining how the five female protagonists perceive their true social position to be. Furthermore, hybrid education, conceived as a source of criticism at fixed poles of identification such as the African and European ones, turns to be one possible step forwards to the emancipation of African women in a patriarchal world, chiefly controlled by Westerners.

As for the opening chapter, it is an analysis revolving around education in Africa before and after colonisation so as to assess the extent to which this phenomenon penetrated African reality and altered it forever. First of all, there is an extended enumeration of the essential characteristics of pre-colonial training in the continent, because, despite the prejudices of many Western people, education existed in Africa before colonial invasions. When Europeans underestimate the importance of African traditional education, they actually do it out of ignorance, since they tend to put academic instruction on the level with education, while these are not equivalent terms at all. Education in pre-colonial Africa had nothing to do with schooling, but it cannot be doubted that it was education after all. Therefore, in this first section, it is explained how sources such as religion, communal law and oral folklore constituted a particular upbringing that was in keeping with the African context that natives inhabited.

Secondly, there is a special reference to the fate that traditional education finally suffered when colonisers arrived in the continent. Europeans suppressed African didactic practices and introduced a new educational system that focused on academic instruction. This new system was conceived so as to mentally control natives and make them believe that they were inferior human-beings due to their skin colour. Thus, the foundations of pre-colonial education got severely damaged and communal life disappeared as a consequence of a new society that relied on values encouraging individualism and capitalism. Furthermore, English was imposed as the language of communication and, although it was associated with a sense of sophistication, it was also the linguistic source of denigration.

Thirdly, education is studied as one of the spheres of life that best depicted the chaotic situation that followed the autonomy of the African countries. After self-determination, African leaders had to steer their continent's destiny again, but they did not agree on how to do it or how to teach the population to assimilate their brand-new independence. There were two groups that projected Africa's future in a different way. On the one hand, some people defended the restoration of tradition, even of obsolete

practices, as the key to recuperate African identity's essence. On the other hand, there were others who relinquished their origins for the sake of imitating colonisers and so inheriting their authority. It was finally European mimics that took charge of African nations and, unfortunately, they are responsible for the disgraceful condition of Africa at the present moment. When they gained the power that they longed for, Europeanised leaders concentrated on obtaining profits for a few individuals and they disregarded important projects such as those intended to provide access to education for all the population. Hence, Africa shows too high illiteracy rates at the present time and it can also be considered a land of contrasts that cannot confront modernity on the same terms as developed countries: tradition has fallen obsolete and some practices can be considered very cruel (for example, clitoridectomy or infibulation) and academic education is frequently a privilege that is conceived as a source of emancipation, but that is also identified with a kind of renunciation of African roots.

As regards the second chapter, it focuses on the relationship between women and education in Africa before and after colonisation. In the first place, there is a description of pre-colonial upbringing as a process conceived for native women to assume their future role as mothers and the consequences of this obligation, mainly their submission to a series of denigrating traditions and rituals that were imposed on them out of sexist prejudices. In addition, African women are presented as educators who constituted their sororities in order to raise children and transmit them some knowledge through storytelling. This was a *matrifocal* conception of education inside patriarchal societies that had nothing to do with the structures of the so-called matrilineal and matriarchal communities. With respect to these latter, it is demonstrated that they did not involve any real power for women.

In the second place, colonisation is depicted as an event that affected native women's life very much, especially as far as their upbringing is concerned. On the one hand, African men lost their past sovereignty in favour of Europeans, who legitimised their superiority by means of their white skin colour. Therefore, since African men wanted to still preserve some authority, they toughened certain initiation rituals practiced on girls as a way of asserting their manliness and they also forced women to assume a kind of slavery condition that gave proof of the fact that traditional education became more repressive for African women. However, despite hardship, native women did not disregard their role as educators at all, since they took refuge in sororities so as to search for a solidarity that they also instilled in their children by means of storytelling

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and that made them raise their daughters' awareness about the double subjugation that they were going to be submitted to as a consequence of sexism and colonialism. On the other hand, it became a fact that African women occupied the last position in their societies, as they were not considered intelligent enough to receive formal instruction, if there was a man in the family that could attend school instead. Nevertheless, the few women who had the opportunity to get academic education began to call into question their African tradition as well as the external input imported by Europeans. Consequently, they realised that the world was full of injustices for African women and so they decided to fight against inequality by adhering to *womanism*. This commitment is still evident nowadays, as reflected in several works written by native women who condemn gender-based abuse in all respects and try to define the essentials for their own emancipation.

With respect to the third chapter, it is intended to be an analysis of the novel *Nervous Conditions* written by Tsitsi Dangarembga in order to demonstrate that education, both traditional and academic, is a key element for configuring identities, but also for challenging the fixed uniqueness that individuals assume them to have. In this case, it is Tambudzai (Tambu), the protagonist, that, paying attention to the experiences of her female relatives, questions the foundations of both the African and European cultures and points at universal sexism as the element that spurs her to suspect cultural identities. She discovers herself as a hybrid individual, but it is precisely this condition that allows her to begin her way to emancipation as an African woman and to take it upon herself to represent the hope for a better future for her female compatriots.

First, a metaphor is established which identifies a baobab with the sorority constituted by the five female characters in the book. On the one hand, the characteristics and functions of this tree in real life can be associated with the important role performed by African women in their communities daily. On the other hand, it is much more interesting to put a baobab's natural growth on a level with the psychological development of the protagonists in *Nervous Conditions*. All these women try to achieve their emancipation as a group, but also individually. However, their African background, academic education and, chiefly, sexism pervading these two previous domains turn to be serious obstacles that not all the characters are able to overcome. Tambu is the only one who reaches closest to her emancipation as a woman in Africa. This is due to her hybrid education that boosts her personal growth and resistance and that makes her symbolise a progress attained thanks to a common and

long-lasting battle of African women against a sad destiny marked by their origins and sex long ago.

Second, although the personality of one female character in the novel cannot be understood without referring to the experiences of the rest, this part of the essay is an attempt at studying the particularities of each of them separately, not as a whole as in the case of the baobab tree. In the first place, Mainini, Tambu's mother, is presented as a victim of the introduction of colonial education into the continent, since her son's death at the mission, precipitated by what she calls *Englishness*, definitely demonstrates her that, in the past, present and future, African women are always stigmatised by both their female and native condition (double subjugation). In the second place, Maiguru, Tambu's aunt, is an example of how background, either African or European, condemns a woman to submission and isolation, if this upbringing is considered inappropriate for a female in the context of its application. In the third place, Lucia, Tambu's other aunt, stands as the model of the new African woman that wants to integrate into modernity. For achieving this purpose, she challenges those sexist parts of her tradition that are intended to repress her femininity and she borrows from the European culture her right to education as the main source of her liberation as a woman. In the fourth place, Nyasha, Tambu's cousin, embodies the alienating effects of her double cultural identity (hybridity). She sadly discovers herself to be a repudiated individual in her mother country for combating gender-based discrimination in the European manner, that is, through education, reflection and subsequent reaction against injustice born to sexism. In the fifth place, Tambu, the main character, represents hybridity as a condition that can trace the way to female emancipation. Her academic education is essential for calling the structures of her surrounding native world into question, but it is especially the experiences of her female relatives that encourage her to be critical of the African and European manipulation exerted on women everywhere, as an attempt at their total disempowerment. Her awareness of the positive side of adopting middle stances on any confrontation between cultures involves a guarantee of a better future for African women in the modern world.

After disclosing the content of this paper, it becomes evident that a meticulous analysis on female education in Africa grants a significant opportunity to approach the tribulations of a group of women that actually appreciates its traditional culture, but who cannot avoid longing for a series of Western aspirations such as their emancipation as educated individuals with full rights. As above mentioned, incidents related to the

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mistreatment of women worldwide give proof of the fact that complete emancipation is still denied for the female sector of societies everywhere. However, thanks to schooling, Western women are at least made aware of the obsolete nature of those sexist impositions that, established by a patriarchal tradition, annihilate their pride and potential as unique members of their communities. In this sense, a process of consciousness-raising through academic instruction in Africa can be regarded as a westernised initiative to uproot native women from their origins. Nevertheless, this initiative has to be conceived as a project intended to eradicate female resignation to the series of gender-based injustices that Africa women undergo every day. The experiences narrated in the literary works of African writers such as Dangarembga (all hybrid women) constitute one of the best means to reveal to the International Community the true necessities of native women in the continent, but it is also an appropriate way of showing African women that, as their compatriots guarantee through their books, there is still hope for a better existence as women who does not want to relinquish their native identity.

Therefore, the primary objective of this essay is to discover a reality that is quite new for Westerners, as it implicates a group of people in the world, the so-called *wretched of the earth* by Frantz Fanon, that cannot express themselves freely very frequently due to their female sex, their African background or even their hybrid education. In the case of Spain, it is necessary to foster the importance of reading and translating African Literature written by female authors as a way of approaching the concerns of those women who are coming to this country nowadays. All these African women often look for an opportunity to start a new life far from hardship. Hence, Spain only turns to be a place where to find a solution for their economic problems at first. However, their arrival in Spain entails their coming into contact with a new education, frequently with literacy for the first time, that allows these women to absorb an input that encourages them to treat the foundations of their original culture as relative, especially those relying on discriminatory and old-fashioned traditions. Simultaneously, the presence of African women in Spain can also teach its population to esteem *otherness* so much to the extent of accepting difference as something natural, even as something better than the cultural particularities that people consider to be inherently theirs. Is this not hybridisation? Is not literature that can help people to understand this process? Cannot it be the beginning of a coexistence based on tolerance? Multicultural education possesses the key to a new future and, in this future, women as whole,

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without inner fragmentations as a consequence of cultural-based divergences, can also emancipate themselves by demanding together their essential rights all over the world.

## CHAPTER ONE

## THE TRANSITION FROM PRE- TO POST-COLONIAL EDUCATION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES ON AFRICANS' LIFE AND IDENTITY

Education is a process that is always in motion, which takes place any time that there are both a source of knowledge which stimulates reflection (a story, a war, a song, the death of a relative, a certain lesson in class...) and a recipient that grasps, consciously or unconsciously, the information conveyed by the source. Depending on how individuals internalise this input, they create a specific set of values and these prove to be crucial for physical survival in life as well as for the formation and perpetuation of an individual cultural identity that should be firstly adapted to the collective cultural identity (or, as Stuart Hall calls it, *collective "one true self"*) of the society that people belong to<sup>1</sup>. Academic instruction, although it is an essential means of education especially in Western countries, is not synonymous with the general idea of education; it is simply one of the many sources that nurtures the global process of education. However, the phenomenon of colonialism imposed formal instruction by force as the only point of reference to determine whether individuals were educated or not. As a result, the universal concept of education changed completely with the introduction of academic education into those countries that did not know it yet and the world got discriminatorily divided into literate (the rich, colonisers) and illiterate (the poor, the colonised) people. Africa is a good instance of how colonial academic instruction, associated with other factors such as subjugation and manipulation, established differences about the true meaning and implications of being educated in the continent in three periods of time: the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras.

First, contrary to Western expectations, education was a fact in Africa before colonial invasions. Far from the process of literacy and schooling, religion, communal

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<sup>1</sup> I agree with Stuart Hall when he establishes a division between two different types of cultural identity:

The first position defines "cultural identity" in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective "one true self" . . . which . . . [reflects] the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as "one people," with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history . . . . This . . . conception of cultural identity played a critical role in all post-colonial struggles . . . . There is . . . a second . . . position [which] recognizes that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute . . . "what we have become." We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about "one experience, one identity," without acknowledging its other side . . . . Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being" (22-3).



law and oral folklore contributed to the constitution of a traditional upbringing and of a wide range of values that were both respectable and appropriate to the virgin<sup>2</sup> environment that Africans lived in. Second, when colonisers arrived in the continent, they annihilated African didactic practices and decided to replace them with a new educational system. This new system was based on academic instruction and, instead of representing the interests of natives, it was designed so as to foster race-based discrimination<sup>3</sup>. These unfair changes concerning pre-colonial education also had many consequences on Africans' daily life, mainly the disintegration of communal existence in all respects and the introduction of a new reality (progress, capitalism, competition and individualism), codified in an alien language (English), where white foreigners were constantly praised and black natives were just victims of denigration. Third, post-colonial education turned to be a mirror image of the chaotic situation that followed the independence of the African countries. African people had a hopeful future in front of them, but they did not seem to reach an agreement on how to pave the way for grasping it (on how to educate the population). There were two opposite groups that planned the continent's emancipation in a different manner, either adhering to tradition so fiercely as to become retrograde or imitating colonisers' action to the extent of sacrificing African identity. The effects of this disagreement can be related to the miserable condition of the continent nowadays.

### **Pre-Colonial Education in Africa**

As previously mentioned, most Westerners have maintained that Africans lacked any kind of education until colonisers arrived in the continent. In fact, it has been even asserted that it was only colonialism that finally guaranteed Africans access to an appropriate training. However, this stereotyped belief is entirely false. Although different from the Western one, Africa, before colonial invasions, did have an educational system that was based on three traditional mainstays such as religion, communal law and oral folklore. What is more, pre-colonial education has always

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<sup>2</sup> Whenever I use the adjective *virgin* to describe pre-colonial Africa, I refer to the fact that, in this period, the continent was not degraded yet by those blights such as capitalism, competition and individualism that, taking progress as a point of departure, had already generated in the Western world.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Said explained the convictions of colonisers, when it came to judge the colonised morally: "The [African] is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'" (1979, 40). Although he focused on the condition of Orientals, he recognised that his conclusions could apply to the situation of Africans as well (1979, 93).

constituted so representative an element of African identity that, in spite of colonialism, several educational practices are still preserved in the continent nowadays. For example, in Zimbabwe (as in many other African countries such as Mali, Somalia, Zambia, Ghana, etc.), people, especially in rural areas, still eat with their hands and they are used to washing them in a special manner before and after having eaten. This process involves a specific ritual that children need to learn from their parents, since the way in which the bowl of water is circulated must observe a particular hierarchical order established by tradition<sup>4</sup>.

In an attempt to explain in a few words what African traditional education involves, I will borrow Lucio del Cornò's definition:

“Educazione tradizionale” [è quella] in cui si perpetua quell'educazione pre-coloniale che nella storia dei popoli africani aveva affinato i propri moduli per stabilire un equilibrio generazionale, rafforzare l'identità di ciascuno nel proprio popolo, trasmettere le tecniche produttive e rendere consapevoli della storia e dell'attuale organizzazione dei propri vicini secondo i cerchi via via più larghi della famiglia, del clan, della tribù (55-6).

At first sight, this explanation could also illustrate Westerners' concept of education in general terms, even nowadays. In fact, I do believe that education is more or less based on these same foundations as everywhere else and, consequently, it is pointless praising certain educational values and discrediting *others*<sup>5</sup>. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that there is one aspect that contributes to distinguish among different educational systems in the world: the application of the above mentioned educational principles to

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<sup>4</sup> *Nervous Conditions*' protagonist shows her anxiety when performing this traditional act, as she can be found responsible for offending any of her family members:

I had a special task. I had to carry the water-dish in which people would wash their hands. I did not like doing this because you had to be very sure of the relative status of everybody present or else it was easy to make mistakes, especially when there were so many people. Today it was doubly tricky because although Babamukuru was the guest of honour, there were male relatives present of higher status than he (Dangarembga 40).

<sup>5</sup> When, throughout this essay, I use the term *other* in any of its morphological categories, I am referring to the concept that is constantly employed in any kind of post-colonial study: “The colonized subject is characterized as ‘other’ through discourses such as primitivism and cannibalism, as a means of establishing the binary separation of the colonizer and colonized and asserting the naturalness and primacy of the colonizing culture and world view” (Ashcroft 169). When colonisers invented the condition of *otherness*, they expropriated natives of their collective cultural identity by means of a totalitarian discourse that imposed both a history and a culture that extolled Western qualities, but underestimated any aspect that had to do with the civilisation of the colonised. As a result, they contributed to the assertion that cultural identities are not fixed categories, but a question of positioning that emerges from a need of identification (Hall 24). In this case, Europeans condemned African cultural identity to *otherness*, because they wanted to position their own cultural identity in a superior stage at the expense of the African cultural identity.

reality, which largely depends on the context of their implementation. For instance, pre-colonial education in Africa was adapted to the priorities established by an environment where nature's violence was unpredictable, tradition was to be strictly respected and progress and capitalism were totally unknown for its population. Although, for many Westerners, these three aspects might represent a series of limitations for the development of a good educational system, it is to be thought that African education was constituted both out of the restrictions and virtues set by unawareness<sup>6</sup>.

As for the main characteristics of African education, it is important to firstly state that natives were ignorant of logical or scientific reasoning. Since they could not resort to contrasted explanations to give sense to the bulk of life events, they relied on particular religious beliefs that set the pattern that justified the world. For instance, in the case of pre-colonial Black Africa, the majority of religions were animist. Therefore, people were convinced that both natural forces and the spirits of dead ancestors were responsible for everything that happened around them.

In reference to natural forces, Africans considered that their physical subsistence was entirely at the mercy of these elements. After all, these forces could bless their lands with rain, fruitfulness and good crops or, on the contrary, they could also damn African lots to drought, plagues and barrenness. That is why living in harmony with nature was of such importance for Africans and, since childhood, they were taught to show deference to the natural world by performing specific rites that they learnt through imitation and participation (Krige 98)<sup>7</sup>.

With regard to dead ancestors, their judgement constituted the main point of orientation for the organisation and development of African communities: “. . . [L]os antepasados, que si bien es cierto que se han ido, al mismo tiempo permanecen con nosotros, siguen conduciéndonos a través de la vida y nos protegen del mal” (Kapuściński 331-2). As Congolese scholar Mbuyi Kabunda Badi agrees with his

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<sup>6</sup> When I mention Africans' state of unawareness, I refer to the fact that natives did not think about the existence of a place where they had neither to take care of nature, nor to respect tradition to the full. It can be said that they accepted their world as it was presented to them. What is more, African pre-colonial unawareness also involved a distance from progress and capitalism and this distance contributed to a longer preservation of important parts of national identity. That is why it is time that African unawareness was not mistaken for barbarism or primitivism. In any case, if African societies could not develop at the pace required by the first world's progress, this backwardness is due to the devastating effects of Western action in the continent.

<sup>7</sup> Whenever possible, I will try to give examples about Zimbabwe, since it is Tsitsi Dangarembga's mother country and the novel *Nervous Conditions* is also located in this nation. Therefore, the Bantu-speaking societies are very representative in this essay, since part of these communities live in Zimbabwe nowadays and the majority of characteristics that are given about them can also be applied to the people living in this country at the moment.

compatriot, the anthropologist T. L. M. Buakasa, African people believed that the universe was divided into two separated worlds: the visible, inhabited by human beings, and the invisible one, inhabited by the spirits of dead ancestors. Although there was constant interaction between these spheres especially by means of certain rituals, the invisible realm was regarded as superior in every sense (35). That is why this transcendental world was considered the model to be imitated in the visible domain and important decisions in the community could only be made on dead ancestors' advice.

In this respect, it is to be highlighted the role played by the African elderly. Not only due to their great political power (gerontocracy), but also due to their advanced age, their experience and the admiration that they had earned throughout the years, “. . . los ancianos se convertían . . . en los depositarios de la memoria colectiva, en la referencia moral, en ese eslabón imprescindible entre el pasado y el presente, o, si se prefiere, entre los antepasados y las nuevas generaciones” (Ndongo- Bidyogo 32). Therefore, it was natural that old people had so much influence on African communities' destiny. After all, they represented dead ancestors' will on the Earth and they had to preserve that morality and traditions imposed from the above.

Apart from the significant role played by religion, another consequence of being distant from progress and capitalism was the rule of what can be called a communal law in African traditional societies. Since money, technology and competition did not exist at all and Africans' daily life was based on a rudimentary utilitarianism, there was no place for individualistic aspirations. Besides, as Africans were still far from scientific reasoning, they could not conceive the sense of their existence out of the philosophy of life established by their religions. As a result, they accepted the constant mediation of an invisible world in every decision that they took. So, they blindly relinquished their individual freedom and took for granted that their daily behaviour could never be dissociated from the intervention or influence of forefathers. Furthermore, the realm of dead ancestors was mainly characterised by its communal and hierarchical nature (Kabunda 35). Consequently, Africans adopted this kind of social organisation for the administration of their own communities and old people above any other strove to teach how to respect it to the full.

As it is obvious, this communal view of life had to be assimilated by African children as well, if their parents wanted them to fit in their societies. Kabunda describes the alien condition of newborn children in society and explains how they finally got to integrate into it:

Al nacer, el niño no está considerado como un hombre completo, sino como un proyecto de hombre, que se debe crear por el proceso de educación religiosa y colectiva, en el que todos participan, para convertirle en un ser social, es decir en un hombre, miembro de un grupo amplio: la familia, el clan, el mundo de los vivientes (34).

As disclosed by this quotation, one of the purposes of traditional education in Africa was to teach children how to live under communal law (“ser social”). However, it is also important to draw attention to the fact that both participants and the elements that contributed to the educational process were soaked with the communal philosophy of life as well (“educación colectiva”). For example, when Kabunda says that “todos participan” in the children’s upbringing, he includes all members of the community without exception, no matter if these and the child in question were bound or not by what Westerners consider real or at least close blood ties. This right of participation that everybody seemed to have was due to their particular concept of a group. From an African’s point of view, a group could never be a limited entity; on the contrary, there had to be the possibility of enlarging it. Furthermore, African people did not want to feel alone, abandoned and needed to be sure that they belonged to “la familia, el clan, el mundo de los vivientes”, since they wanted to fully participate in this collective life.

In this regard, Gay Wilentz’s definition of the African concept of a family becomes quite illustrative. It justifies Africans’ communal attitude to education: “[I]n contrast to the nuclear family, the extended family [was] a way of branching out to a whole community through marriage. In this system, your responsibility [was] to all the children of the community, not merely your own” (xvii). Since the community could be regarded as a network of relationships, everybody, especially women and old people, felt that they had to contribute to the education of the children in their society. History, traditions, folklore, duties and rights had to be transmitted to the new generations. In fact, if parents tried to educate their offspring just by themselves, this individualistic initiative would be considered an offence against the highest entities: “la familia”, “el clan”, “el mundo de los vivos” and “el mundo invisible” (dead ancestors’ world).

On the other hand, African educators were very conscious that they had to spread the idea of communal law. That is why they made the following statement their main concern: “What a man knows is . . . less important than what he does, how he lives and behaves; success and welfare are closely related to morality and any change from traditional ways is looked upon with suspicion” (Krige 98). Then, for African educators

the possibility of a cultural education conceived to encourage individual self-fulfilment was totally discarded. In contrast, they thought it a priority to teach children how to make the most out of those aspects of daily life that could enrich communal existence. This is the reason why it was so significant for educators to monitor what the child did, how he lived and behaved. They also made sure that children learnt to respect tradition as well as religion, since both elements safeguarded and fostered their communal law.

Firstly, among the obligations to the community that children were intended to learn, manual labour was of an essential value (“what he does”):

*L’ educazione tende ad integrare molto presto i bambini nella vita sociale degli adulti anche nei suoi aspetti di lavoro produttivo . . . Vivono in un mondo in cui il lavoro non è alienazione, ma è qualcosa di naturale, di inevitabile e che non si vuole evitare, a cui ben presto ci si interessa (del Cornò 83).*

Regardless of their age, all members of the community contributed to manual labour, especially farming and cattle raising, since it constituted the main source of survival and perpetuation. Nevertheless, it is to be indicated that: “L’africano nella società tradizionale non lavora per guadagnare o per motivi di promozione personale, ma in quanto membro di una tribù o di una famiglia allargata” (del Cornò 79). That is to say, the fruits obtained by means of individual endeavours could not be regarded as a personal reward, but they had to be shared with the family and, in some cases, even with the whole community.

Secondly, African educators were in charge of making their children aware that each person occupied a specific position in the community (“how he lives”). This position involved certain rights and duties for the individual and it had to be accepted as it came in order to maintain the group’s communal and hierarchical character. Therefore, although for some members of the community coexistence was very comfortable, it was neither possible for others to condemn the (unjust) condition of their place in society, nor to refuse the performance of the ceremony that finally legitimised the occupation of their imposed new position:

*In many Nigerian cultures the most humiliating treatment is reserved for widows, and older women-in-law . . . The least offensive is the insistence on shaving the widow’s hair as part of the obsequies. Many cultures force the widow to drink the water used to wash the corpse; adverse reaction implies that she had a hand in his death . . . The period of mourning is turned into punishment for the widow, as if they are angry with her for daring to survive her son (Ogunyemi 88).*

When their husbands died, Nigerian women had no option but undergoing these series of cruel rites to be recognised as widows, although this condition did not bring them any benefit, but quite the opposite (levirate).

As far as this kind of ceremonies is concerned, they were also considered part of the process of education, because, after all, they were initiation rituals<sup>8</sup>. The role of initiation was to prepare African people to assume the obligations of the new place that they were about to occupy in the community. There were different types of initiation rites (puberty, marriage, old age, death/burial rites), but those that took place when boys and girls reached the age of puberty are best-known. Although the performance of these initiation rites such as circumcision in the case of boys and excision, clitoridectomy and infibulation in the case of girls has a sociological explanation<sup>9</sup>, these practices have been recently denounced both by African and Western critics, especially women, because of their cruelty.

Thirdly, it is important to highlight the significance of adhering to tradition, if anybody wanted to be integrated into the community (“how he behaves”). African children learnt this commitment to tradition very early by participating in any kind of ritual, by worshipping dead ancestors and respecting the elderly, by collaborating in manual labour and by preserving and perpetuating certain customs and habits. That is to say, by means of a practical education, children were “. . . made to feel the importance of those things that [were] of value to society,” not to the individual (Krige 98).

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<sup>8</sup> Colonisers considered African beliefs heathen and primitive and they forced Africans to abandon rites, when these were made to convert to Christianity. However, many of these rituals are still taking place nowadays and a great importance is attributed to them.

<sup>9</sup> Kabunda provides one of the sociological explanations of these initiation practices in Africa:

Se considera la androginia como sinónimo de la esterilidad y contraria a la supervivencia del grupo, valor social fundamental en la sociedad africana al determinar el papel de cada uno . . . . Por lo tanto, se procede a la ablación del prepucio (circuncisión) considerado como la parte femenina del hombre, y del clitoris (escisión) de la mujer, equiparado con el órgano masculino, con la meta de fortalecer la heterosexualidad y la consiguiente procreación . . . , suprimiendo la androginia . . . . Desde el punto de vista sociocultural, estas prácticas . . . se insertan en el marco global de la transmisión de valores fundamentales que definen la personalidad del individuo dentro del grupo . . . (43-4).

As I said, this is simply a sociological explanation of initiation rites that is based on pre-colonial arguments to justify these practices. Therefore, critics should understand the motivation for celebrating these ceremonies, taking into account the retrograde context of their performance. However, I agree with Kabunda when he asserts that: “Ha llegado la hora de buscar otros mecanismos que no atenten contra la integridad de las mujeres o al desarrollo de su feminidad”, especially because female excision, clitoridectomy and infibulation are perversely practised even nowadays so as to subjugate women physically and denigrate them psychologically (44). In any case, I will be elaborating on this subject in depth in the second chapter of this essay.

Therefore, if a person dared to challenge any aspect of tradition, communal life became severely damaged and the individual “. . . se [exponía] a las desgracias inflingidas por los antepasados” (Kabunda 34). That is why it has to be admitted that, in pre-colonial times, Africans were both “. . . [sometidos] y [protegidos] a la vez por un conjunto de deberes colectivos” connected to tradition that had to be acquired since childhood (Kabunda 35).

Apart from the importance of religion and communal law, orality can also be considered one of the most representative characteristics of traditional life in Black Africa. After all, writing had not been introduced yet by colonisers and oral language was the only means Africans had to communicate and to convey their ideas about the world that surrounded them. It is true that, as Kabunda indicates, there were some communities that did have pictographic systems that allowed them to express themselves (31). However, these methods were not really codified and they were sometimes very ambiguous, as there were not fixed correspondences between graphic signs and the concepts transmitted. Anyway, it is a fact that Africans’ existence seemed to depend on oral language, because education, crucial for the survival and development of every culture, largely relied on words in order to be transmitted. Congolese scholar Landry-Wilfrid Miampika reinforces this assertion and he even goes further, when he states that: “Mezclando realidad, memoria, historia e invención, la tradición oral (o la *oralitura* africana) desempeña una función tanto social como política, pedagógica, lúdica, filosófica, ética y religiosa” (100). As Miampika explains, orality was more than a means of communication; it contributed to education in all its possible representations (politics, philosophy, ethics and religion).

Teaching methodology in African pre-colonial education was mainly based on oral skills. This proved to be so, whenever the subject matter that wanted to be taught had to do with politics, philosophy, ethics or religion. Nevertheless, there was also practical knowledge, essential for African existence as well, that could only be communicated by means of words, but acquired just through experience. Walter J. Ong shows the most representative means (oral skills) that Africans used for learning in daily life:

They learn by apprenticeship—hunting with experienced hunters, for example—by discipleship, which is a kind of apprenticeship, by listening, by repeating what they hear, by mastering proverbs and ways of combining and recombining them, by assimilating



other formulary materials, by participation in a kind of corporate retrospection (9).

Traditional education, in general terms, was regarded as a kind of literary game in which words had to be mastered in order to get to the lesson to be learnt. Furthermore, if Ong's quotation is related to Miampika's previous one, it is possible to verify that, when educators resorted to these literary devices, the four pillars supporting African oral education ("realidad, memoria, historia, invención") did become stronger, more powerful and, therefore, the message that was conveyed was better grasped by pupils. For example, when Miampika talks about reality, he is referring to practical knowledge, which was usually acquired by means of "apprenticeship" and "discipleship"; memory, for its part, was exercised by "listening [and] repeating what they [heard]"; community's history was prevented from being forgotten thanks to a "corporate retrospection"; and invention was stimulated by, among other things, "combining and recombining . . . formulary materials".

Although Arabs did develop writing and reached to the south-eastern coast of Africa (Zimbabwe is more or less located in this area) before Europeans, they did not teach this system of communication to the Bantu-speaking communities (Lestrade 291-2). Therefore, the Bantu people had to resort to a series of oral pieces of literature that spontaneously generated from the use of the above mentioned oral skills ("listening", "repeating what they heard", "corporate retrospection", "combining and recombining . . . formulary materials", etc.). These literary creations contributed to their social, political, philosophical, moral and religious upbringing.

First, among the compositions that came into being thanks to daily oral habits, proverbs, riddles and fables require special attention. This group of literary pieces was mainly didactic and focused on what G. P. Lestrade calls *folk-wisdom*, since they dealt, in a figurative way, with everyday experiences and tellers took advantage of them so as to subtly convey morals that were to be drawn and learnt by the audience.

Second, it is worth elaborating on the significant verse-lore of the Bantu people. There were songs of different types that were inspired by events of their past or by incidents that took place in their present common life. These could be elegiac songs, love songs, game songs, lullabies, war songs, hunting songs, satiric songs, work songs, ritual songs, etc. However, "[i]t must be realized that words of songs [were] linked in Bantu society, not only with music, . . . but also, . . . with action as well, whether that action be a dance or a ceremony, a game or a ritual performance, a movement or an

immobile pose, either collective or individual” (Lestrade 294). Therefore, in African societies, words were of an extreme importance for communication, but silence and motion were even more meaningful in some occasions.

Third, myths and legends but especially stories deserve to be analysed in depth. Myths and legends were intended to explain the origins of the community but, despite having a real essence, they were soaked with supernatural elements, imaginary devices and metaphors (especially animal metaphors: turtles, hares and spiders). Consequently, these compositions were hardly ever entirely true. With regard to stories, Isabel Hofmeyr establishes two different types that have also been accepted by South African writer Zöe Wicomb. On the one hand, there was a historical storytelling that was usually performed by old men and that, in a similar way to myths and legends, focused on past events that took place in the community and which contributed both to the community’s moral education as well as to the reinforcement of its identity. On the other hand, there was a fictional storytelling performed by women that could deal with any kind of subject. These tales could be invented, but they were also based on real experiences. In addition, they were often didactic, because a moral was to be extracted from the narration, but they could also have as their only purpose to delight the audience<sup>10</sup> (157-8).

As far as the act of storytelling is concerned, it constituted the best representation of the communal law that pervaded African societies. It was a kind of democratic celebration in which not only the storyteller, but also the audience had the opportunity to participate. Although there was a basic story, both the storyteller and the audience could alter it as they wished to; they had the possibility of inventing new parts and dancing and singing could be introduced into the performance. Consequently, the real author’s “. . . personal share . . . [tended] to be forgotten as it [was] absorbed into the general wealth of communal tradition” (Lestrade 298). This situation did not seem to worry or annoy the storyteller, since what mattered was that everybody participated in this particular educational process. Therefore, it can be asserted that:

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<sup>10</sup> In order to reinforce the classification that Isabel Hofmeyr establishes on storytelling, I want to add what Gay Wilentz, echoing Jan Vansina’s words, says about pre-colonial oral tradition: “[O]ral tradition’ encompasses both oral history [historical storytelling] and orature [fictional storytelling]. Oral history ‘deals with accounts of events’ [male storytelling] while the orature [female storytelling] is an artistic ‘interpretation of experience’” (xxii).

. . . [L]os maestros de la palabra (el anciano, el narrador y el *Griot*<sup>11</sup> o cantante, músico poeta, historiador y cómico) tienen el deber de la memoria y de la notable retransmisión. Encarnan la conciencia colectiva y las historias de todos y cada uno de los miembros. Revelan con sabiduría y habilidad, durante las veladas bajo el árbol de las palabras o junto al fuego<sup>12</sup>, los misterios de la existencia humana y las relaciones secretas entre hombre y naturaleza. Aparte de su fuerza de cohesión, su papel primordial es sin duda didáctico, de retransmisión del conocimiento múltiple (Miampika 100).

Miampika shows very clearly that storytellers were among the most respected individuals in the continent, since they had the aptitude to creatively put into words the worries, the opinions, the habits and the history of the African people. In essence, they transmitted the cultural identity of every African community.

Old people's ability as storytellers need to be specially underscored. As it was disclosed before, the elderly were very respected in their communities, because they represented dead ancestors' will on the Earth. However, it was their experience in life, their moral qualities and their good knowledge of tradition that made them "[guías] de la comunidad" (Ndongo- Bidyogo 32). They were not just good historians, but the best teachers, even manipulators if they wanted to. That is why I agree with the Malian novelist Amadou Hampâté Bâ when he explained that in his mother country (Mali), the same as in the rest of Africa: ". . . [C]haque fois qu' un vieillard meurt, c'est une bibliothèque qui a brûlé" (Lapalme, par. 5). After all, they replaced the absence of books with their own oral contributions, which were as aesthetic, moral and enlightening as the written compositions that would appear afterwards:

. . . [E]n las noches de luna llena de la época seca, después de la cena y antes de dormir . . . los más mayores les contaban cuentos a los niños, que eran siempre cuentos morales, salpicados de sentencias y proverbios, cuya moraleja tendía a subrayar en todo momento aquellas virtudes que se quería inculcar a la juventud, como la generosidad, el sentido de pertenencia a la comunidad, la unidad del clan, con el fin de combatir aquellos hábitos

<sup>11</sup> In many parts of the continent, especially in West Africa, there was a caste constituted by *griots*. These people, both women and men, entirely depended on their oral skills and eloquence so as to daily survive. They were genealogists, therefore, their primary function was to preserve history and tradition and they did it by performing different roles: singing in rituals and ceremonies, speaking in public, reciting history and telling stories. Pre-colonial *griots* were the only individuals that were allowed to carry out public performances. Their kings or patrons whispered them a message and they afterwards had to convey it aloud before an audience. They sometimes accompanied it by the drums or the kora, which is a twenty-one stringed instrument that shares some characteristics both with the lute and the harp. Nowadays, there are still *griots* in a dozen African societies. Some are gaining fame throughout the world, but the majority of them are just tourist entertainment in their countries.

<sup>12</sup> As Lucio del Cornò indicates: "[I]l focalare è la scuola" (80).

considerados perniciosos para la supervivencia de la comunidad, como el egoísmo, el individualismo o la crueldad (Ndongo-Bidyogo 33).

As it is reflected in this quotation, when old people told stories at night, they demonstrated their capacity to be good artists and educators. They found vigorous energy to perform this activity in their condition of grandparents; after all, they were responsible, to a certain extent, for the future of their offspring in the community. In addition, it is remarkable that old people seemed to have premonitory qualities, as they warned their descendants against a series of vices (“el egoísmo, el individualismo o la crueldad”) that, later in time, destroyed African pre-colonial harmony and reinforced a colonial period that involved the degradation of the African essence.

To conclude, it is to be stated that, as examined throughout this section, education did exist in Africa during the pre-colonial period, in spite of Western scepticism. The only requirement to accept this reality is to adopt the *other's* perspective and try to understand the particular bases of the African educational system in the past. It is a fact that this continent had certain limitations both due to its hostile environment and its slow pace of development, but these restrictions might not be considered so by the Africans of that time, they simply had no knowledge of a different kind of life. Furthermore, this unawareness involved certain advantages for Africans, because it prevented them from losing the characteristic ingenuity of those people that do not understand about the evil consequences of progress and capitalism: “el egoísmo, el individualismo o la crueldad”. All in all, African traditional education did exist and was based on a solid purpose, that of survival. On the one hand, it was important for parents that children learnt to strive for their sustenance. On the other hand, it was essential that new generations were taught to maintain the foundations of African life: respect for religion, the importance of the community and the value of oral skills. In other words, the main purpose of pre-colonial education in Africa, the same as in the rest of the world, was the perpetuation of their cultural identity.

### **Colonialism in Africa: The Vilification of Traditional Upbringing and the Introduction of a New Educational System**

African identity was clearly shaped in the pre-colonial period. The reason for such well-defined uniqueness could be found in those three pillars that supported the

education that Africans received throughout their whole existence. First, religion was a point of reference so as to make sense of every event that happened in life. Second, communal law constituted the rule under which Africans were protected as well as submitted to. Third and last, orality was the main source of communication and, of course, of transmission of ideas about the world that surrounded them. It is evident that this kind of traditional upbringing was built out of Africans' pre-colonial unawareness, but this continent followed its natural pace of development.

Unfortunately, African civilization was not to be allowed to unfold as it was expected, since colonialism altered its order forever. At the beginning, Europeans were only interested in Africa because their economy was sustained by the slave trade (from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century). Since colonisation started in America in 1492, millions of Africans were exported to this new continent and many of them died during the journey. Those who were able to survive were enslaved in their countries of destination; therefore, one way or another, all Africans suffered a similar fate. However, although slavery was a terrible blow for African population, it was only the starting point for a series of merciless crimes against humanity. At least, in this period, Westerners never stayed in the continent for long. They only intended to take slaves from the western coast of Africa, and expeditions into the inland could be considered just timid when compared with subsequent invasions. In fact, only a tenth part of the African land was taken by Europeans by the year 1880.

Nevertheless, when colonisers realised that there were a lot of natural resources to be exploited, Western presence in Africa became permanent, not transient as before. In 1884, at the Berlin Conference, European powers established specific norms about how to officially occupy African territories. From this moment onwards, Africa ceased to belong to Africans and it was shared out among Great Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal, Italy, Germany and Spain. For example, Zimbabwe was colonised by English people, when K. Mauch, a German geologist, discovered important goldmines in Matabeleland (southern part of Zimbabwe nowadays). In 1888, Cecil Rhodes was granted exclusive mining rights in this area by Lobengula, Matabeleland's king, and in 1889 he founded the British South African Company that allowed him to exploit and occupy this region, which was to be named Southern Rhodesia afterwards.

Although it is true that colonisers were only concerned with those profits that Africa could bring them, they also came to have delight in devastating the continent in all its aspects. Europeans ravaged it physically and, afterwards, they also strove to

destroy its population emotionally, because they did not accept an identity dissimilar to theirs. That is why Africans were deprived of their right to be African and they were condemned to occupy an inferior *otherness*. It was this kind of psychological subjugation that affected the colonised most, since their dignity as human beings was totally undermined. As colonisers were conscious of the harmful effects of this kind of oppression, they tried hard to inflict it on Africans as well as they intended to separate them from their old life: “En todas partes los colonizadores procedieron a la ‘cosificación’, deshumanización y etnologización de los africanos, a la desestructuración y destrucción de los valores ancestrales reemplazados por la introducción brutal y autoritaria del modo de vida occidental” (Kabunda 62). As agreed by many scholars, education stands as the source that empowers a nation. That is why Europeans decided to distance Africans from their own traditional upbringing. They discredited pre-colonial education’s three main pillars (religion, communal law and orality) completely and attempted to make them disappear in order to uproot the colonised forever.

In addition, colonisers imported a new reality that had nothing to do with the pre-colonial past and, instead of helping natives to adapt to it, they made sure that Africans had little access to academic education which, in spite of fostering racial discrimination, contributed to the understanding of the new project of society that Europeans were creating. In sum, colonisers simply wanted natives to undergo the negative effects of a lack of adjustment, since Africans were gradually deprived of their origins and culture, but they were also denied the opportunity to adopt a new identity that allowed them to fit in the new colonial world. Europeans intended to take advantage of Africans’ rootless condition so as to exploit them as much as they could. Capitalism and individualism, Christianity and formal instruction were the most important elements that prompted the inner destruction of the African population.

When colonisers arrived in the continent, Africans had not learnt yet about scientific discourse or the results of progress. However, colonialism brought a new routine to Africa, especially at the end of the eighteenth century, when the Industrial Revolution was taking place in Great Britain. Capitalism was exported to the continent and, as a consequence, Africans had to assimilate a different conception of life as well as to face those changes that their communities were to experience. Natives in the pre-colonial period found it a must to teach their children how to work the land. They had to learn to cooperate with the group in order to get sustenance for all its members. In

fact, each community had specific lots, where everyone participated in their cultivation. Nevertheless, when colonisers discovered the existence of these common lands:

. . . [L]as tierras inalienables por ser propiedad colectiva del clan, heredadas de los antepasados y conservadas para las generaciones futuras, en el marco de la religión tradicional, fueron declaradas vacantes, es decir “sin dueños” y expropiadas por el Estado colonial, para el desarrollo del capitalismo local a partir de los trabajos forzados (Kabunda 75).

This expropriation of African lots was the end of the communal work that parents strove to inculcate their offspring, since subsistence turned to depend on private property exploitation. This irruption of private property represented the first trace of degradation in the communal life, because it involved the introduction of individualism. Africans were deprived of those resources they lived on, and, therefore, children were often taught to combat poverty individually. It can be said that pre-colonial harmonious coexistence turned into a competition for survival.

In this respect, capitalism also led to the disintegration of families. Since there were many people that could not earn for a living in their villages, fathers and the eldest sons moved to town so as to raise some money for their relatives, whereas mothers and daughters took care of children and strove to manage in the rural communities. This decision boosted individualism very much and families separated for the first time. As for the effects of this dismemberment, it must be stated that, in pre-colonial times, families were considered focal points of education, where children learnt everything that was necessary according to their sex and age. However, when families fragmented with colonialism, this traditional process of education got quite damaged, especially in the case of boys.

On the one hand, the youngest sons that stayed in the village were paid little attention by their fathers, because these were rarely at home and when they did visit their families, they were too tired as to be concerned about their kids' upbringing. As a result, little boys did not receive the traditional education that their fathers had been expected to give them in the pre-colonial period. On the other hand, the elder sons that were in the urban areas with their fathers changed their perspective of life completely. Subsistence became their priority and, consequently, there was no time for other preoccupations. In addition, they could not attend school, because they did not have enough money to pay the fees. These boys had to grow up at top speed, especially when

they witnessed how their fathers very often wasted their savings in alcohol so as to forget their misery or, claiming to feel lonely, spent their money in prostitutes.

Although it was difficult for all Africans to observe how their families were breaking apart and how their traditional lifestyle was disappearing, it was especially hard for old people to get used to this new reality. In the pre-colonial period, grandparents received a preferential treatment and occupied a special position in the community, as they were considered “maestros y modelos para la juventud” (Ndongo-Bidyogo 32). However, when Europeans invaded the continent, old Africans’ educative role was completely underestimated.

As mentioned before, old men were traditionally in charge of their descendants’ historical education. Since they had gained a lot of experience throughout their whole lives, they invented stories in which they combined the village’s past as well as certain morals that could be learnt from those preceding events. Grandfathers told these stories in front of the group and everybody learnt something about their origins. Nevertheless, in the colonial period, the time for storytelling seemed to be postponed forever. Communities were often fragmented due to the forced migration from rural areas to towns and, as a result, people rarely got together as before in order to listen to the stories that old people had to tell them. Besides, since colonisers feared that natives might be planning possible uprisings, they prohibited this kind of encounters.

In addition, when all members of a family happened to be together and grandfathers decided to tell some stories so as to celebrate this special moment, the younger generations, especially those individuals who worked in town, seemed to become aware that, at that time, life for Africans had nothing to do with the past history that grandfathers depicted in their old-fashioned stories. Those morals conveyed by their tales were, in the eyes of the new Africans, obsolete, not applicable to that period of European colonialism.

Although it is true that the colonised had a lot of preoccupations because of Western oppression, they did not realise that grandfathers’ stories reflected a part of their cultural identity. The elderly did not want their offspring to forget about their origins and preserving the tradition of storytelling was a way of preventing this from happening. Nevertheless, as Zöe Wicomb asserts when she echoes Isabel Hofmeyr: “. . . [T]ransformation in rural societies [caused by colonialism] . . . was responsible for drastic changes in story-telling patterns, notably the disappearance of male historical story-telling” (157). Therefore, in spite of grandfathers’ efforts to protect male



storytelling as a significant part of the African cultural heritage, this activity was condemned to disappear. Conversely, as it will be studied in the following chapter, female storytelling suffered a very different fate.

Furthermore, productive labour was the only contribution that was sufficiently appreciated both by the colonisers and by the colonised themselves in the new capitalist society. As for the former, they were interested in Africans just because of the profits these natives could bring them; as for the latter, in so competitive a context, benefits in kind were essential for their subsistence. That is why, although colonisers and natives had very different reasons for it, they both participated in the spread of materialism in the new African world and this materialism gradually replaced people's interest in many other activities that simply invited to abstract reflection. For example, Africans minimised the importance of traditional practices such as storytelling, since an education that did not aim at the acquisition of material benefits appeared to be senseless. As a consequence, being the African elderly in charge of a good part of pre-colonial education, they began to feel that there was no place for them in the new society that it was being created. Furthermore, grandparents were quite old as to make too much physical effort. Therefore, they were to be fed as the rest members of the family, but they participated neither in the family income nor in the colonial production. For instance, in slavery times, old men were deemed useless, because they were too weak as to work in the cotton plantations and there were few other occupations that they could hold in the master's house.

Apart from capitalism and individualism, the introduction of Christianity in the continent also contributed to the degradation of traditional life as well as to the manipulation of many African people. Missionaries strove to eliminate the animist creed in Africa so as to establish a Christian perspective of life that was both alien to natives and at the service of the colonial cause. They also wanted the end of communal coexistence, so they frightened African people by proclaiming that salvation after death was obtained by good individual deeds that were always related to the blind observance of that Christian law that had nothing to do with Africans' concept of religion (Schapera 1966, 381).

As for religious education, old people played an important role in pre-colonial times once more. It was believed that the eldest members of the group represented dead ancestors on the Earth. Therefore, the elderly, following forefathers' mandates, were in charge of initiating children into religious doctrines and practices that were essential for

their lives. Nevertheless, when colonisers invaded Africa and animist religions were deemed to be pagan worship, those rites performed by old people, which were intended to integrate individuals into the communal life, were condemned as primitive and savage. As a consequence, the elderly were deprived of their divine right to guide the group and they were also banned from practicing initiation rituals. It was a logical reaction then that old people felt totally defeated; after all, they had been “. . . publicly held up to ridicule” (Fanon 1963, 113). They had been once spiritual leaders but, in that moment, they began to be considered just lunatic and alienated people.

Although still in connection with Christianity, academic education turned to be so powerful a factor in the destruction of the African identity as to be the most influential one just by itself<sup>13</sup>. As Christian Potholm asserted and Kabunda corroborated, Europeans wanted that Africans “. . . [olvidaran] el África precolonial y tradicional [y asimilaran] los sistemas de valores occidentales, bajo la falsa excusa de que aquélla no contribuyó al progreso de la humanidad” (65). For this purpose, a few schools were built in order that African children came in contact with this new kind of education, but only a small number of kids could attend them. As it is obvious, families could not afford to spend their money on this service, since there were many more urgent needs that had to be met. But, in any case, many African parents did not see the point either in acquiring what they considered to be useless and deceiving knowledge. After all, their children had to learn first how to daily survive to escape abject poverty. Furthermore, natives did not want their traditions to become degraded. They feared that the new European input would also deprive their descendants of their African culture and dignity, since colonisers had already exploited them physically. Margaret Read illustrated Africans’ first reactions toward colonial academic education with an incident that took place in real life:

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<sup>13</sup> As for the introduction of academic (or modern) education in Africa, Margaret Read suggested that:  
 . . . [W]e can recognise six stages in the cultural contacts of Britain with the colonial territories in Africa in the field of modern education. These stages have a chronological sequence, but since modern education is at different levels of development in different territories, and even within different parts of any single territory, we cannot say that any one territory as a whole has passed through all six stages. It is a technique for recognising, and perhaps for classifying, certain elements in the reactions of the African peoples to the impact of modern education (358).

These six psychological stages ranged from resistance to external manipulation (first stage) to a blind assimilation of the new ideas that Africans were introduced to by Westerners (fourth stage). However, from the fifth stage onwards, natives gradually combined certain traditional elements of their African culture with some contributions of the European education so as to reach a balance both emotionally and in the new society that was to be created (359-362).

The history of the Livingstonia Mission in Nyasaland among the warlike Ngoni people<sup>14</sup> illustrates the conservatism of a people who had their own forms of training their young people. The Ngoni paramount chief told Robert Laws<sup>15</sup> and his colleagues at first that they could live among them, practise medicine, preach on Sundays, but not “spoil the young people” by teaching them in schools (359).

By means of this quotation, it is attested that Africans were reluctant to be absorbed by colonial education. Nonetheless, I do not consider “conservatism” the insistence of a people to protect “their own forms of training their young people”. On the contrary, the Ngoni, in my opinion, proved to be both very respectful and open-minded with Western habits and traditions. They allowed Europeans to live among them as well as to “. . . practise medicine [and] preach on Sundays”.

Despite initial prejudices against colonial schools, African parents gradually became convinced that if their kids got a European education, there would be a time when their offspring would occupy colonisers’ same respected positions in society. They did not want their descendants to be condemned to ignorance and, therefore, be pushed into the background as their parents were in that moment. That is why Africans made a great effort in order to save some money for their first son to go to the missionary schools. Girls, on the other hand, always stayed at home, because it was believed that the best for them was to learn how to do the housework, therefore, they continued to be taught in the traditional way:

The informal training so characteristic of tribal life and the gradual introduction of the growing child to his future tasks and duties . . . disappeared almost entirely [with colonialism] . . . For the young girl training of this nature still [persisted] . . . She [learned] . . . almost from her earliest days, such routine domestic tasks as cooking, dusting, scrubbing, polishing, washing, and ironing by

<sup>14</sup> Although the Ngoni live in Tanzania nowadays and Nyasaland is present-day Malawi, I have decided to use this example for two different reasons. On the one hand, the Ngoni is a Bantu community that, in times of the Mfecane (a period of war and migration that affected the Bantu-speaking communities from 1818 to 1840 and that located in the south of the African continent), also stayed in Zimbabwe for a while and, therefore, it is a group that, to certain extent, represents some part of the history of this country as well. On the other hand, there was a time when Nyasaland and Rhodesia (Zambia and Zimbabwe) were conceived as a unity: the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (1953-63) and, in this way, Zimbabwe and Nyasaland shared a common past too.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Laws (1851-1934) was a missionary from Mannofield, Aberdeeen, who, inspired by the exploits of David Livingston, travelled to Nyasaland (Malawi). He established the mission station of Livingstonia on the shores of the lake Nyasa and he ran this mission from 1878 to 1928. Among his contributions to the country, he participated in the organisation of different social projects, he built 700 schools that were attended by 44000 African children, promoted the formation of native associations and translated several works into local languages. He also converted about 60000 Africans into Christianity.

watching and assisting her mother, often in a form of play imitation (Hellmann 416).

It is evident that African girls' situation did not change at all when colonisers arrived in the continent (as it will be studied in the second chapter of this essay), it even got worse with them. However, at that time, even European women were made to believe that their only objective in life was to learn how to do the housework as well as possible.

But, although missionary schools were so appreciated at the beginning, Africans turned to completely dislike them when they realised that European education was distancing their children from their families, from their African culture and values, from their origins. Natives came to understand that this foreign education was a “. . . proceso de desculturización a través de la escuela, cuyo objetivo no declarado consistía en hacer admitir a los africanos la dominación extranjera y el rechazo de sus propios valores equiparados con el primitivismo y el salvajismo, es decir la alienación” (Kabunda 78). For example, African history, which used to be contained in traditional stories, was not valid anymore, because colonisers considered that it was all a fantastic invention with no clear chronological data. In addition, pre-colonial chronicles were always conveyed by oral means and, consequently, their content could be changed from one storyteller's performance to another. Then, this creative license was the perfect excuse for missionaries to claim that the history of the African past was so subjective that could not be included in any written book and that it was only in written sources that accurate information could be found. Furthermore, the history of the colonised did not coincide with the colonisers' version at all and it was the latter, a praise of the colonial crusade and a condemnation of African *savagery*, the only one that was going to prevail in the centuries to come.

Besides, schooling contributed to enforce a biased ontological perspective of reality. Europeans knew that if they also colonised natives' minds, these would finally call their own integrity into question. As Ngũgĩ openly denounced:

Berlin of 1884 was effected through the sword and the bullet. But the night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and the blackboard. The physical violence of the battlefield was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom (1986, 9).

European educators intended to convince African people of Western moral superiority. Consequently, Europeans devised a particular conception of existence that relied on ambivalence as the key to give any sense to the chaotic condition of the colonial world.

Africans were taught at schools how to coexist with this double perception of life, but they never really managed to understand it to the full.

Firstly, Europeans formulated a colonial world that had a dual structure based on contrasting pairs. Positive qualities were always attributed to them, whereas negative characteristics were inevitably attached to Africans. This binarism in life came from an essential fixed dichotomy, which was composed of two opposite poles: good and evil. So, colonisers insisted on transmitting at schools a Manichean conception of colonial Africa in order to celebrate their supremacy, to justify their actions against *wicked* Africans and to convince these same natives of their innate *immorality* and *philistinism*. As Frantz Fanon puts it:

The colonial world is a Manichean world. It is not enough for the settler to delimit physically, that is to say with the help of the army and the police force, the place of the native . . . [T]he settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil . . . The native is declared insensible to ethics, he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is . . . the absolute evil . . . The customs of the colonized people, their traditions, their myths . . . are the very sign of that poverty of spirit and of their constitutional depravity (1963, 41-2).

Westerners wanted Africans to believe that it was their evil nature, mainly represented in their dark skin colour, that dislocated them from the place they had always occupied in pre-colonial Africa; it was that “quintessence of evil” that made them just *others* in their own land. Although it was colonisers that were actually strangers in Africa, they came to be identified as *Others* (capital letter due to their power), but as *Others* with full privileges and rights to impose their differences as a canon to be imitated, never to be equalled.

In spite of the fact that Europeans invented this dual philosophy of existence so as to easily colonise Africa in all its aspects, they also devised it to reinforce their own identity at the expense of the African one. Actually, education proved to be the best source to manipulate the colonised as well as to provide colonisers with self-fulfilment. Westerners knew that, compared with Africans, they were superior in terms of material power, but they also needed to feel their uniqueness as a group. That is why the formation of “. . . oppositions [was] crucial not only for creating images of the outsider but equally for constructing the insider, [their] (usually white European male) ‘self’” (Loomba 104). Therefore, colonisers took advantage of all those differences that separated them from the African essence to produce an opposite character that

embodied all the negative features that Europeans disliked most. In other words, Westerners invented a perfidious Caliban<sup>16</sup> (an *other*, an African, a pupil) in order that they, Prosperos of the nineteenth century (an *Other*, a European, an educator), could demonstrate their innate *good* nature as well as justify their terrible abuses against Africans.

Secondly, colonial education was conceived as the source in charge of domesticating *black savages*. It can be stated that it was a real process of domestication, because Europeans did not intend that natives became literate as a way to emancipate themselves from subordination. On the contrary, European educators tried to mentally tame Africans in order that they could only envision the world according to Western metaphysical patterns, that is, regarding prejudiced oppositions as a natural division that could not be changed at all. The immediate effects of this particular conception of existence could be observed in the serious problems that African children had to accept their perception of life as so valid as that of the colonisers. As W. E. B. du Bois explained it:

[T]he Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted second-sight in . . . a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity (45).

The colonised proved to be unable to discern whether they judged their environment as they intended to or they were always manipulated by the European influence. Due to their “double consciousness”, natives found it difficult to solve this dichotomy. What is more, as even their senses were falsified by colonial intervention, the only truth for Africans was that they were never free to experience life first-hand.

So, all in all, Africans became aware that the emancipation dream that they had for their children was only an illusion, a deception. Their boys continued to occupy a lower status than that of white pupils. African children did not even attend the same schools as whites, since they were segregated as well as were adults. In addition,

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<sup>16</sup> Prospero and Caliban (cannibal in a different order) are two of the main characters of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. They are frequently used in post-colonial discourse to reflect the exploitative relationship that existed between colonisers and the colonised. Among the excuses that Prospero had to denigrate Caliban, he insisted on the fact that this slave was: “A devil, a born devil, on whose nature/Nurture can never stick” (358). As it is made clear in the *Cátedra* edition of this book, “nurture” refers to education.

Africans were taught to believe that they were inferior. They were exposed to a colonial world which did not have anything to do with the African one and, within this white reality, black people were just the best representation of evil and foolishness. The worst of this sharp subjugation suffered by natives was that many African children, being so easily influenced, assumed what missionaries told them and turned to despise their own origins. They saw “. . . their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and [therefore] . . . [wanted] to distance themselves from that wasteland” by imitating colonisers and trying to be like them one day (Ngũgĩ 1997, 3).

Despite the different means used by missionaries for distancing African children from their traditional communities, there were two strategies that proved to be especially effective: the imposition of English as the only language of communication at school<sup>17</sup> and the introduction of writing as a substitute for oral tradition. The key for the success of these two sources of manipulation was the subtle manner in which they enforced the supremacy of the colonial perspective of the world. European sophistication was clearly promoted as opposed to African *vulgarity* that was strongly condemned.

English was established as the only language to be spoken at school, because colonisers were convinced that a compulsory use of it would force the colonised to experience and convey reality according to European patterns. *Vernaculars*<sup>18</sup> were completely forbidden in class and those pupils that resorted to them were severely punished. Europeans knew for sure that, if native languages continued to be used for codifying the African world, these would always give evidence of a pre-colonial essence that had once pervaded the continent and resuscitated, one way or another, whenever an African *vernacular* was spoken. Colonisers wanted to avoid this yearning for the past life that prompted rebellion and so they regarded indigenous languages as dangerous tools that could make natives remember the value of their cultural identity.

What is more, English pre-eminence came to be identified with a sense of power, superiority and respect, while the use of African languages was associated with submissiveness, ignorance and failure. Therefore, it was logical that African children

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<sup>17</sup> I explicitly refer to English, because this essay concentrates on Anglophone Africa and Zimbabwe was a British colony until recently.

<sup>18</sup> As Zaline M. Roy-Campbell indicates: “Within African countries, indigenous linguistic forms are typically referred to as *vernaculars* or *dialects*, whereas European linguistic forms are called *languages*” (84). I am conscious that both *vernacular* and *dialect* are discriminatory terms, but I have used them on purpose in order not to lose their negative connotations. It can be perceived that race-based discrimination also pervades linguistic matters.

preferred to communicate in English. By using this language, they came to think that they also belonged to the chosen group of society. The Nigerian writer Buchi Emecheta recalls an illustrative experience of her past concerned with languages:

The day I stepped into Methodist Girls High school, I was uprooted from my culture, and I made my first great step into the Western world. Most of us did not understand what our teachers were saying . . . The only way we could communicate was between ourselves when our teachers were out of earshot. If you were caught speaking in vernacular you paid a penny fine.

One young teacher . . . said to us innocently, "I always know when you are speaking Yoruba, because your voices were raised, you all would be rather noisy and full of laughter." That should have taught anyone our being forced to pay fines for speaking our mother tongue was like cutting our tongues of joy from our heads. But at the time, we were being made to feel privileged for attending such a school and being taught by Europeans (96).

Emecheta admits that replacing Yoruba with English at school involved a renunciation of an important part of her African identity. At the beginning, children could manage to use English at school and the *vernacular* at home, although "[l]earning for a colonial child, became a cerebral activity and not an emotionally felt experience," since "[t]he language of [his] education was no longer the language of [his] culture" as before, when they learnt African traditions in their communities and they used their own mother tongues for it (Ngũgĩ 1997, 17, 11). But, at least, African children were still able to separate two different worlds, without forgetting their roots and their true reality. Nevertheless, little by little, they began to associate the use of their African mother tongues with a past and a present that they were made to feel ashamed of, whereas English represented the access to a future that appeared to be full of opportunities for all. Unfortunately, they did not realise that, as a matter of fact, that prosperous life that they wanted to achieve was totally vetoed for them, as it was only reserved for colonisers' enjoyment. Consequently, the mere act of speaking English had crucial connotations for the different parties that constituted the colonial society. For Europeans, English meant domination; for African children, aspiration; and for African adults, usurpation.

As for writing, it came to replace the orality that characterised African pre-colonial time period. Needless to say that oral expression in the past constituted the principal means through which the essence of communal values was conveyed. However, when missionaries arrived in Africa, one of their main concerns was to teach



natives to read and write in English so that these new literate Africans could help them in their evangelising cause. They knew that natives, once converted in *noble savages*, would contribute to spread the Christian doctrine in the continent. Therefore, westernised Africans were taught the Holy Scriptures in English and, afterwards, they delivered persuasive speeches to their pagan comrades that they had previously written in their African mother tongues under missionaries' supervision/manipulation.

On the other hand, colonisers also used European texts at schools for promoting European qualities in order that Africans learnt that Westerners were superior. So, it can be said that these texts contained a totalitarian discourse in the sense that Europeans were described as the best models to be imitated, whereas Africans, who represented a difference, were completely scorned. However, in spite of the fact that Westerners were presented as the perfect model to aim at, colonisers made very clear that natives could never become like them because of their skin colour, *primitivism* and *immorality*.

When Africans learnt to read and write English, they also lost their ability to analyse life from a communal point of view. In the past, those decisions and ideas that concerned the group were always discussed orally, which conveyed a wide range of opinions that encouraged an agreement based on different perceptions of reality. But, when writing was introduced, this collective way in which information was processed and reflected on changed completely for natives, as Walter J. Ong remains:

When a speaker is addressing an audience, the members of the audience normally become a unity, with themselves and with the speaker. If the speaker asks the audience to read a handout provided for them, as each reader enters into his or her own private reading world, the unity of the audience is shattered . . . (73).

So, when Africans read European texts, they penetrated the colonial written world alone. Consequently, natives became more prone to manipulation, as they had to reflect on discriminatory contents without the possibility provided by former oral discussions to compare their conclusions with those drawn by other Africans.

In the past, African education relied on its folklore (songs, storytelling, rites, dancing, etc.) so as to be transmitted to the youngest generations and this kind of educational practices entirely depended on orality in order to be performed. Therefore, the introduction of writing as a source of education confused African children very much, since they were learning this skill at missions, although "[t]here was often not the slightest relationship between [their] written world, which was also the language of

[their] schooling, and the world of [their] immediate environment in the family and the community” (Ngũgĩ 1997, 17). As it is obvious, African children had different reactions to this linguistic duality and experienced conflicting sensations when they resorted to a form of expression at the expense of the other one.

For example, in their communities, young natives had always used the spoken word to communicate with each other. As a result, orality in African mother tongues carried emotional connotations for them, because it depicted the uniqueness both of the culture and traditions of their native continent. Nonetheless, at the colonial period, orality also represented a decaying Africa that did not offer any clear opportunity for the future of African young people. Consequently, writing metaphorically turned to be the imported sign of a prosperous Europe that seemed to provide some kind of power to those who came into contact with it. Then, it was difficult for Africans to decide whether to abandon their natural African background born to orality or to adopt the written perspective of existence provided by colonisers. Many centuries later, it can be seen that natives relinquished a part of their African identity, since their pre-colonial oral tradition has disappeared to a significant extent, although not completely in rural areas. It is true that there are many African authors nowadays that write about their national traditions and that have contributed to the preservation of many of their cultural manifestations. But, if it is taken into account that the majority of these writers use European languages to write their literary pieces, it is to be admitted that all these written versions are just poor copies of those beautiful oral performances of the African past, since the genuine character of the original masterpieces cannot be fully transmitted through these new adaptations.

As a conclusion, it is to be stated that colonial manipulation involved the vilification of the traditional upbringing that was so deep-rooted in pre-colonial communities. Europeans did not want to admit the existence of an educational system that conceived the role of education from so different a point of view. That is why, they emphasised the importance of academic instruction and strongly condemned pre-colonial education (religion, communal law and orality), claiming that it fostered savagery and moral inferiority.

As Paulo Freire comments: “. . . [N]i la cultura iletrada es la negación del hombre ni la cultura letrada llegó a ser su plenitud. No hay hombre absolutamente inculto: el hombre ‘se hominiza’ expresando y diciendo su mundo” (23). Although colonisers seemed to disagree with the first part of this assertion, they were totally

convinced of the truth of what is stated in the second place. So, they understood that, if they intended to exploit Africans physically, they firstly had to avoid that natives could take pride in the uniqueness of their cultural identity. Therefore, by means of an academic education in English, Europeans strove to denigrate Africans psychologically in order that they could not become powerful “expresando y diciendo su mundo” and that they finally submitted to the colonial authority. Another strategy that Europeans employed to proclaim their superiority was to promise Africans that if they recognised the depravity of their origins and adopted the new colonial perspective of life, they would abandon the *primitivism* and *immorality* they were living in.

Both subjugation and these absurd promises gained a lot of African supporters for the colonial cause, especially among the new generations who had attended missionary schools and were obviously exposed to more manipulation. However, this submissiveness was not going to last forever, because natives were fortunately going to react and restore national pride and African dignity once again.

### **The Reflection in Post-Colonial Education of the Conflict between Traditional and Colonial Legacies**

In spite of the fact that colonial discourse exerted its humiliating manipulation on Africans for a long time, these finally succeeded in inverting their feelings of inferiority and replaced them with an urgent need for rebellion. This determination and factors such as the Second World War<sup>19</sup> and the *négritude* and Panafricanist movements<sup>20</sup> among others led to a crucial fight for the emancipation of the African

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Ki-Zerbo explains the importance that the Second World War had for the reaction of Africans against colonialism:

La Guerra . . . [f]ue para cientos de miles de negros la ocasión para descubrir de manera brutal al hombre blanco, sin máscaras, en toda su realidad, sin oropeles imperiales. Los blancos trabajaban con sus manos, y sudaban como todo el mundo . . . Otros temblaban de miedo, torturaban, traicionaban y se descuartizaban entre ellos con frenesí. Algunos, incluso, eran héroes . . . Confundidos entre la dominación y la superioridad colonial, los blancos de África se mostraban ahora, también, como lobos para los demás blancos. Y el desprecio bestial en que Hitler englobaba a los demás blancos y a los negros, éstos últimos descubrían de repente su propio valor y alcanzaban de improviso la estatura y estatuto de defensores de una causa que trazaba la línea real de demarcación entre los hombres: la de la dignidad humana (705-6).

<sup>20</sup> The formulation of the term *négritude* (Léopold Sédar Senghor, Léon-Gontran Damas and Aimé Césaire) involved the creation of an important cultural movement for the recognition of the African rights. As for Panafricanism (Alexander Crummell, W. E. B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey), it constituted the significant expression of union and solidarity among all African nations in order to fight together for the recovery of their dignity as human beings.

continent. As Fanon explains it: “The native . . . knows that he is not an animal [anymore]; and it is precisely at the moment he realizes his humanity that he begins to sharpen the weapons with which he will secure its victory” (1963, 43). This victory became actually real especially from the sixties onwards, when African countries began to gain their physical independence from the colonial power<sup>21</sup>.

Although a new hopeful future seemed to open in front of natives thanks to emancipation, there were a lot of challenges that they had to meet in order to relish the true advantages of their new status. On the one hand, countries had to be reconstructed as well as adapted to the modernity that the rest of the world had already entered. On the other hand, it was essential that Africans *decolonised their minds* and learnt to experience life freely, far from the biased version of it that Europeans forced them to receive during the colonial period. Education proved to be the more appropriate means to achieve both purposes. The same as it had been very useful in the past so as to subjugate Africans, academic education had to be now one of the best sources of their redemption.

Nevertheless, in spite of the enthusiasm of the first moment, education came to reflect the difficulties of a continent that did not agree on how to fill the *tabula rasa* granted by decolonisation (Fanon 1963, 35). First, after a process of colonisation and acculturation, going back to pre-colonial times to restore the particularities of the African identity appeared to have no sense at all. Africans had to take pride in their origins and tradition again, but they should not relinquish development or disregard some of the priorities imposed by it on the new world. Second, if Western influence was to be present in every decision concerned with the continent’s future, then the fight for independence had to be considered completely useless. After all, natives had rebelled against colonisers, because they wanted to take charge of their life anew far from Western manipulation as well as to recover that African essence which had pervaded the pre-colonial period. Academic education in post-colonial times became the ill-fated

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<sup>21</sup> Although decolonisation began in the sixties, it took a long and difficult time for some nations, especially for those located in Southern Africa, to become really emancipated. For instance, Southern Rhodesia was illegally declared to be independent from Great Britain in 1965 for the first time. However, it was a white minority that, thanks to the apartheid system, governed the country as they wanted to, without taking into account the black majority, who experienced a large series of abuses because of their race, colour, religion and culture. But, at last, in 1980, Southern Rhodesia managed to be released from British domination. Nationalists intensified the activity of their guerrillas and the ruling white people were forced to grant the black population their right to vote. In this way, the foreign regime was finally overthrown and Southern Rhodesia welcomed a new black government as well as its current name, Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe was officially the last country but one to become independent in Africa (Namibia in 1990). Therefore, it is a very young nation in the new world order of these days.

product of a policy of reformation that did not really take into account this conflict between traditional and colonial legacies. It was an education that ignored the true intellectual, physical and psychological necessities of the natives born to decolonisation, whose identity was divided between their African roots and European aspirations.

On the one hand, there was a sector of the African society that strongly adhered to pre-colonial tradition as the only kind of education that had to be transmitted to African children. These natives believed that, after colonisation, the best way to bring nation consciousness back to the continent was by educating new generations in the traditional oral way. So, these Africans intended to recover indigenous languages as the means of communication and they emphasised the importance of performing initiation rites, respecting communal law and practicing animist religions, no matter if some of these beliefs turned to be outdated for the new future that Africa was trying to enter. In fact, although some colonial innovations could mean any progress for the African population, these natives were very critical of them. For example, Caliban's metaphorical declaration in *The Tempest* as far as colonial languages is concerned reflects how these natives felt and reacted toward what they deemed to be European impositions, not beneficial advances for them at all: "You taught me language, and my profit on't/ Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you/ For learning me your language!" (Shakespeare 150). Ismail S. Talib states that many scholars, such as Benedict Anderson, regarded the introduction of writing as the crucial element that allowed nationalism to spread in Africa. Besides, they considered the use of English a symbol of solidarity among different African peoples that succeeded in communicating in a shared language (80). Nonetheless, those Africans who rejected any colonial sign in their society were totally convinced of the fact that English language, especially in its written form, meant the end of their oral tradition and, consequently, a renunciation of an important part of their cultural identity as well.

As for the members of this group, most of them were people living in villages, those agitators of the revolutionary period that fought for independence with their physical force. They were especially supported by the elderly of the majority of communities, since they had been deprived of their power with the arrival of Europeans in the continent. It was logical that people from rural areas projected to rehabilitate the glorious history that they had always heard of, as colonialism had severely damaged their dignity and decolonisation did not seem to give it back to them again. In their opinion, it was only people living in town that received any compensation for their past

suffering. Furthermore, urban Africans were thought to be assuming through academic education a colonial perspective of life so as to benefit just by themselves from the advantages provided by the European heritage.

On the other hand, there were other natives that intended to create a new African continent, taking as their main point of reference the Western model of life established by colonisers. They claimed that, if the European conception of existence materialised in the new world that Africans were about to constitute, then modernity would finally reach Africa and those privileges that colonisers used to have and still kept in Europe would remain the same for the natives of the present. Thus, in their opinion, African traditional education had to be totally renewed in order to both adapt itself to a new perception of reality as well as to convey it according to the series of guidelines left by colonial academic instruction. Therefore, these natives were in favour of teaching a European syllabus codified in written English, which hardly dealt with the true African priorities of the time or the continent's culture, but that symbolised the acquisition of power. What is more, it was so strong their desire to import a borrowed experience of the European reality that they even endangered family and community relationships. African children would grasp modernity through academic education, but they would also forget tradition and, as a result, there would be a significant estrangement among old, middle and young generations.

Among the members of this group, privileged natives that lived in town were the most representative ones. During the colonial period, these Africans had been educated at missions or even abroad and had learnt how to escape what they considered to be their *disgraceful* condition of natives by imitating colonisers, that is, by appropriating their manners, culture, languages and philosophy of life. Their main purpose had always been to abandon their black past and present so as to get a white future: "The black man wants to be like the white man. For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white: Long ago the black admitted the unarguable superiority of the white man, and all his efforts are aimed at achieving a white existence" (Fanon 1986, 228). However, in spite of the *white masks* that these Africans had intended to wear, they finally seemed to realise that, due to their *black skin*, they were condemned to be mimics of their European counterparts, not their equals:

[The] converted heathen and the educated native [noble savage] are images that cannot entirely or easily be reconciled to the idea of absolute difference. While at one level they represent colonial achievements, at another they stand for impurity and the

possibility of mixing, or to use a term that has become central to postcolonial theory, “hybridity” (Loomba 119).

From the moment that these natives, mainly intellectuals, became aware of the fact that, for colonisers, their “impurity” was to be the proof of their *imperishable inferiority*, they tried to recover their African roots again in order to disguise their double condition (*Black Skin, White Masks*) and not to feel scorned expatriates anymore. They attempted to bind their divided identity together anew by writing literary works that elaborated on the African past (another way of educating people). However, as they had been educated in the Western manner, they were very often unable to conceal their colonial side:

At the very moment when the native intellectual is anxiously trying to create a cultural work he fails to realize that he is utilizing techniques and languages which are borrowed from the stranger in his country . . . The native intellectual who comes back to his people by way of cultural achievements behaves in fact like a foreigner . . . [because] the ideas that he expresses and the preoccupations he is taken up with have no common yardstick to measure the real situation which the men and women of his country know (Fanon 1963, 223).

Therefore, these intellectuals concentrated on the depiction of the picturesque aspects of the African tradition as any European researcher interested in exotic cultures would do. They adopted a patronising attitude to write about their own origins, thus favouring the creation of stereotypes and detaching themselves from the actual circumstances of Africans during the process of decolonisation. As a consequence, they again separated from the rest of their compatriots and they found it difficult to fully integrate into their communities. While they had been repudiated by colonisers owing to a physical quality (their *black skin*), they were now rejected by natives because they were educated, but not mature enough to assimilate the real meaning of being African and the true necessities that the indigenous population had at that moment.

Nevertheless, owing to their presumed African consciousness as well as to their knowledge of the modern world, this educated elite that had acted as nationalist leaders during the revolutionary period came to be relied on by the rest of natives to govern the new African countries. Hence, they inherited the positions that had been occupied by colonisers in the past and they became members of the political sector and the bourgeoisie. The *impurity* that, according to Europeans, had characterised these hybrid natives in the colonial times proved to be now one of the main sources of the

continent's destruction. As education had gained for these Africans a lot of power in the new decolonised countries, then their Western aspirations, usually related to a selfish acquisition of money, did emerge again and contributed to leave Africa in abject poverty in all its aspects. Kabunda summarises as follows how these *converted*<sup>22</sup> natives disregarded the true necessities of their original continent:

Los nuevos dirigentes no cambiaron en su esencia las prácticas coloniales al concentrar en sus manos todos los poderes, y ello no se acomodaba a la nueva situación ni a los nuevos objetivos que se autoconfiaron. Tanto las prácticas políticas como las económicas no cambiaron. Las Constituciones se inspiraron en las de las metrópolis. La enseñanza seguía fundamentándose en el modelo elitista colonial. Las lenguas de los colonizadores se convirtieron en lenguas oficiales y de construcción nacional. Es decir, se creó un anacronismo y un callejón sin salida al contraponerse las estructuras tradicionales mayoritarias y las prácticas importadas elitistas, disfrazadas mediante el desarrollo de un discurso demagógico de retorno a las fuentes. De este modo, aparecieron las bases objetivas del bloqueo del desarrollo, de las prácticas dictatoriales, de los conflictos y de la violación de derechos humanos, por la incompatibilidad manifiesta entre ambos sistemas (96).

As indicated by Kabunda, the area of education also underwent the effects of the suspicious administration of those African politicians with colonial inspiration. They invested their influence and the domestic capital in developing superfluous and ostentatious enterprises instead of in projects that could have made that the African population progressed without betraying their cultural identity<sup>23</sup>. Three were the most important consequences of the little attention that these leaders paid to the creation of an educational system especially conceived for their African *electorate*.

In the first place, politicians did not bother to maintain the few infrastructures, such as hospitals and schools, which Europeans had built in Africa during the colonial period (Kabunda 99). Therefore, on the one hand, diseases submitted a significant part of the African population, because there were few prepared doctors that, with an

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<sup>22</sup> I use the term *converted* in this context, because I find it appropriate to imply that these westernised natives relinquished both their political and religious convictions, being indifferent toward the miserable condition of their homeland and gaining just for themselves those Western privileges that they had always longed for. As far as Christian religions is concerned, these actually spread in the continent faster after independence than during the colonial period, since they were regarded as signs of (European) modernity, especially in Kenya, Zimbabwe and in the Sudanese part that goes from Senegal to Ethiopia (Ilfie 339).

<sup>23</sup> These westernised leaders disregarded education in Africa, because the majority of them had been educated in European countries and sent their children there too: "Leading Africans wanted their children to have a complete 'English' or 'Scottish' education in all its details, fearing that without it their children's development would be retarded, and they would be discriminated against in competing with Europeans for professional posts" (Cowan, O'Connell and Scalon 360).



appropriate equipment, could treat those patients that required their help. Furthermore, the few pupils that could attend schools did not receive any information regarding illness prevention. On the other hand, since old schools were not preserved as in the colonial period and little money was spent in both the construction of new ones and in the promotion of a syllabus adapted to the new African situation, illiteracy condemned natives to ignorance about modern reality. Formerly, in pre-colonial times, Africans had been unaware of an outside world that, after all, did not really concern them very much<sup>24</sup>. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of colonisation had introduced them into the competitive world that progressed beyond the African frontiers and so, natives became conscious of the fact that they needed education to at least reach the minimum standards of life that existed in the rest of the globe.

In the second place, due to a significant shortage of facilities and material, the access to education continued to be very limited and only a few children could enjoy the privilege of attending schools. This situation proved to be worse on the outskirts of town as well as in villages, because politicians assumed that the Africans inhabiting these areas had neither educational aspirations nor money for paying school fees. This kind of presuppositions contributed to increase illiteracy even more. A reference to the lack of bookshops and libraries especially in rural areas turns to be very indicative of the little concern that African leaders had with the spread of academic education:

They are poor and illiterate; therefore they cannot buy or read books; therefore there is no need for bookshops or libraries. But because no bookshops or libraries are available, people are denied the very means of knowledge and information which might help in their attempt to organise and break the circle of illiteracy. Rural schools are denied what is freely available to the wealthy sections of the urban centres. The habit of borrowing a book from a library or buying a book for reading for pleasure and for instruction outside the formal classroom is hardly developed (Ngũgĩ 1986, 83-4).

It is true that formal education very often played a secondary part both in the periphery of town and in villages. On the one hand, parents considered that they had a much more immediate priority in life, that of daily surviving. As a result, they preferred that their

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<sup>24</sup> Although they did not know to read and write, it cannot be considered that Africans in the pre-colonial period were illiterate. In my opinion, the term *illiterate* has very bad connotations nowadays, it is associated with barbarian and primitive individuals. I believe that pre-colonial natives were not savage at all, their *illiteracy* was only due to the fact that it was not really their time yet to develop the academic skills that some other people had already expected from them. In fact, they had many other important priorities at that moment.

children worked every day and brought money to the household. On the other hand, country people also perceived the indifference, even contempt, that their westernised compatriots living in town felt for them. Consequently, they insisted on educating their offspring in the traditional way, as they did not want their children to become like their urban counterparts.

In the third place, African politicians devoted little money and few efforts to introduce indigenous languages at schools as the means of transmitting academic education. English was regarded by them as one of the most important elements that had contributed in the past to bring independence back to the African countries. Talib recovers these opinions in the words of Ali Mazrui: “. . . [T]he de-emphasis of traditional beliefs, and of tribal connections which came about through the use of English, gave rise to detribalization, which in turn made possible the kind of nationalism that opposed British colonial rule” (107). Therefore, although a significant part of the African population did not speak a word of English, new governments established it as the national language after emancipation. In their opinion, English represented stability in all its aspects as opposed to the conflicting diversity of *vernaculars* that existed in every African nation. As a consequence, if English turned to be the official language in Anglophone Africa, then it inevitably had to become the language of education too.

Besides, education conveyed in English continued to be associated with the acquisition of power and sophistication. African new politicians were obsessed with the idea of gaining international admiration by creating an educated elite that, communicating in English, would be able to compete with the intellectuals of the rest of the world. Hence, they promoted the use of English at schools to the detriment of the majority of Africans who found it very difficult to speak in a foreign language and experienced contradictory feelings when reflecting on the use of it:

English [continued] to be used for modernisation and social change, and to provide unprecedented access to mobility and advancement to native and non-native users who [possessed] it as a linguistic tool. Linguistic schizophrenia [was] likely to prevail [and it has prevailed indeed] for some time yet in South Africa, with people perceiving English simultaneously as the language of oppression and of access to elite educational, scientific and political domains. What [was] becoming increasingly apparent [was] that even the strongest opponents to English [saw] to it that their own loved ones [mastered] the language (de Klerk 17).

A good command of English constituted for Africans the essential condition for fulfilling any of their aspirations in life, for example, that of receiving a formal education. However, it was colonisers who had imported English into the continent, the same as other phenomena such as exploitation, denigration and subjugation. As a result, academic education in English revealed a permanent conflict inside all those individuals that had been once colonised, but who could not deny a series of European longings that they wanted to achieve any time:

El gran problema radica en cómo podrán los oprimidos, como seres duales, inauténticos, que “alojan” al opresor en sí, participar de la elaboración, de la pedagogía para su liberación... . Sufren una dualidad . . . Descubren que, al no ser libres, no llegan a ser auténticamente. Quieren ser, mas temen ser . . . Su lucha se da entre ser ellos mismos o ser duales (Freire 41, 45).

Natives were aware of all the advantages that academic education in English could provide them for social promotion. However, they also knew that if they accepted all the conditions imposed by it, that is, the use of a foreign language to express a reality that did not really belong to them, they would be adhering to a dual identity that neither represented their true African self, nor released themselves from the colonial influence. But, the decision to fully grasp a single African identity also proved to be very difficult to take, as it meant a renunciation of certain tempting privileges and the acknowledgement of their so despised African roots.

As Joseph Schmied asserted: “[P]sycholinguistic studies have shown that mother-tongue education is better for child’s cognitive development” (103). Consequently, after independence, while English language in education proved to be only appropriate for objectively conveying a series of values that were not African at all, it was totally inconvenient for internalising the true concept of being an African. As it is obvious, indigenous languages were completely essential for achieving this latter purpose, but westernised leaders did not spend national income in maintaining them for instruction, since they preferred to invest money in other much more *smart* enterprises. As a matter of fact, they were not interested in fostering the good quality of African education or in preserving the use of their mother languages, because they themselves had forgotten the true meaning of their original African essence. A good instance of how the transmission of African culture and education was disregarded by authorities could be observed in the publication and translation of school books:

With school textbooks . . . , transnationals [issued] translations or reprints in official languages without concern for their pedagogical value or their relevance to the domestic cultural situation. . . . British publishers in Africa imported “either those used in Britain or those developed in India and the Far East” (Rea 1975: 145). Even when a British textbook was written precisely for an African audience, the author might ignore cultural differences by adhering too closely to British values (Venuti 1998, 163).

Although it was transnational companies that published these school books in the continent, it was the African government that allowed them to do it. Furthermore, it was only Africa politicians to be blamed for the manipulation of books, since they were in charge of revising the content of any text.

If anybody pays attention to the situation of Africa nowadays, it is easy to observe that Western influence is still responsible for the unsatisfactory performance of all the black leaders that act as true dictators in their countries<sup>25</sup>. Education continues to be the ill-fated product of the unbalanced conflict that confronted, just after independence, the honourable but blind purpose of restoring African identity in the traditional way with the Machiavellian intention of acquiring money and power at all costs by introducing a totally westernised education. Therefore, it can be asserted that the underdevelopment of education in Africa is primarily due to the action of those African governments that, encouraged by Western countries, preferred individual profits to national moral benefits.

As for traditional education, one of the most important symbols of African identity, it disappeared to a great extent during the colonial period and the customs that are still kept nowadays are just traces of cruel practices that go against human rights and that, in many occasions, should be severely punished by law:

[L]a tradición ha muerto. Por eso el africano se encuentra ahora mismo sin asideros espirituales . . . . Lo que ahora llaman *tradición* ya no es sino un eco de lo que se supone que fue . . . . Lo que algunos consideran ahora *tradición* no son sino los vestigios más crueles o más caducos o más inhumanos de algunas prácticas del mundo antiguo, ya totalmente carentes de su sentido

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<sup>25</sup> A member of the old educated elite that has become one of the dictators that *governs* in Africa nowadays is Robert Gabriel Mugabe, president of Zimbabwe. He received a Christian education and attended different African universities. It is remarkable that he has a diploma and a bachelor's degree in Education from the University of South Africa and another bachelor's degree in Economics from the University of London, all by correspondence. Although, especially before independence, he strove to guarantee access to education to the majority of Africans (literacy rate is at 85% in Zimbabwe), he has recently disregarded this area and there are not enough funds or resources for maintaining schools. In addition, trained teachers have gone abroad.

original . . . La tradición se ha convertido . . . en mero folclore, en una apariencia de la realidad, utilizada las más de las veces por unas mentes interesadas en conservar sus privilegios mediante el oscurantismo y el terror (Ndongo-Bidyogo 33).

With regard to academic education, although it could be one of the best means for African true emancipation, it is considered to be by some sectors an annoying source of mental stimulation that constitutes a threat against current profitable subjection. That is the reason why, in many Africa countries, there are few investments<sup>26</sup> for the improvement of this area and the access to it is so limited as to become evident in the high illiteracy rates of any country in Black Africa<sup>27</sup>. As Kabunda explains:

La educación está en manos de los maestros y profesores mal pagados y, por lo tanto, desmotivados. Ésta se limita cada vez más al dictado y a la memoria sin estimular la reflexión. Las autoridades, conscientes de estas lagunas intencionadamente entretenidas, prefieren enviar a sus niños a las escuelas privadas o al extranjero (99).

Besides, with a few exceptions, the kind of academic education that children have in Africa is just a rudimentary training that allows learning a trade; it is not a true African education for aspiration, liberation or personal enrichment: “[W]e daily hear that an education that encourages aspiration, that sets the loftiest of ideals and seeks as an end culture and character rather than bread-winning, is the privilege of white men and the danger and delusion of black” (Du Bois 126). As a result, going to university is only a dream for a significant part of the African population. However, due to their grateful nature, those natives who only succeed in learning to read and write in their forgotten villages feel that they are very lucky to enjoy this opportunity.

As far as English is concerned, it became the official language of many African countries with independence and so the importance of oral indigenous languages

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<sup>26</sup> Jeffrey Sachs, one of the most influential economists in the world, has disclosed in his last book, *The End of Poverty*, one of the four universal lies that everybody seems to believe in. That is the false assumption that a lot of economic help is given to Africa every year:

Durante los años 90, la ayuda oficial al desarrollo descendió del 0,3 por ciento al 0,2 por ciento del PIB. EEUU gastó tanto dinero en dos semanas de la guerra de Irak (2500 millones de dólares) como lo que dan al año a África para ayuda al desarrollo [education is included here]. En 2002, el mundo rico dio a África 30 dólares por africano. De esta pequeña cantidad, 18 fueron para pagar a asesores y consultores occidentales y conceptos relacionados con la deuda. El resto, 12 dólares, fueron para África (Sánchez-Terán 28).

<sup>27</sup> In order to have an idea of literacy and illiteracy rates in Sub-Saharan Africa, I would recommend to look at the latest Unesco's statistics provided at the end of this essay.

continues to be relegated to the background in the educational syllabus of the majority of nations. For example:

In Zimbabwe, the two major languages Shona and Ndebele, were recognized as national languages. However, English has remained the primary official language and the language of instruction for most of primary and all post-primary school education. Shona and Ndebele are required subjects up to secondary school level in the respective regions where they are spoken<sup>28</sup> (Roy-Campbell 92).

The reasons for declaring English as the language of education are more or less the same as in the colonial period. It is believed that an education in English is the only one that may grant some power or possibilities of promotion to African people. For instance, Schmied has studied that in Zimbabwe, the same as in Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, Malawi, Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, English is taught “. . . as a subject in lower primary education, with the change-over usually between Standard 4 and 6. This has the advantage that all pupils can acquire a reasonable level of English before it takes up the burden of supporting the content of other subjects” (100-1). In countries such as Zambia, Kenya, the Republic of South Africa, Namibia, West Cameroon, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Gambia and Nigeria (in some fee-paying primary schools), English is introduced as the language of education as soon as possible, because authorities claim that there is not any possibility to agree on a single lingua franca to be used in class. However, in Tanzania, Somalia, Ethiopia and Southern Sudan, local languages are still used for primary education, although English is an important subject and is required afterwards at secondary schools. In these latter countries, the use of English or indigenous languages is sometimes conditional on the type of subjects studied: English is used for science subjects, and African languages for arts (100-01). Although it is true that an attempt to change the language policy related to education would be very difficult and expensive now, I do believe that, at the beginning of the process of independences, governments did not make an effort at all to put the use of native languages before that

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<sup>28</sup> It is very significant to pay attention to the map provided at the end of this essay. It can be perceived that, although Bantu languages, especially Shona and Ndebele, are still spoken in Zimbabwe, it is a foreign language, English, that has been declared to be the official language. In addition, it is important to look at the percentages of the different ethnic groups that exist in Zimbabwe: 98% are of African ascendancy (Shona 82%, Ndebele 14% and other groups 2%), 1% are of mixed or Asian ascendancy and less than 1% are of white ascendancy. It can be realised that linguistic discrimination is very clear in Zimbabwe, since English, as I said, is the official language, although less than 1% of its population are of English origins.

of English. Therefore, African *vernaculars* are not suitable nowadays for expressing modernity, especially when it comes to elaborate on certain subjects such as technology.

As a conclusion, it is to be indicated that the manipulated input that natives received from Europeans in the colonial period was so tempting and powerful as to be impossible to release Africans from its dividing influence even nowadays. That is why African society is very fragmented into those individuals who adhere to obsolete tradition and those westernised people who do not remember their true native origins. Therefore, it is necessary to reach a balance between these two opposite groups in order that all natives recover their dignity both as true Africans and as citizens of the modern world that progresses outside the frontiers of this abandoned continent. The best way to achieve this purpose now is to raise African leaders' awareness about the necessity of a good educational system that reached all sectors of the society. Africans are to be taught to assimilate modernity as well as to revitalise that African identity (African culture, languages, traditions and oral folklore) that fostered so strong a union in the past as to combat colonial subjugation. Once a nation is reinforced in its unity, it is proved that it can follow the universal way to development. As Fanon puts it: ". . . It is national liberation which leads the nation to play its part on the stage of history. It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows" (1963, 247-8). Consequently, it is a fact that education is the most important means that can contribute to the true emancipation of Africa, to the restoration of its dignity and to the encouragement of an African unity that would promote this continent at a universal scale.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **WOMEN AND EDUCATION IN AFRICA FROM PRE- TO POST-COLONIAL TIMES**

As analysed in the previous chapter, colonialism had a crucial influence on the development of education in Africa and, therefore, on the difficult process of consolidation of what can be called the African identity. As for native women, the introduction of a European academic training continued to prove that education was conceived as a tool to better control women's action in every sphere of life. Although this perception became more apparent during the colonial era, the truth is that it could not only be restricted to that period, since the existence of a second-class education for African women was a fact from pre- to post-colonial times in the continent. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of colonialism turned to be especially important for the upbringing and inner formation of African women as human beings due to two very opposite reasons. On the one hand, Europeans imported both their racist and sexist prejudices with them that brought the highest degradation to female education and severely damaged African women's self-esteem and the constitution of their identity. On the other hand, Western literacy gave the opportunity to at least a few women to know that, beyond the physical frontiers of their continent, it existed a reality different from that in Africa where women were not so much discriminated and where they could also fight for the acquisition of a certain degree of emancipation through education. Many African women tried hard to appropriate these foreign educational possibilities in order to gain their continent's true independence, but they especially intended to take advantage of them so as to achieve African women's liberation.

#### **Women's Pre-Colonial Upbringing in Africa**

In spite of the fact that pre-colonial education in Africa was conceived as the central element to integrate children into their societies; in the case of girls, it was conversely intended to make them assume their role as mothers and wives in isolation, thus sacrificing their lives in the interests of the patriarchal community. As far as this female education is concerned, it is very difficult to distinguish a clear process of instruction intended to proclaim women's inferiority. That is why it turns to be essential to refer to a series of sociological events that revealed that native women were imposed their African tradition in such a manipulated way that they learnt to validate an



existence based on submission and resignation. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to certain social habits and obligations related to religion, communal law and femininity to realise that these aspects were both didactic enough for African women as well as crucial for showing them the right way to their targeted place in the world, that is, the way to become good mothers and wives according to (male) communal patterns<sup>29</sup>. However, despite occupying an imposed marginalised space, it is true that African women were able to create a characteristic educational system out of their maternal instincts that, directed to their whole offspring but mainly to their daughters, transcended time orally. In fact, this special kind of education based on the tradition of storytelling has been inherited by African women nowadays, constituting one of the best representations of the true cultural identity of the whole continent.

As for religion, it was the main reason for women in the pre-colonial period to learn their obligation to motherhood willingly. It has to be remembered that it was a precept established by forefathers to encourage the group's supremacy and continuation over those of individuals. Then, people alone were underestimated and they were only empowered as they deserved, when they cooperated with each other and contributed to the community's growth in any aspect. In this regard, families were deemed to be small productive entities of great value for the cohesion and prosperity of African societies and so, to get married was both an essential element for avoiding individualism as well as for perpetuating the human race. Celibacy, for example, was regarded as a sign of great selfishness (Kabunda 37).

With respect to marriage, Africans regarded it as a tradition that could provide them with those children that would later help them to work for the community. That is why sexual intercourse was not simply conceived as a pleasant experience between a man and a woman, but as a fruitful encounter that could result in the family's enlargement. Therefore, since incest, homosexuality, fellatio and *coitus interruptus* lacked any kind of reproductive purpose, natives thought that these practices had no sense for them at all (Kabunda 37).

So, as marriage was understood as a source of reproduction, it is logical then that women came to play an important part in the community's destiny. That is why, since

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<sup>29</sup> In this respect, I will try to avoid any European patronising criticism by only condemning those social and traditional aspects that African writers such as Ama Ata Aidoo (Ghana), Tsitsi Dangarembga (Zimbabwe), Buchi Emecheta (Nigeria) and Bessie Head (South Africa) among others have also denounced through their literary works.

they were very little, girls were taught that motherhood was an indispensable condition for them to be accepted both by their husbands and the whole community. Because “. . . los niños [eran] una inversión para la vejez [y] además [eran] eslabones en la cadena de la vida”, a promising future for the family and the clan very much depended on the number of children that women gave birth to (Kabunda 37).

In addition, women were very early made aware of the fact that it was dead ancestors who granted them the possibility of having children. Hence, being motherhood a sacred gift, they had to learn to be grateful for this virtue to forefathers. For instance, “Nigeria has conditioned women not to complain about the burden of mothering, lest they be considered unnatural or, worse still, lose their children because of a negative attitude about what should be considered a blessing” (Ogunyemi 76). Consequently, it can be observed that, if Nigerian women wanted to be respected by their community and protected by the invisible world, they had to appreciate motherhood as this quality deserved it. Should they underestimated the value of this “blessing”, they would not be able to escape both social scorn as well as their blame for any problem during pregnancy or for one of their children’s casual death.

Furthermore, children were also considered to establish a bond between ancestors and the future<sup>30</sup>, thus favouring a beneficial development of life events for Africans. As a result, if there was any setback in this projected relationship coming from the women’s part (for instance, barrenness or abortion), the expected contributions from forefathers to the community’s improvement were totally altered and caused a lot of problems for daily survival in the community:

Any irregularity in child-bearing, such as the birth of twins, an abortion, or a miscarriage, [was] thought by many tribes to have an effect on the rain. If a Pedi woman [had] an abortion, it [was] considered enough to desiccate the country with heat. . . while among the Lobedu abortions and twins [had] to be buried in wet soil, lest they [caused] drought (Krige 108).

In the case of Bantu-speaking communities, women assimilated that they were almost always to be found responsible for natural forces’ bad actions on Earth. Female infertility was believed to be transferred to natural forces and, in this way, the weather

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<sup>30</sup> A kind of union between ancestors and the future was required in order to preserve a balanced existence for Africans far from too much hardship. Motherhood was essential to reinforce this bond, that is why Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi referred to childlessness as a dangerous element for perpetuation as well as for a comfortable life: “[C]hildlessness [was] important as a spiritual issue in indigenous religions. It [created] a gap in the antenatal-living-postmortem cycles that must be maintained for consonancy” (136).

that was expected to be good in the future changed completely and ruined all those sources that provided any kind of nurture to the community.

Besides, when a woman was believed to be barren, her dysfunction was very often attributed to dead ancestors' anger. Forefathers had probably felt affronted by her behaviour one way or another and had decided to deprive her of her capacity for bearing children. However, more than physically, this punishment affected women mentally due to two reasons. On the one hand, as it was thought that: "El vínculo . . . entre las madres y los hijos [era] . . . espiritual ya que, según la tradición, las madres [permanecían] como protectoras más allá de la muerte," hence women lost their only opportunity to hold such an important responsibility after death and especially to be remembered and respected by their offspring as they had always desired to in life (Aragón 89). On the other hand, African men did not want to have bad relationships with forefathers, because they feared their reprisals a lot. As a consequence, rather than experiencing dead ancestors' rage, Africans preferred to condemn infertile women to derision and isolation, arguing that they were bad witches. John Iliffe explained that:

La acusación [de bruja] se centraba . . . en las mujeres yermas y de pocas amistades, que podían ser sometidas a terribles sufrimientos que habitualmente consistían en hacerles beber una pócima conocida en el África central con el nombre de *muavi* o entregarlas a la ira de la multitud (161).

It is obvious then that women felt great anxiety when it took them too long to get pregnant or even when they had only three or less than three children (they were also considered to be sterile with three children).

All in all, it can be observed that African women were taught both the benefits of motherhood and the risks of barrenness, but it was impossible for them to learn how to control a body that seemed to be manipulated by dead ancestors. Although they fought very hard for their children's welfare, for their husband's satisfaction in this respect and for the community's perpetuation, these women felt completely powerless as their future was not in their hands at all and they could be unfairly condemned for a natural dysfunction that was always unexpected.

Apart from religion, communal law also played an important part in the imposition of childbearing as the key issue in the education of the African female population. Women were made to assume that motherhood had to become their main aspiration in life, since children were believed to be their only contribution to the community. As already stated, marriage was an institution that had little to do with true

love and that was due to many other priorities that turned to be practical at a social level. That is why, when a man thought of a woman as his future wife, a series of requirements were demanded to her in order to verify if she would keep her husband satisfied and would also participate in her new community's development:

In marriage it [was] the social, legal, and economic aspects that to the Southern Bantu [were] the most important . . . Further, marriage [was] primarily an affair between groups, involving the two families concerned even more than individuals. The personal predilections of the couple [did] not carry nearly the same weight as the good name of the family of the girl, her ability to bear children, work well, and get on amicably with her mother-in-law, for whom she [would] at first have to work (Krige 111).

This example could also be applied to the majority of clans in the continent. Whereas women witnessed that their personal virtues were totally disregarded, they saw that they were only valued for their family's reputation as well as for how they had learnt to submit to their husband's family and community during childhood.

Nevertheless, among the series of qualities above mentioned that were expected from a good wife, her capacity to have as many children as possible was considered the most important one. New kids would help their parents with manual labour and would secure the continuation of their community as well<sup>31</sup>. So, in order to foster a numerous and healthy offspring, exogamy was spread among many African clans. Members of certain groups got married with people belonging to other communities both to have fewer enemies and to avoid biological defects that could result in the clan's extinction (Kabunda 38).

Therefore, women, since they were very little, realised that everything in their lives depended on children, even their possibility to have a good marriage. In this respect, the question of *lobola* or *roora* deserves special attention. The *lobola* was that part of the cattle that a suitor had to transfer to his woman's family, if he wanted to marry her and be granted her parents' permission to do it. This tradition was imposed as a way of compensating a clan for the loss of one of its members, but, for an African man, the *lobola* involved a kind of empowerment, since he gained the right to possess

<sup>31</sup> John Iliffe emphasised the importance attributed to children in African pre-colonial societies by giving an example of the khoisan wars:

. . . [T]ener numerosos hijos [era de gran importancia en África], sobre todo en las sociedades fuertemente patriarcales y competitivas de los pastores de ganado. Los primeros colonos holandeses consignaron que en las guerras de los joisán, "las mujeres parecían ser el botín principal, ya que todos se jactaban del número de las capturadas a sus adversarios. La razón parece ser su deseo de incrementar la población criando hijos" (152).

the children born to his wife. Although those girls that were believed to be the most fertile ones tended to have a higher value for men, the number of animals given for a woman was not directly related to her exceptional characteristics (Krige 113). Consequently, African women were not sold in the strict sense of the word, especially if it is taken into account that money was never exchanged between the suitor and the girl's family in the pre-colonial period. It can be said then that, for natives, the *lobola* was only regarded as a present for the woman's family.

Although it is considered by many European critics that the *lobola* degraded African women's dignity, it is necessary to analyse this tradition from different perspectives. First, the *lobola* allowed an African man to have full rights over her woman's children, not over his wife (Krige 113). Second, as Molara Ogundipe indicated and Marta Sofía López Rodríguez corroborated, in Europe an engagement ring is always given by a fiancé to his woman in order to marry her afterwards. Nobody seems to condemn this act, in spite of being a similar custom to that of the African *lobola* (2001a, 49). Furthermore, if it is thought that money is used for buying this ring, it can be asserted that this tradition is a transaction where the man resorts to a valuable present so as to gain his fiancée's approval. Third, the *lobola* is said to grant African men the opportunity to possess their women. However, this supposition cannot be very surprising, since, in Catholic weddings, the bridegroom gives thirteen coins to the bride and this ritual symbolises that the husband will support his wife economically. Therefore, she will have to devote her entire life to him, because it is assumed that, whereas she will not contribute with any other good to their marriage, he will provide her with anything she needs.

But, despite having tried to dismantle European biased criticism before, I agree, the same as many other African women, with the belief that the tradition of *lobola* had sexist connotations and that it was a shame that girls were taught to accept this tradition, without complaining about it. First, when the *lobola* was transferred to the woman's family and she could finally get married, she only changed the man to whom she had to submit herself: up to that moment, her father and older brothers if she had them and, from that moment onwards, her husband. Second, if it was only for his wife's children that a man sacrificed a part of his cattle (it was essential for survival), then it can be said that African men only appreciated women for their children. Third, fathers *paid for* their kids with cattle, because they expected their offspring to be as productive

as the animals given. Consequently, it seems that, at least at first instance, even motherhood was conceived as an utilitarian experience for fathers.

As regards their position in the communities, women were made aware that “. . . [their] status . . . [wa]s measured . . . by the number of children [they] [had] borne, [as] the birth of a child [was] hailed with great joy as an event of importance to the whole village” (Krige 95). This general celebration was due to the fact that new babies fostered the perpetuation of the clan and, since childhood, they were educated to cooperate with adults in the communal labour. Nevertheless, women gained more respect, if they gave birth to boys instead of girls. On the one hand, men always stayed in their community, even after marriage, because it was their wives that left their native clan and moved to that of their husbands. On the other hand, women coming from other groups were potential mothers and contributed to a genetic renewal. As a result, once *lobola* was given to the women’s relatives, children came to belong to fathers and hence to the community where the new couple was expected to live (men’s native communities).

In this respect, Asunción Aragón Varó also indicates that:

En África, al igual que en Europa hasta hace no demasiados años, las expectativas sociales proyectadas sobre las mujeres hacían que su función en la vida se centrara en ser madres y esposas. La maternidad supone uno de los acontecimientos más felices en las vidas de muchas africanas, especialmente porque, como apunta Phanuel Akubueze Egejuru, la maternidad es “un estado que confiere a las mujeres prestigio y poder permanente” (89).

I fully agree with Aragón’s statement, but I think that it cannot be asserted that this happiness attributed to motherhood was a true feeling of joy. The main reason for women to be pleased with motherhood at a social level was that children (as many as they could and especially boys) allowed them to be respected in their communities as well as to guarantee themselves a decent status that would be later transferred to their offspring.

Since African women were believed to only contribute children to their communities, mothers had the obligation to transmit the importance of motherhood to their daughters. That is why certain aspects related to sex education were taught to girls very early, especially if it is taken into consideration that sex life and its outcome was regarded as a communal concern that could have several consequences on the group. For instance, in the Bantu-speaking communities: “. . . [A] menstruating woman [was]

a danger, not only to any man who [had] relations with her, but also to the cattle who would become ill if she were to go into their kraal and, among the south-eastern tribes, to drink their milk” (Krige 108). The same as it happened with other sexual irregularities, this time women were also to be blamed for those calamities that ancestors and natural forces had already planned for men or for the community as a whole. Therefore, when mothers educated their daughters about sex and motherhood, they strove to warn their girls about the delicate position that women occupied in their societies. They could sometimes be praised for their fertility, but also condemned for their sexual behaviour in many other occasions. Then, motherhood and sex for African women were both a source of public satisfaction as well as of female individual frustration.

Apart from providing their clans with children, women also worked hard at home, in the fields and even with the cattle in order to favour their family’s daily survival and, indirectly, that of the community. That is why girls, from the age of five onwards, began to be taught their duties by mothers. For example, in the Bantu-speaking communities, whereas boys learnt to hunt and herd the cattle with fathers, girls looked after their brothers and sisters, carried water and firewood home, collected crops, ground cereals, cooked, hoed, etc (Krige 96-7). Therefore, as Kabunda states, there was an early sexual division of work that would later contribute to marital stability (38). Nonetheless, if the above mentioned male chores are compared with the female ones, it can be perceived that that sexual allocation of jobs was not as fair and balanced as presented by the Congolese scholar. Women had many more obligations to the family and the clan and they even undertook some of those tasks that men were supposed to perform:

The poor women of Africa, like those of India, [had] a hard time. As a rule, they [had] all the hard work to do. They [had] to cut and carry all the wood, carry all the water on their heads, and plant all the rice. The men and boys cut and [burnt] the bush, with the help of the women, but sowing the rice, and planting cassava, the women [had] to do. You [would] often see a great, big man walking ahead with nothing in his hand but a cutlass (as they always carry that or a spear), and a woman, his wife, coming on behind with a great big child on her back, and a load on her head. No matter how tired she [was], her lord would not think of bringing her a jar of water, to cook his supper with, or of beating the rice, no, she must do that (qtd. in hooks 16-7).

Despite its length, this is a first-hand description of women's labour life in pre-colonial Africa given by the 19<sup>th</sup> century black missionary Amanda Berry Smith. When she arrived in Africa for the first time, she denounced both female exploitation in the continent and the lack of possibilities that women had to complain about their difficult situation.

On the other hand, when girls were a little bit older, mothers taught them some aspects about their lives after getting married. They learnt that they had to submit themselves to their husbands and their husbands' families, but that women had never any apparent compensation for their sacrifices. For example, as Iliffe explained:

El predominio masculino era antiguo en el África austral, . . . las mujeres tenían una condición social algo inferior a la habitual en el África occidental. A las muchachas se les enseñaba, posiblemente desde la niñez, a servir a todos los hombres adultos y a las mujeres mayores del hogar del que pasaban a formar parte como recién casadas. No tenían acceso a las tierras más que a través de los hombres, ni acceso al granero excavado debajo del corral. En caso de divorcio, solían perder todo derecho a la custodia de sus hijos, recurso encaminado a imponer una castidad femenina mucho más rigurosa que la exigida en cualquier otra parte del África subsahariana (153).

So, women, especially those who lived in southern Africa, devoted their entire existence to satisfy men rather than themselves. However, not even this self-denial seemed to deserve any reparation, since women were flagrantly deprived of their essential rights by men. In this case, they were not allowed to step into their lands and barns without male permission, although it was women that dedicated themselves to agriculture. What is more, when a couple got divorced, women were revengefully robbed of their children by their husbands, because men knew that this kind of loss affected that part of women's self-esteem that got strengthened through motherhood.

As stated in the previous chapter, the African concept of a family was very different from the European one. Far from being nuclear, a family in Africa was an extended entity that spread through kinship to the whole community (Wilentz xvii). Hence, all members of a same clan undertook the responsibility to educate new generations, no matter if adults were related to children by true biological ties or not (Kabunda 36). In this communal context and bearing in mind the patriarchal nature of most African societies, it can be understood the formation of what can be called



sororities<sup>32</sup>; groups of women that joined together in order to educate girls and provide them with an appropriate female upbringing: “Las ancianas, las tías, las muchachas del pueblo, las hermanas . . . se convierten en ‘madres’ de [las niñas] . . ., como forma de preparación de [éstas] a la pluralidad y a la aceptación del cuerpo social en su diversidad” (Kabunda 36). So, women made girls learn the duties and rights of communal law and taught them to accept motherhood as the essential key to social integration. Furthermore, daughters were made aware of the fact that, because of their sex, they would have to make a lot of sacrifices and even suffer sometimes. Nevertheless, these girls also assimilated that: “. . . [L]a solidaridad entre mujeres, la sororidad, [era] el fundamental mecanismo empoderador para el colectivo femenino . . . el apoyo [entre] mujeres se [presentaba] una y otra vez como la única vía para sobrevivir en el contexto del patriarcado” (López 2005, 108-9). Therefore, they realised that, in spite of living in communities that only safeguarded male interests, they would always have the possibility to take refuge in sororities, when they needed some advice to go on in a patriarchal environment.

In sum, it is easy to observe that motherhood had to become women’s main aspiration in life one way or another, as children were conceived as public property from which all members of a community could benefit to a certain extent. In fact, women were educated to willingly accept motherhood and its implications, since it was the only merit that was attributed to them in pre-colonial times. Motherhood guaranteed social integration to African women, as children, especially boys, were regarded as the communal source of development and perpetuation. However, as López has asserted:

[M]ientras que las mujeres sigan siendo valoradas únicamente como madres dentro de las sociedades africanas, su potencial como seres humanos se verá drásticamente disminuido y sus aportaciones materiales y espirituales [educación] al bienestar de la comunidad serán ignoradas por quienes, imbuidos e imbuidas de un ciego machismo, desprecian a las mujeres en tanto que seres humanos autosuficientes y económicamente productivos, y no sólo reproductivos (2005, 112).

I agree with her statement. Even though motherhood has always been considered one of the most beautiful experiences that women could ever have, it was sometimes a burden

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<sup>32</sup> The original meaning of *sorority* is: “In the United States, . . . a society of female university or college students” (Cobuild 1487). However, in this context, the word *sorority* refers to a feeling of solidarity that unites certain women in cooperative groups that allow them to better endure patriarchy and the injustices of their subjected condition. These women tend to come from countries that are marked by colonisation and have always been victims of their sex, their race and, in many occasions, of both aspects.

for African women in the pre-colonial period. Despite demonstrating their great potential in different areas, women's efforts were never recognised in their communities. Children would always bring them the key to social integration, but inevitably the key to self-destruction as well.

Apart from these reasons of a religious and communal nature, motherhood was also presented as the essential quality for women to reinforce their femininity. As previously explained, girls, since childhood, were taught that kids were required from them, since the community's development and perpetuation depended on the new generations. However, while children were attached so much significance at a social level, women regarded motherhood as the only natural ability that made them different from men and that was accepted (even celebrated) by their male partners without any objection. That is why, when educators prepared them to confront motherhood, women tended to admit this responsibility willingly as a source of their personal satisfaction and did not realise that, to a certain extent, "[this] institution . . . [was] a cornerstone of patriarchy" (Ogunyemi 32).

In order to be ready for motherhood, it was compulsory for girls to be submitted to the performance of a series of initiation rites that were believed to be so educational as to allow them to abandon childhood and enter adult life. In this new period, they would reach sexual maturity and would have the possibility to marry those young boys that had also undergone their corresponding puberty rituals<sup>33</sup>. Furthermore, girls attributed so much importance to this kind of rites<sup>34</sup>, as they were made to believe that these practices especially consolidated their femininity. On the one hand, initiation was thought to contribute girls all those social obligations that, due to their female sex, they had to assume during their adult age (most of them related to motherhood). On the other

<sup>33</sup> It is to be indicated that, as children born out of wedlock were not welcomed in their clans, women were expected to get married before having any descendant. For a marital union to take place, it was an obligation for young women to be firstly performed their corresponding initiation rites. However, in certain communities, before celebrating these rituals, children, especially girls, were taught how to avoid unexpected pregnancies. As Helen Jensen Krige indicates: "In all the Southern Bantu tribes the birth of a child out of wedlock [was] frowned upon as an offence, and sexual morality [consisted] in avoiding this . . . [A]mong the Venda and Zulu definite instruction [wa]s given at puberty on how to have intercourse without becoming deflowered. . . . The Swazi [guarded] against possible consequences by placing a piece of soft goatskin over the female organ" (109).

<sup>34</sup> It is obvious that African girls accepted initiation rites without complaining, since they were educated to believe that these practices had a lot of advantages for them. As Mary Holding, a British Methodist missionary, observed in Meru (Kenya): ". . . [F]emale initiation [involved] preparation for marriage and procreation: it marked the end of sexual freedom, affirmed parental authority and filial duty, protected one against the dangers of sexual intercourse, and ensured fertility as well as ancestral blessings" (Thomas 20). What is more, these rituals gave women an opportunity to "remade [them] into women [and] transformed adult women into figures of authority within the community" (Thomas 24).

hand, as Kabunda indicated, clitoridectomy and infibulation<sup>35</sup> were mainly conceived to excise the clitoris, which was considered to be women's *masculine part* and so it should be removed at all costs if girls wanted both to assert their female sex<sup>36</sup> and to guarantee the good health of their offspring<sup>37</sup> (43). However, these practices were not as educational, beneficial and satisfying for women as presented, the truth was very different.

First, female bodies were mutilated through excision and women's original anatomy was altered to such an extent that could not be recognised as feminine at all. Therefore, in spite of much suffering, femininity did not become more noticeable after initiation as it was argued. On the contrary, women had learnt to reject their true female nature very early, while, as a matter of fact, they accepted a new anatomy that was actually a fake and that could neither be identified as feminine. Besides, although boys' foreskin was also excised and there has never been so much criticism against this rite, circumcision did not involve the end of sexual pleasure for boys, whereas excision and infibulation could perfectly meant it for girls. In addition, as the tools used for operating were not sterilised and hygiene was conspicuous by its absence, women could easily die because of an infection, especially when the labia minora and majora were also cut.

Second, all these rituals were not intended to encourage women's femininity; this argument was only an excuse that men invented in their own interest. The majority of communities in pre-colonial Africa were patriarchal, as a result, men wanted to preserve all those traditions that allowed them to hold their hegemony. On the one hand, African men attached great importance to fertility, as it was an essential element for the clan's perpetuation. So, they decided to excise their women's clitoris, because they feared that, if this organ touched their penis when having sex, they would become impotent. On the other hand, African men were also obsessed with infidelity. That is why they preferred to have their wives excised, as they thought that this ritual fostered female fidelity and prevented women from sexual pleasure.

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<sup>35</sup> As Lynn M. Thomas explains: "The terms 'clitoridectomy' and 'excision' both denote the removal of the clitoris and the whole or partial excision of the labia minora . . . [while] 'infibulation' refers to the excision of all or part of the mons veneris, the labia majora, the labia minora, the clitoris, the raw wounds adhering or having been sewn together to leave only a small aperture for the urinary and menstrual flows" (35-6).

<sup>36</sup> In some communities, people were convinced that if the clitoris was not excised, it would grow so much as not to allow women to walk or have sexual relations.

<sup>37</sup> In some places, it was believed that if the baby's head slightly touched the clitoris during the birth, the child would die.

Third, initiation also meant for girls the submissive assimilation of a series of sacrifices that they would have to undergo in the future. Therefore, the same as they were deprived of physical pleasure through the clitoris's excision, African women were simultaneously robbed of their freedom in all respects forever. As Mineke Schipper explained:

Las niñas aprenden durante los ritos de iniciación que su futuro estará determinado por la exogamia y por acuerdos de intercambio. . . Se las casará y terminarán en otras aldeas. Pasarán la mayor parte de sus vidas viviendo entre "extraños", su familia política. Desde una edad muy temprana, a las jóvenes se les inculca la idea de que están "de tránsito" en sus casas para prepararlas ante el trauma de la separación. . . La joven está condenada a marcharse, sus hijos, en muchos casos, pertenecerán al clan de su marido mientras que ella no pertenece a ningún lugar. Tras su matrimonio, la joven está bajo la supervisión del marido y de la familia de éste; sin embargo, sigue estando obligada a cumplir las órdenes de su hermano porque si se tuviera que divorciar tendría que volver a su propia familia (qtd. in Aragón 77).

It can be perceived that puberty rites also prepared African women to realise that, from that moment onwards, they would become *unhomed* individuals, since they would never be able to find a space where to feel really protected and assert themselves as true owners of their lives. Homi Bhabha elaborated on the state of *unhomeliness* when dealing with post-colonial peoples (hybridity), but his definition of the term could have also be applied in pre-colonial Africa to the emotional situation of women after initiation and marriage:

. . . [U]nhomeliness is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations . . . In that displacement, the borders between home and the world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is divided as it is disorienting (9).

It was impossible for African women to locate where their physical and spiritual home was, since they were always made to live according to a series of principles and obligations that were never established by them, but by their fathers, brothers, or husbands. Furthermore, they felt totally *unhomed*, because they were obliged to leave their native community and live among strangers (her husband's family) that had different habits and traditions. Besides, these women found themselves even more *unhomed*, when their husbands' relatives made clear that they could never belong to the new clan that received them. In addition, African women were forced to have as many

children as possible, but they were never allowed to claim their offspring as theirs (“home”, “private”), since the husbands’ clans appropriated babies after they were born for their social benefit (“world”, “public”).

After initiation rites, African women knew that they were expected to prove their fertility. Mothers, since their daughters were very little, had taught them that pregnancy was a blessing for the community as well as for themselves, since it was the definite test that demonstrated their femininity. Nonetheless, if a couple did not have any children, it was women who mainly suffered the psychological consequences of this inability, no matter if there was any evidence that it was their husbands who were actually impotent. In order to combat sterility, men resorted to different remedies that notably affected women’s self-esteem, but that consolidated male self-confidence.

First, if a woman was supposed to be barren or died childless, a stranger or frequently one of her sisters was made to take her place. Those children born to sexual encounters between a man and his sister-in-law were considered to be the offspring of the barren woman. The *surrogate mother* did not gain a special status for her service and, although her family was given some compensation, their parents did not receive any *lobola* for her (Krige 116). In this case, there were two women whose dignity was completely undermined and it is logical then that they felt frustrated for that. On the one hand, the *lawful* wife was unjustly rejected by her husband because of a dysfunction that she could not control at all and, in addition, she was imposed an infidelity that she could not complain about. On the other hand, the *surrogate mother* was required a commitment that did not contribute her any benefit. She was obliged to have sex with a man that was not her husband and that she had not even chosen. Besides, this man could often be her brother-in-law, thus betraying her sister unwillingly. Furthermore, it was only their parents who got any profit from their daughter’s service, since she received no direct appreciation from the beneficiary.

As for male infertility, remedies were very different. If a man was not given any children by his wife, she was immediately to be blamed for this problem. That is why his family tried to marry him with another woman in order that this new partner could conceive any son or daughter for him. However, when this solution proved to be useless and it was recognised at last that it was the husband who was sterile, it was decided that another man would have to get his wife pregnant.

Therefore, it is easy to observe that all problems concerned with infertility were solved in such a way that men did not seem to be psychologically affected in the end,

whereas women's self-esteem was always affronted one way or another and wives turned to feel completely frustrated:

. . . [T]here were hardly any men without children, since the infertile man could remarry, and/or it could be arranged for the wife to become impregnated by somebody whose identity was kept in secret. This arrangement to ease man's anxiety through a sperm donor exacerbates the spiritual anguish of the barren woman, who has to resort to surrogate motherhood, with people knowing that she did not actually give birth to her child. This emptiness is agonizing for the Nigerian woman, as, once in other world, she has no living child to "feed" and propitiate her (Ogunyemi 136).

Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi admitted that this unbalanced situation was frequent in Nigeria and claimed that it was very unfair as well as humiliating for all women.

Second, polygamy was regarded in many parts of Africa as an institution that safeguarded procreation and motherhood. It combated the demographic threat caused by a hostile environment, a high death rate and, of course, by barrenness (Kabunda 37). So, in a polygamous context, if a wife could not bear any children and hence was unable to prove her femininity, a man had the possibility to resort to another in order that she tried to conceive any offspring for him. It is obvious that, when there were women that could not be mothers and were replaced in this function because of their disability, these felt completely frustrated. After all, according to their educators, these women had lost the opportunity to have access to their only true aspiration in life: motherhood. Besides, owing to barrenness, women knew that their status<sup>38</sup> could probably be affected and, consequently, they would have to abandon their previous position to occupy a lower one (for example, from being a chief wife to becoming a minor one).

In spite of the fact that, from a sociological point of view, it is often argued that polygamy existed (and exists) in Africa to contribute to the family's perpetuation, I believe that there was also a sexist justification for this practice. African men wanted to have as many wives as possible in order to exploit them both sexually and economically. On the one hand, after women had a baby, it was compulsory for their husbands to observe a period of sexual abstinence. However, although the purpose of

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<sup>38</sup> In a polygamous context, whereas women's status and condition could considerably change according to their sexual ability, labour performance and daily behaviour, men only got advantages from having more than one wife. In fact, the more wives a man had, the higher his status, as he came to hold full rights over those properties and income that were actually their women's.

procreation had already been fulfilled with the new birth, men did not seem to be satisfied and could not restrain their male sexual instincts. So, despite the above mentioned ban, polygamy guaranteed them the possibility to have sex with other women. On the other hand, wives and children were taught to work hard in the *kraal* and, as a result, production increased a lot thanks to their efforts. Nevertheless, they did not benefit from their labour; it was only men that gained significant economic power and a high social status (Kabunda 51).

Although there was occasionally some hostility among the different wives of a same man, the truth is that, in pre-colonial times, African women learnt to coexist without serious problems. After all, they were all submitted to oppression and humiliation and shared a common feeling of frustration. In fact, it was probably this suffering that encouraged them to conceive the harem as a kind of sorority similar to those previously mentioned. There were critics such as Filomena Steady that even asserted that:

Polygamy . . . facilitated the shared mothering of children and guaranteed women some autonomy, personal freedom, and greater mobility than would be possible in a monogamous, nuclear family. Women had more time to themselves, developed strong bonds with other women, and experienced a more limited, rather than absolute, form of patriarchy (qtd. in Ogunyemi 82).

I do not think that polygamy granted true “personal freedom” to women. However, it did foster the creation of sororities, which allowed wives to bear hardship together and to collectively educate their children, particularly girls.

As for daughters, they came to belong to a sorority from the moment they were born, since they began to be educated by the whole group of women that lived in the same household. All these women taught girls to respect religion, communal law and orality, but they especially wanted their daughters to assimilate their female condition and so their obligation to motherhood. Consciously or unconsciously, all these mothers made girls aware of the fact that their main role in the community was to have children; otherwise, they would always be pushed into the background, being theirs a patriarchal society. Then, it can be asserted that daughters early assimilated that being born women proved to be painful very frequently in many respects. Even motherhood, as an

imposition, had a bittersweet component that did not allow them to enjoy the innate qualities of their sex and femininity, freely and to the full<sup>39</sup>.

Nevertheless, although mothers had to teach their daughters to live a second-class reality, there were girls who perceived that African women were not as passive and invisible as they were advised to be. Girls realised that motherhood granted a kind of power to women that, to a certain extent, could not be undermined by the strong influence of patriarchy and that permitted to discreetly preserve female significance in Africa generation after generation. This power was transmitted to mothers through fictional storytelling, since this kind of “[o]rature [was] part of many women’s daily struggle to communicate, converse, and pass on values to their own and other children, and one another” (Wilentz xvi). Therefore, it can be said that African women gained certain freedom of expression urged by their naive desire to educate their offspring (especially girls). So, they managed to convey their opinions, beliefs, interests and even worries (their identity and femininity) by orally encoding their daily experience in an artistic way, that is to say, by mastering fictional storytelling.

In this regard, it is to be emphasised the important role played by African grandmothers in sororities, since they proved to be good educators by inventing didactic stories for their granddaughters. On the one hand, as they had lived for a long time, grandmothers knew the difficulties of living in a patriarchal society very well. Consequently, they presented their own life experiences as fictional stories in order to stimulate girls’ ability to draw those morals that could be useful for their survival among men. On the other hand, grandmothers<sup>40</sup> willingly resorted to stories so as to

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<sup>39</sup> In pre-colonial Africa, biological differences established by *sex* were already used as an excuse to encourage female discrimination. So, the category of *sex* actually referred to *gender* very frequently. Therefore, although it has been nowadays that its definition has been finally put into words, it can be perceived that the term *gender* is not a new exclusive Western concept at all:

Género: Designación de lo que se considera propio de las mujeres (femenino) o propio de los hombres (masculino) y se atribuye como prejuicio sociocultural a unas y a otros. No suele coincidir en el tiempo ni en las culturas, y varía continuamente pues se deriva de la ideología, las costumbres y las condiciones económicas de cada sociedad. Las características que conforman el género se conforman y se pueden educar, pues son mandatos sociales y no se nace con ellas (“Igualdad” 38).

<sup>40</sup> As I do not want to extend this essay too much, I would only like to comment on an aspect related to grandmothers briefly. I want to state that African girls also learnt the discriminated role of women in patriarchal communities, when, for instance in Nigeria, they saw how grandmothers were often ill-treated if they survived their husbands and were also to be blamed for their partners’ death if they could not bear the torture they were submitted to. Among other things, Nigerian widows were forced to have their hair shaved as part of the obsequies as well as to drink the water used for washing the corpse. Therefore, Nigerian old women’s dignity was not respected at all and got severely damaged due to all that humiliating punishment (Ogunyemi 88). In other cases, widows were made to accept the levirate, as it



educate both their daughters and granddaughters, because they were aware of the fact that oral literature was the best means to leave an important imprint of their own concerns and personality on at least the two generations to come.

However, in spite of the fact that the tradition of female storytelling seemed to be so rooted in African communities, Hofmeyr indicated that:

Women's storytelling was a marginalised and patronised craft, relegated to a distinctively lesser sphere of a separate woman's world . . . . Like their agricultural endeavours, women's cultural work was located in the household . . . women's narrative labour was less valued, just as their cultivation work could never match the glamour and prestige of male cattle keeping (qtd. in Wicomb 158).

Although it might be thought that female storytelling's discrimination could have been a hindrance for the perpetuation of African women's identity in the course of the centuries, Hofmeyr also admitted that male storytelling (historical storytelling) disappeared with the arrival of colonialism in Africa, whereas female storytelling (fictional storytelling) resisted Western attacks and, despite certain changes, still survives in the form of written short stories nowadays (Wicomb 157). Therefore, at least in terms of storytelling, it can be asserted that African women's perseverance has contributed to the preservation of a genuine African tradition that reflects a significant part of black (female) identity. Nonetheless, those African men of the colonial period do not deserve so much praise in this respect, since they neglected habits such as their historical storytelling, when these turned to be anonymous and did not receive public acclaim as before due to Western repression.

Finally, it is worth briefly studying motherhood again as both the main objective and source of female education in all its aspects, but in a kind of communities that cannot be regarded as patriarchal in the strict sense of the word. Those African women living in these particular clans were educated in such a way that they also came to assimilate their unavoidable obligation to children and their discriminated position in life due to their female sex. These societies are indistinctly labelled as *matrifocal*, *matrilineal* or *matriarchal* nowadays, but it is necessary to establish differences among these terms, since they do not refer to the same concept at all.

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happened among the Bantu-speaking communities, if they did not want to be totally stripped of their possessions. The levirate involved a widow marrying his deceased husband's brother (generally a younger one) in order to be supported economically and thus survive.

First, according to Nancy Tanner, *matrifocal* are those societies with “[a] kinship system . . . in which *the role of the mother is central in terms of cultural values . . . and affective ties*” (qtd. in Wilentz xii). In this context, mothers together with the female members of the same clan devoted themselves to their children’s education. They constituted the above mentioned sororities that are especially known because of their special dedication to girls and their female solidarity in all respects. However, although these women had the possibility to transmit part of their personal thoughts to the following (female) generations, the truth is that they only held this special power in the small cultural context of the sorority. Meanwhile, it was men that dominated the rest spheres of life, thus maintaining the patriarchal structure of their societies and so encouraging female inferiority (women were only valued here for motherhood as well).

Second, *matrilineal* are those communities where the whole offspring of a couple come to belong to the maternal clan and the material inheritance as well as certain social privileges are also transmitted through the maternal channel. Nevertheless, although it might be expected that African women living in these societies were educated in a more liberal environment and enjoyed a significant degree of freedom, fathers, brothers and husbands continued to hold complete authority over their women and children. As Celia Amorós indicates:

. . . [A]quí no deja de estar presente en última instancia el pacto entre los varones como los agentes del contrato social. Las mujeres son aquí las intercambiadas, las mediadoras simbólicas, y en este sentido están subordinadas, aunque en diferentes grados. Porque los hombres, como ha señalado Maurice Godelier, tienen dos posibilidades: renunciar al control de las esposas y mantener el de las hermanas (que es lo que harían las sociedades matrilineales), o, si quieren tener el control de las esposas, obviamente, han de perder, al menos hasta cierto punto, el de las hermanas. Entonces, las opciones matrilineales y patrilineales corresponderían respectivamente a estas dos variantes de un pacto patriarcal. Parece ser, sin embargo que, en los casos en que los hombres han optado por controlar a las esposas más bien que a las hermanas, la mujer ha perdido posiciones. Pues cuando los varones controlan a las hermanas, ella sigue perteneciendo a su propio clan de origen, y sus relaciones de contigüidad con su propia familia consanguínea le dan unas posiciones menos precarias, sobre todo si ello se combina también con el factor residencia (275).

Therefore, it is a fact that discrimination existed for African women both in matrilineal and patrilineal communities, as, after all, these were “dos variantes de un pacto

patriarcal” (patrilineal and matrilineal patriarchies). So, education could not be supposed to be more promising in the matrilineal context, since girls were inevitably prepared to assume their obligations to motherhood and their submitted condition in society the same as it happened in patrilineal patriarchies.

Third, as for matriarchies, it is impossible to mention any aspect concerned with female education there, because I have understood that this kind of communities has never really existed and it is frequently mistaken for *matrifocal* or matrilineal systems. The term matriarchy involves “. . . poder de la mujer, entendido como poder político de la mujer como grupo, y poder, además público y social, en el sentido en el que se entiende el poder viril, . . .” (Amorós 276). Consequently, except for isolated cases, there have never been real traces of communities where women held full power (political, public and social). They have not been educated to occupy true influential positions in any society. Whenever a woman has excelled in any sphere of life, she has been closely controlled and even persecuted for her qualities in some occasions, especially if she could prejudice men in any aspect (Amorós 276). Ogunyemi saw an instance of male battle against outstanding women in Nigeria:

To counter disempowerment [mainly prompted by menopause and the inability to conceive children], the older woman often seeks and acquires mystic powers; in local parlance, she becomes a witch, often dwelling on the edge of the town. In the role of a witch, she is perceived as wicked, if she attacks her enemies as a defensive strategy; or, she is seen as a true mother, if she protects her people, especially successful men who are particularly vulnerable, since they are exposed to the evil eye in their public position (19).

It can be observed that Nigerian witches were marginalised for their “mystic powers”, since those individuals that had any connection with the spiritual world were envied because of their closeness to dead ancestors, but also feared due to their unpredicted reactions. Nonetheless, if these women contributed to the benefit of men, they were publicly acclaimed as their power was actually considered to be at men’s service.

To conclude, it is to be stated that, more than a true educational process, female education in pre-colonial Africa was in reality a gradual accumulation of daily experiences that made women aware of their obligation to stoically assume their future role as mothers as well as their submitted position in their societies. Since they were very little, African women were taught that they were expected to accept motherhood as manipulated through tradition, that is, as an unavoidable female responsibility that they

had to accomplish due to three reasons. First, motherhood was a gift granted by dead ancestors and so, women had to respect the sacred will of forefathers. Second, motherhood had to become women's only aspiration in life, since they, the same as the rest of the members of the community, had to sacrifice themselves for the society's development and children were considered the main female contribution to it. Third and last, motherhood had to become an appreciated quality for women, as it was the only decisive element for the community to recognise their femininity. Therefore, it can be asserted that women were educated and even mentally controlled in order that they accepted to devote their entire existence to childbearing, even sacrificing their dignity in some occasions. In fact, they were physically and psychologically prepared, even in sororities, to grasp a deceiving image of happiness that could only be achieved through motherhood.

In the case of male educators<sup>41</sup>, they took advantage of their *enlightening* role to show a subjugating behaviour toward women, since they thought it their right to require from their daughters and wives that they relinquished their self-fulfilment to preserve the patriarchal concept of a family as well as many other traditions related to it (*lobola*, initiation rites, polygamy, levirate, etc.). So, these men subtly succeeded in perpetuating a false *cliché* of their women's identity that lasted in the years to come; that of unemotional machines that gave birth indiscriminately and that strove to keep all the people satisfied except for themselves.

As it will be studied later on, when colonialism arrived in the continent, women's particular training for life continued to revolve around childbearing. What is more, despite Western dislocating intervention in African existence, all those traditional practices that proclaimed and educated African women as only mothers were preserved and, in some cases, even celebrated by colonisers. In fact, few native women were allowed access to that formal education imported by Europeans and, if so, they were discriminatorily instructed due to both their sex and race.

However, as it was clearly perceived during the colonial and the post-colonial periods, African women demonstrated that, despite having assimilated their traditional obligations to motherhood as enforced by their male partners, they had also been able to transform this imposition into a kind of empowering condition. Motherhood turned to

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<sup>41</sup> These male educators that I am referring to tended to be women's fathers, brothers and husbands. However, there were also women that, convinced by their men of the fact that girls were only to be valued by their capacity to be mothers, defended a male perspective of the world they lived in.

represent the principal source of African education, especially through storytelling. As a consequence, motherhood also became one of most important symbols of the African cultural identity in the new era that the continent was about to enter.

### **The Impact of Colonialism on Female Pre-Colonial Education and the Consequences of Formal Training on African Women's Life and Identity**

As analysed in the previous chapter, the irruption of colonialism in the continent had many consequences on African daily life. These effects were especially significant for women as far as their education was concerned. On the one hand, Europeans hardly bothered to alter that pre-colonial training that orientated African women to an appropriate performance of their role as mothers. They rather took advantage of this education based on submission in order to have the female section of the African society better controlled. On the other hand, the introduction of formal education did not offer many opportunities for African women's emancipation, since few had access to it and it proved to be really discriminatory as well. Therefore, female education in Africa during the colonial period combined certain humiliating practices from the past (initiation rites, arranged marriage, *lobola* in cash, exploitation and polygamy) with some prejudices from the present reality in order to oppress women both for their sex and race. However, colonial education also brought certain notions from the outside world that turned to be very promising for the improvement of African women's condition in the future. Those apparent traces of a prosperous destiny that women seemed to discover proved to be essential for the creation of the new African women that gave special proof of their existence in post-colonial times.

When colonisers arrived in Africa, the communal structure of African societies began to disappear in all its aspects and individualism and an eager desire for material property turned to pervade among Africans<sup>42</sup>. This change in the perception of existence obviously affected the configuration of the pre-colonial educational system that

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<sup>42</sup> With capitalism, patriarchies consolidated and the majority of matrilineal societies disappeared:

Property and inheritance destroyed the foundation of the . . . matrilineal system and led to the division of society into classes. The idea of private property especially in land characterized the patrilineal system, which identifies children according to the father and ensured that they earned his name and inherit property. This system produced systematic gender inequalities. In most societies, property was the male person's domain and the female person world is the labourer working on the land to improve it and hence get subsistence for her family (Adhiambo-Oduol, par. 20).

gradually had to adapt to the new values introduced by Europeans. As a result, a lot of traditions were abandoned and certain religious practices were disregarded especially due to colonial intimidating influence. Nonetheless, female education barely experienced any change and it still was directed to the submissive assimilation of motherhood and of all those physical and psychological sacrifices that it entailed. In fact, women's education did become a kind of training that preserved obsolete ways of instruction, but that reflected the effects of a new external exploitation, the colonial one, that condemned African women to a more subjugated position in their communities.

Firstly, as it can be remembered, initiation had been in the past one of the most important means to educate women about the implications that puberty and marriage had for them, mainly their obligation to motherhood. During the colonial period, despite the disintegrating power of capitalism, female initiation rites continued to be celebrated and gathered the community together again. The main reason for these rituals to take place was that African men, by performing them, had the opportunity to vindicate that, although they had been robbed of their dignity by colonisers, they still preserved their male control over their women:

. . . [L]os hombre deshonrados por el gobierno europeo reaccionaron a veces afirmando por la vía de la crueldad su dominio sobre las mujeres, en especial en el África del Sur, donde la supremacía masculina había sido históricamente vigorosa y la opresión de los europeos fue mayor. La iniciación masculina posiblemente decayó, pero . . . consideraron una cuestión de honor conservar los ritos femeninos (Iliffe 303).

Therefore, during pre-colonial times, initiation had been regarded as a crucial step forwards to the education of both boys and girls. Nevertheless, when Europeans arrived in the continent, these practices lost their original educational meaning. African boys were often exempted from undergoing these rites, whereas girls did continue to experience a cruel performance of both clitoridectomy and infibulation. It was only African men that deprived these practices of their initial didactic purpose, because they resorted to them as a physical way of freeing themselves from the frustrations caused by colonialism. Men believed that if they excised their women, these would be prevented from rebelling in any way. They wanted their wives to become even more submissive than in the past; they only desired to make women aware of the fact that their mission in life was to keep them satisfied by doing the housework, by having sex

when they felt like it and by constantly giving birth in order to perpetuate African male offspring.

Secondly, despite the impact of individualism in some spheres of African life, marriage continued to be a social and agreed issue instead of a couple's private decision. The preservation of this tendency especially affected African girls, because it was demonstrated that women were always to be educated to sacrifice their personal will in the interests of communal (male) preferences. In the past, the resigned acceptance of *lobola* had been a good instance of the extent to which African women had understood that their qualities (manual labour and motherhood) equalled the value of animals. In the colonial period, African women were made to assimilate that marriage was a mere transaction in which they were sold and bought as material goods with that money that colonisers had introduced in the continent.

Thirdly, African educators taught girls to become good housewives and mothers with more dedication than ever. Since capitalism had forced men to work in towns, African women had to stay in the community and learn how to take charge of the hardest duties such as the management of the household, the education of children, the cultivation of crops, the raising of the cattle and the building of houses among other things. As for polygamy, it even extended in some parts of Africa, because the possibility of having as many women and children as possible involved the acquisition of both more freedom and money especially for men (Kabunda 75). As Iliffe indicated, this unfair allocation of tasks turned to be very comfortable and beneficial for men. Whereas women became more and more exploited, African men began to discover the advantages of the patriarchal structure of colonial life:

Los hombres recibieron de ordinario la mayoría de los ingresos provenientes de la venta de las cosechas, mientras que las mujeres llevaron a cabo parte del trabajo extra . . . El trabajo emigrante procuró a los hombre dinero en metálico y una experiencia más dilatada, mientras que dejaron a las mujeres encargadas de cultivar los alimentos para el consumo y la crianza de los hijos . . . Cuando el marido emigrante estaba mal pagado, la mujer quizá tenía que emprender algún trabajo ocasional asalariado (303).

Therefore, African men enjoyed the relative freedom granted by their male condition, mainly represented in their sole administration of money and in the performance of the most undemanding jobs. Meanwhile, women became more isolated at home, as they were always busy with different chores and their husbands spent little time with them.

Besides, individualism ruined a significant part of African social life. As a result, African women could not participate as before in those communal events such as public dances and storytelling that constituted their main source of recreation.

However, in spite of the fact that women were still educated by men to assume exploitation and marginalisation as something natural, African women tried to show their female relatives the positive side of their situation. Male abandonment allowed them to gather together in sororities and create their own female space, where they had the opportunity to share both their problems and yearnings among generations. In a way, they took refuge in the power granted by motherhood, since they felt that it was only through children that they could proclaim their vision of the world. That is why they continued to perpetuate a *matrifocal* perspective of education relying on storytelling as the main source of their knowledge. In fact, as disclosed in the previous section, African women played an important part in the preservation of the African identity, since, even in colonial times, they educated their children in the traditional way, by means of fictional (female, not historical or male) storytelling.

As it can be perceived, colonisation and its collateral effects succeeded in making female traditional education even more retrograde than it had been during the pre-colonial period. The main consequences of this kind of training were reflected in women's life that underwent constant male oppression and so turned to be full of sacrifices. The principal component that fostered an education based on subjugation as its primary source of influence was the sort of sexism that, imported by Europeans, aimed at destroying African women as full human beings from within. Colonial manipulation encouraged African men to adopt so sexist an attitude toward life as to become evident in the suffocating characteristics that African tradition assumed for women.

However, Western sexism did not only affect the area of traditional education. African men, influenced by Europeans, created a biased image of African women that also made them unable to aspire to colonial education. As Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie asserts, African women were presented as “[seres] [infantiles], [incapaces] de iniciativa. Estas mujeres, depositarias de la tradición y cultura, [eran] sumisas, apolíticas e incapaces de comprender un mundo moderno lleno de avances tecnológicos, de ahí que se [presentasen] en contraposición a la innovación y evolución . . .” (qtd. in Aragón 66). Consequently, if African women were conceived to be like this, then it was obvious that men were believed to have better aptitudes for grasping all the new knowledge



conveyed by missionaries. So, in that period of time when Africans were convinced of the fact that colonial education was the only means that would allow them to become like colonisers, parents strove to send their first-born sons to school in order that they liberated their families from their *native ignorance and primitivism*.

As for daughters, it was often if their brothers died that they were only offered the possibility of attending missionary schools. Nevertheless, once at school, they could neither escape both discrimination and humiliation due to their sex and race. First, whereas boys were educated to occupy public positions and earn money, missionaries only taught African girls how to do the housework in the European way. Second, while boys were given their lessons in English, girls were only considered capable of processing education codified in native languages<sup>43</sup> (Kabunda 81). Third, whereas the Western (male) version of history was deemed to be the only valid one even by European women, “[African female] storytelling [was] regarded as gossip if not complete paganism” (Emecheta 96). Fourth, if African girls belonged to different social classes or communities or they happened to attend the same schools as their European counterparts, the poorest and the blackest ones underwent public scorn. Fifth, African girls also had to confront the reproach directed to them by their relatives, even by the female members of their communities. Traditional women believed that, by being educated in the European manner, their daughters were betraying the future that African tradition had traced for them (especially marriage and motherhood). As a result, a generation gap was created and African families fragmented even more. Emecheta remembers her suffering, when she experienced some of the bitter consequences of going to a missionary school:

I got a scholarship to a very, very middle-class school. I was among girls from rich homes and I was the only Igbo girls among two hundred Yorubas. This was like being the only Black girl in an all-White elitist school. Mine was made worse because I came from a poor family and my mother never visited me because she thought I was wasting my life in no getting married that early<sup>44</sup>. The family needed the money from my bride-price to educate my brother (98).

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<sup>43</sup> It should be remembered that English was considered the language of aspiration and sophistication (colonisers, Europeans), whereas *vernaculars* were said to be the *dialects* of *savagery, ignorance and depravity* (colonised, Africans).

<sup>44</sup> It is worth indicating that Emecheta was engaged to her husband, Sylvester Onwordi, when she was only eleven years old and that she finally married him at the early age of sixteen. Therefore, when her mother told her that she was wasting her life at school because she did not get married, she was still a little child.

It is obvious that for Emecheta and the majority of African girls, life during the colonial period was not easy at all, especially as far as their education was concerned. Actually, it was a fact for them that:

. . . [T]anto la ideología colonial occidental como la africana confluyen en lo que se refiere a la discriminación en la educación de las mujeres, puesto que, por una parte, las sociedades africanas consideraban que la educación occidental impedía que las mujeres africanas cumplieren de forma exitosa con su función de madres y esposas, por lo que era necesario apartarlas de cualquier tipo de educación colonial y por otra parte, la ideología del colonizador, enraizaba en prejuicios sexistas, negaba a las africanas una educación igualitaria . . . (Aragón 64).

Therefore, it seemed that a buried agreement existed between Europeans and Africans in order to prevent African women from fulfilling themselves. It was taken for granted that African girls could not feel their native essence, if they learnt how to read and write in English. Conversely, it was also assumed that it was impossible for them to become something similar to European housemaids (they could not aspire to any other position in the Western world), if they embraced some of their African traditions. This complex situation involved the beginning of a battle against *middle positions*. Both Europeans and Africans fought against the creation of hybrid women that did not fully attach to one of the extreme positions adopted by colonisers or their African compatriots.

Anyway, during the colonial era, African girls turned to be the victims of two conflicting educational systems that only united in their discrimination of women. This confrontation was the main consequence of the new dichotomist reality introduced by colonisers in Africa (Manichaeism). For Europeans, good came to be represented by themselves and evil by natives, but certain sectors of the African population used this conception of existence so as to create their own philosophy of life. These African people obviously situated the poles of good and evil the other way round. In the case of African women, discrimination arising from Manichaeism affected them particularly, since the sexist configuration of life established by colonisers concerned them not only for being African, but also for being women in a patriarchal society. In this way, African women underwent a double oppression due to their sex and race and so they represented the *other* twice over. Ania Loomba indicates that: "In patriarchal society, women are split subjects who watch themselves being watched by men" (162). This double consciousness was a fixed variable in many African women during the colonial period and its effects went further as they were also educated by Westerners to judge

themselves as Africans, but according to European patterns that were clearly discriminatory. Therefore, the image that African girls received from themselves was a totally distorted one and it constituted a falsified reflection of reality. They were not as useless as presented and they were going to demonstrate it, especially after national independence.

Although Fanon proclaimed that the fight for emancipation required a union between women and men in order to build a fair nation for all, the truth was very different at least in Africa (1963, 202). Men excluded their women from fully participating in the process of decolonisation due to a series of prejudices inherited both from the African tradition and European influence<sup>45</sup>. As a consequence, women came to occupy the most unprotected strata of the new African countries. Nevertheless, especially from the colonial period onwards, African women began to call the patriarchal and sexist structures of their societies into question. They were becoming aware of the discrimination that they had always undergone and of their necessity to build a new future for them so as to get to their true emancipation and self-fulfilment.

First, during the colonial era, African women had already been able to witness that their men were not as untouchable as they had previously believed them to be. Colonisers had also humiliated their male compatriots due to their skin colour and race and so, they lost some of the intimidating qualities that their women had always attributed to them. In addition, the Second World War proved that men, mainly Europeans, were not as unbeatable as they had been assumed to be, since they killed each other and raped European women the same, no matter whether their victims were black or white.

Second, African men had also neglected the value of the African tradition and had only used it in order to submit the female population. As a result, African women reached two important conclusions: on the one hand, their men had never really appreciated their African identity and they even felt ashamed of it; on the other hand, tradition could not be as sacred as it had always been presented, since men had sometimes perverted and even forgotten it during the colonial period and they had not been punished for that by their forefathers in any way. Therefore, African women

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<sup>45</sup> African women such as Bessie Head involved in the politics of their countries in order to fight for the African emancipation from the colonial power. Head, although she abandoned this kind of life afterwards, joined the Panafricanist Congress in the beginning of 1960 and she even left her job as a journalist at the *Golden City Post* for devoting herself to this political cause. However, she, the same as many other women in Africa, saw that their efforts to contribute to their continent's prosperity were hardly recognised due to their sex very often.

realised that, if tradition was not so powerful, it could also be condemned in some of its aspects (for instance, the performance of initiation rituals).

Third, with colonisation and especially with the end of it, Africa inevitably entered the modern world. This event echoed the existence of a reality beyond the continent's frontiers where life for women was very different from that in the African land. Native women got to know that, to a certain extent, their female counterparts from the outside world had more freedom of action and that their education was especially conceived for the achievement of a significant degree of emancipation for women. Those African girls that had gone to the metropolis in order to complete their studies and that had come back to Africa in order to apply their new knowledge in the development of the continent played an important part in showing their female relatives that a future full of opportunities was waiting for African women. They very often exaggerated the enlightening side of their experiences in the Western world. In fact, they were also discriminated there because of their sex and race. However, they intended to raise African women's awareness about the fact that education was not useless at all and that it also involved the acquisition of certain fundamental rights. As it is obvious, literacy began to be considered the key to get closer to the outside world (especially through reading) as well as to recover the dignity of African women's condition in their continent. Writing, in particular, became one of the means of expression chosen by many women to communicate their personal vision both about their own problems and Africa's situation.

These three and many other reflections, which legitimised their aspirations to occupy a more respected place in the new African society, gave proof of the fact that African women began to be critical of the environment that surrounded them and, especially, of the sexist education, both traditional and colonial, that they received. In this way, they underwent an unconscious process of hybridisation, since they appropriated or discarded certain values from the two main cultures that they were exposed to and this dual background prevented them from fully embracing a particular pole of identification (either the African or the European identity), mainly because both of them relied on patriarchal foundations for their configuration. Therefore, native women inevitably came to occupy the interstitial space existing in the middle of cultures that constituted a specific culture by itself, but whose primary values could change according to new influences coming from the African or the European culture:

Aesthetic and ethical values are derived from those boundaries *between* languages, territories and communities that belong, strictly speaking, to no one culture; these are values produced in the on-going practices and performances of “crossing over”, and become meaningful as cultures to the extent to which they are intricately and intimately interleaved with one another (Bhabha 2000, 139-40).

The existence of a (in-between) *Third Space* that was inhabited by African women and that was in constant renovation due to new emerging influential inputs highlighted the subjective and frail basis on which the absolute concept of *cultural identities*, in this case the African and the European ones, was formulated. Whereas individual identities such as the hybrid revealed not to be static at all, but in continuous production, “[c]ultural identities [turned to be artificial] . . . and unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a *positioning*” (Hall 24). Hence, the uniqueness of cultural identities proved to be not as evident as proclaimed. Education, either African or European, was the only responsible for their creation and, if this education was prejudiced against a specific group of people on the grounds of race, it led to the exaltation of a particular cultural identity and to the total vilification of the Other’s/other’s one. For example, the manipulating power of European education was especially apparent during the colonial period. Resorting to the strategy of the Manichean conception of existence, Western academic instruction succeeded in reinforcing the importance of the European identity, destroying the historical and cultural status of the African identity and condemning it to a complete *othering* and deprecation. As for native women, if they accepted the cultural identity imposed on them by means of either the European or African education, they were inescapably obliged to bear inequality and their subjugated condition inside their societies, as both cultural identities were somehow defined according to a male perception of life. Thus, African women were victims of their upbringing (“common historical experiences”, “shared cultural codes”, “stable, unchanging, continuous frames of reference and meaning” (Hall 22-23)) as a result of their sex (African education) or even their sex and race (European education) and so, it was logical that they finally dissociated themselves from their corresponding cultural identity in favour of the cultivation of their (hybrid) individual one.

As regards those African women that turned to occupy the *Third Space*, they reflected on hybridity as the main source that encouraged their isolation, since their

identity was split in two parts and nobody seemed to come to terms with this division, not even themselves frequently. However, although they felt that they had been rejected by both the African and European cultures for nourishing themselves from both, they could not avoid longing for the benefits of literacy granted by Western education and for the strong personality derived from their original native roots (mainly from motherhood). It was a fact that they did neither want to become just poor reflections of those white exploiters of their continent, nor to be condemned to ignorance anymore. These confronting feelings were permanent in hybrid women. As a consequence, they were submitted to a constant *nervous condition*: “The status of ‘native’ is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among colonized people *with their consent*” (Sartre 20). Jean-Paul Sartre, in his preface to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, focused on the anxiety shared by all those colonised individuals that came into contact with the colonial universe through elements such as academic education and did not want to separate from it, but could neither relinquish their original African identity. These natives were either mimics or, as in this case, hybrids.

In spite of the fact that many hybrid women were unable to endure so much inner pressure, there were others who finally succeeded in doing it. These African women came to accept their hybridity, when they realised that, although they, for instance, yearned for attaining that freedom of action that European women seemed to have abroad, they were not betraying their original identity or environment. They were not becoming like their Western oppressors for having a European aspiration, but assuming the autonomous status of all those people in the world who wanted to emancipate themselves and so they were critical of any aspect inside their communities that suppressed civil liberties. In this way, they were hybrid, feeding themselves from the contributions of different cultures, yet they finally perceived their identity to be unified, not a divided one, as they were very clear about their goals in life. In this respect, after having accepted their hybrid condition, these new African women underwent a higher degree of marginalisation and reprobation, since their detractors realised that they had become less vulnerable than before and they could not be so easily manipulated and exploited any longer because of their sex or race. These hybrid women were satisfied with themselves, they had acquired the power of criticism, they fought against injustice and they could even incite their female partners to rebellion.

Anyway, as above indicated and despite their strength, all these African women had to suffer the consequences of their *disobedience*. On the one hand, those who were

living in Western countries experienced both the physical and psychological effects of xenophobia and sexism, as they were different from the rest of the people that surrounded them due to their skin colour, their culture and their habits:

I am neither English nor fully African, but part of a group of floating people I refer to . . . as the new tribe. If I had been White I would not have no problem. . . [M]y colour will always be my badge. And this Black badge coupled with the hybrid of upbringing leads to the kind of isolation that is almost eternal (Emecheta 96-7).

On the other hand, those other African women with hybrid education that stayed in their mother countries were very frequently condemned by their own families, especially by their female relatives, because they were believed to be renouncing their original culture. Their critics thought that, the same as *noble savages* and the corrupted educated elite that had seized power in the new independent nations, these women were only trying to climb the social scale left by colonisers in order to drift apart from the African ordinary people. They did not take into account that their female offspring appropriated certain aspects of colonial education so as to separate their mother continent from isolation and in order that its population, especially women, could benefit from some of the ideas about science, culture, technology and human rights that constituted the key passport to their integration in the new world. Contrary to their relatives' thoughts, these African women were *climbers*, but not "the ones who forget who they are", these were just selfish and ridiculous mimics; these new hybrid women of the post-colonial era were "climbers . . . who remember where they came from" and who wanted their continent and all their compatriots to achieve first emancipation and afterwards a honourable position in the world (Fanon 1986, 37)<sup>46</sup>.

As for the contribution of these hybrid women to their mother countries, there were many who committed themselves to different causes. Firstly, as Wilentz asserts: "The African women see their culture and traditions in both a positive and a negative light- as a life-giving force as well as a restriction of women's rights" (xvii). Therefore, they censured certain aspects of the African tradition that proved to be cruel (clitoridectomy and infibulation among others) and that endangered women's physical and psychic integrity. In addition, they taught their female compatriots not to fear the

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<sup>46</sup> There are also many African men that can be considered hybrid individuals, but the truth is that the case of women turns to be much more representative. As hybrid identities emerge inside minority groups that are submitted to both discrimination and a forced isolation, African women become the prototypes of hybridity par excellence as they always embody the *other* for their sex and race and so they tend to occupy the middle space between the African and European patriarchal cultures.

reprisals of tradition and to accept education as a means of being informed about the risks of certain practices. Secondly, these African women condemned colonial abuses in all their aspects, but especially for having introduced in their continent a kind of sexism that encouraged African men to behave with their women as true dictators and barbarians. Thirdly, they also demanded a wide access to education, even for adults, as they wanted to avoid both a breach among generations and the radicalisation of the prejudices that the eldest members of the communities had against any sign of modernity (Cowan, O'Connell and Scalon 51-2). Fourthly, they revitalised an important part of the African identity as it is the tradition of storytelling, but in the written form of short fiction. Although it is obvious that this literary expression lost some of its spontaneity and expressiveness (typical oral characteristics) and that it had to be adapted to the structures of the English language, this genre gained some international recognition in the voices of writers such as Yvonne Vera (Zimbabwe), Bessie Head (South Africa), Ama Ata Aidoo (Ghana), Fatima Dike (South Africa), Ifeoma Okoye (Nigeria), Awuor Ayoda (Kenya) among others<sup>47</sup>. These stories especially elaborate on African women and on certain problematic aspects such as tradition and the consequences of colonialism in the continent. As Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins indicate: "The story-teller, then, is a potential political agitator: as Fatima Dike puts it, 'we don't tell *bedtime* stories to put people to sleep; we want to scare the shit out of them and wake them up' (137). Therefore, the same as in the pre-colonial period, the role of the storyteller continues to go beyond entertainment and stories are still intended to cause such an impact on the audience as to be educational as well. Fifthly, from hybridity, it emerged a group of African women that formulated and defended a kind of feminism that had little to do with the Western one. On the one hand, it did not agree with the exclusion of men as participants in the process of female emancipation:

Esta concepción del . . . *mujerismo africano* ha sido adoptado por numerosas escritoras africanas de gran renombre [Ama Darko (Ghana), Buchi Emecheta (Nigeria), Ama Ata Aidoo (Ghana) and Flora Nwapa (Nigeria) among others], quienes han rechazado en bastantes ocasiones la etiqueta de feministas por la idea occidental del término. Estas autoras defienden en líneas generales un feminismo que no excluya a los hombres, puesto

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<sup>47</sup> The majority of female authors in Africa have written short fiction at least once, since it is the best genre to again ". . . take on their traditional role as educators of present and future generations [and] to voice their heritage, which has been distorted and effaced . . . through imposed dominant cultural values and attempts at assimilation" (Wilentz xvi).



que ambos comparten una historia común de colonialismo, racismo y un presente neocolonialista o imperialista” (Aragón 68-9).

On the other hand, this African womanism was adapted to the true necessities of the female population in the continent and it firstly concentrated on certain priorities such as the access to education and health care for women. Western feminists, due to their well-to-do situation, took for granted all the fundamental rights that African women fought and are still fighting for.

As a conclusion, in spite of the struggle of all these hybrid women to obtain a better future for their female compatriots and themselves, the truth is that their efforts have not been enough to achieve African women’s emancipation through education. It has been widely recognised that:

Eppure non sfugge a nessuno, proprio in una situazione d’impossibilità ad assicurare a tutti l’istruzione in modo organizzato istituzionalmente, l’importanza delle donne che svolgono un ruolo fondamentale nell’educazione familiare; non a caso, alla conferenza di Addis Abeba, il ministro dell’educazione del Ghana, Dowouna Hammond ebbe ad affermare: “Quando si educa un uomo, educate un individuo; quando si educa una donna, educate una nazione”. Almeno sul piano dell’alfabetizzazione, i paesi africani sono molto lontani da questo obiettivo (99).

Three are the most important reasons to explain why the education of African women has always occupied the last place in the list of priorities of any country or society. First, during the pre-colonial period, girls did not receive a training so as to integrate into a community, but to be submitted to it, particularly to men, through motherhood. Second, in the colonial times, African tradition together with racism and the kind of sexism imported by Europeans made that women’s aptitudes continued to be undermined to the extent of both not being considered able to assimilate academic education and being discriminated by Western educators. Finally, in the present post-colonial era, all the racist and sexist prejudices inherited from the past as well as the little international help received to solve Africa’s problems have contributed to the fact that, although the situation of some lucky women has improved thanks to the hybrid education constructed by them, they are still deprived of their possibility to embrace

## CHAPTER TWO

womanhood and self-fulfilment to the full as it is obvious, for example, in the high illiteracy rates for women in Sub-Saharan Africa<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> See the charts at the end of this essay.

**CHAPTER THREE****HYBRID EDUCATION IN TSITSI DANGAREMBGA'S *NERVOUS CONDITIONS*: THE SOURCE THAT MAKES THE TREE OF WOMANHOOD GROW**

It is a fact that, in her novel, Tsitsi Dangarembga intends to attribute the greatest importance to the relationship existing between native women and education in Africa. Therefore, she has created a very special kind of sorority, constituted by five female characters, where the experiences of one woman, representing a specific generation, always turn into morals for the rest of them. Consequently, these African women take part in a common educational process whose humane utility surpasses any didactic contribution from other sources. Thus, although African tradition and European instruction set their particular guidelines to be applied to daily life, the protagonists learn about female existence through their own stories. In this way, they become aware that they cannot rely on conventional education, either African or European, since it is frequently created on sexist and racist bases. For example, Western formal training is unfortunately inaccessible to some of them due to poverty, but mainly to prejudices against black skin colour and womanhood.

Besides, by way of a metaphor, this common and turbulent way to female happiness can be identified with a tree's growth toward the sky. There is a series of parallelisms that can be established between the different stages of these two processes. Hence, even though each woman undergoes an individual development, it is interesting to pay attention to their progress as a whole symbolised by a tree, as it gives proof of how African women combat discrimination and make their way to emancipation nowadays. Tambu, the main character, is a hybrid teenager who, encouraged by her dual education and taking advantage of the experiences of her partners, creates a new identity adapted to a plural modernity. As a result, she comes to represent the hope for a better future for all those native women, such as her own female relatives, who share Africanness and womanhood with her, but who are unable to overcome the social obstacles resulting from these two innate qualities.

**The Metaphor of the Tree of Womanhood in *Nervous Conditions***

As already mentioned, African womanhood captures prominence in *Nervous Conditions*. Although Tambu is the protagonist and, therefore, is the most

psychologically developed character in the novel, it would be almost impossible to get to know her, if it was not for the female members of her family. Tambu, her mother (Mainini), her cousin (Nyasha) and two of her aunts (Maiguru and Lucia) belong to a sorority where the five of them contribute to their own formation as human-beings. They constitute an indivisible whole that can be metaphorically represented in the image of a tree, for example, a baobab. Both their native origin and female condition compose the common essence of this baobab and there are also certain elements such as European education and African tradition that, together with sexism, affect this tree's growth, that is, these women's progress to their emancipation.

In Africa, trees are considered to deserve as much respect as people. On the one hand, they give the shade that allows natives to survive high temperatures. On the other hand, this shade often improvises an open-air classroom for rudimentary lessons to take place (Kapuściński 330). As a result, trees can be actually identified with women, since they are both sources of protection as well as of education. As for baobabs, they are among the most emblematic trees in Sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, many authors such as the Senegalese Ken Bugul have drawn inspiration from them in order to write their works (*Le baobab fou*, 1982). Consequently, the baobab tree turns to be an almost perfect representation of any female character in African literature. After all, it gathers the majority of qualities that are expected from native women in real life and, the same as them, it is also subjected to exploitation, especially on the part of men.

First, baobabs provide natives with drink<sup>49</sup> and food out of their leaves and fruits and so they contribute to their physical survival. Second, the bark of these trees is used to make rope, baskets, mats and cloth and their pollen functions as glue, thus life for Africans become much more comfortable thanks to these products. Third, baobabs' trunks are so wide (up to forty metres of perimeter) that they give shelter to people, if they need it. Fourth, these trees create an ecosystem where all kind of animals (big or small) and plants get their sustenance. Hence, it can be stated that baobabs play an analogous role to that of African women in their communities. First, since they are very little, girls are made to work in the fields so as to get the crops that nourish their families as well as to walk to the nearest well to bring fresh water to the household (physical survival). Second, women are taught how to perform all the housework in

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<sup>49</sup> Apart from the special drinks that are made out of their fruits, baobabs can store up to 120,000 litres of water. As a consequence, these trees frequently prevent people from dying from thirst.

order that everything is ready when their husbands come back home (comfortable life for the rest). Third, they are educated to sacrifice themselves, even their personal life, to satisfy any kind of demand coming from their communities without complaining (shelter). Fourth, they give birth to children and they are responsible for their upbringing in cooperation with other female members of their societies (ecosystem). Apart from these similarities, baobabs and African women also share another particularity. The former have white flowers, but these only open at night, when only a few people can contemplate them. In the same way, the latter keep for privacy their most beautiful and delicate craft: fictional storytelling. As analysed in the second chapter, female storytelling often takes place at night and is relegated to the domestic space. So, it is mainly children that have the opportunity of enjoying their mothers' and grandmothers' performances.

With respect to *Nervous Conditions*, a baobab tree also embodies the five main female characters in the book. They are represented by it as African women in their daily routine due to the series of parallelisms above established. However, it is much more interesting to concentrate on this tree's natural growth, because it is equivalent to the unpredicted process toward emancipation that Tambu, Mainini, Nyasha, Maiguru and Lucia undertake as women and natives in a society characterised by its patriarchal structures and its colonial influence.

In order to grow a baobab, it is essential that a seed comes off the parental tree and gets buried in the ground one way or another. As for the tree of womanhood in the novel, the seed is contributed by ancestors; ancestors that, in the case of baobabs, could have been born even 4000 years ago, but whose power is a fact in the importance that women attribute to origins and tradition when constituting their personality. For instance, although she hardly appears in the book and cannot be included among the female protagonists, it was Tambu's grandmother the principal connection that her family has with the past. By means of storytelling, she brought back memories of ancient history, thus fostering the development of native roots. However, she was also the person who prompted an immediate growth of the tree's initial stem, African womanhood, out of the seed in question. After all, she wanted to early warn her granddaughter about the difficult reality that was waiting for her outside, where she was going to occupy an *otherness* position due to her race and sex:

Praising my predisposition towards working, she consolidated it in me as a desirable habit. She gave me history lessons as well.

History that could not be found in the textbooks; a stint in the field and a rest, the beginning of the story, a pause . . . Slowly, methodically, throughout the day the field would be cultivated, the episodes of my grandmother's own portion of history strung together from beginning to end . . . It was a truly romantic story to my ears, a fairy-tale of reward and punishment, of cause and effect. It had a moral too, a tantalising moral that increased your aspirations, but not beyond a manageable level . . . The suffering was not minimised but the message was clear: endure and obey, for there is no other way (17-20).

The grandmother acted as a true educator with Tambu. In the first place, she showed her granddaughter those labour obligations that were expected from her as a woman in the community. In the second place, she taught the girl the oral craft of female storytelling. The best proof of this kind of inheritance is to be perceived in this written account of her story. In the third place, she tried to make Tambu understand the situation of her family at the moment as a consequence of their past history. In the fourth place, the grandmother instilled endurance and obedience in the protagonist as the attitudes to be adopted by her if she wanted to succeed in a world dominated by colonial and patriarchal priorities. Tambu especially pays attention to this latter piece of advice, but in a particular manner. She symbolically chooses the garden where her grandmother used to work in order to grow the maize that would grant her the possibility to start her right way to education. She shows a lot of endurance to bear hard labour and to overcome both her father's lack of support and the obstacles imposed by her brother who wants to avoid that Tambu comes back to school by all means. Later, once at the mission, she is also very obedient to Babamukuru, her uncle, in order not to be deprived of the opportunity to extend her educational process the longer the better.

As already mentioned, both baobab's roots and stem result from the initial seed. The growth of these new parts in the tree is especially encouraged by two central elements: humus and water. On the one hand, humus represents pre-colonial education as it contributes vegetable remains and dead animals to the land, which exclusively come from Africa. Humus or traditional education is intended to transmit African religion, folklore and communal law as well as to convey all the obligations that are expected from native women in their societies. Nevertheless, although the primary objective of this kind of training is to preserve the African essence in the new generations, it is to be borne in mind that humus is decaying organic matter and, therefore, its decomposition is due to the stale condition of materials. In the same way,

traditions can also be anchored in the past, be putrid, thus preventing natives from progressing and abandoning certain obsolete practices that engender shame, fear and pain in those individuals that undergo them. This is the case, for instance, with African women experiencing the consequences of habits such as the *lobola* or *roora*, clitoridectomy and infibulation, levirate and polygamy among others. In the book, Jeremiah, Tambu's father, wants to resort to old witchcraft in order to solve the family's problems:

These are serious misfortunes. They do not come alone. They are coming from somewhere. It's obvious. They are being sent. And they must be made go back where they came from, right back! It's matter for a good medium. A good medium to do the ceremony properly with everything— beer, a sacrificial ox, everything. We must call the clan and get rid of this evil—

"Jeremiah," interrupted Babamukuru in an incredulous tenor "am I hearing you correctly? Do I hear you say you want to bring alcohol and— er— and witchdoctors here— into my home! Tonight, Jeremiah," he said sadly, "you are disappointing me. . ."

[W]e did not often perform the rituals anymore. And I [Tambu] was quite proud of this fact, because the more I saw worlds beyond the homestead the more I was convinced that the further we left the old ways behind the closer we came to progress (150-1).

Tambu and her uncle, Babamukuru, are against performing old-fashioned rites, because they have learnt that these rituals are practised by certain natives in the false name of African culture and for the sake of both maintaining their power and obtaining their interests<sup>50</sup> from their compatriots. In this sense, roots are very much related to the role played by humus. Although they are in charge of absorbing and conducting water and minerals throughout the whole tree and so fostering its growth, they can be also responsible for setting the baobab too deeply in the African ground, that is, in its origins. Therefore, roots, especially those parts of them relying on patriarchal foundations, are frequently to be blamed for the female tree's immobility and, as a result, of depriving women of the possibility to improve their condition.

On the other hand, water embodies Western education, since it comes from the outside (colonisation) as one of the main sources for the stem, a trunk by now, to get out of the earth (pre-colonial period). Water or academic education, contrary to what happens in Europe, tend to be scarce in Africa mainly among girls, because their

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<sup>50</sup> In the colonial period, Christianity was similarly manipulated by Europeans so as to control Africans.

aspirations are made to remain at home. This discrimination turns to be paradoxical, since it is women that daily go to fetch water for the whole community and best manage its distribution: drinking, cooking, washing, doing the housework and watering the crops. In other words, African women, despite all the problems that they have to get access to academic education, they always turn this possibility into a social issue to common advantage:

We took in turns to go to Nyamarira, either Nyasha, Anna and myself or the other two girls, and this was not such a chore, because the outward journey with our empty drums was pleasant . . . Although the tasks themselves were tiring, the laundry and the drawing and carrying of water, we did not feel it too heavily, because we could bathe and sun ourselves on the rocks while we waited for the clothes to dry. But whatever time we returned it was in time to cook the next meal or wash the previous meal's dishes (137-8).

In *Nervous Conditions*, it is women who walk to the river in order to bring water to the household. As for Tambu, she runs this errand for her family willingly, although it involves hard work. This is a metaphor of her way toward academic education. Once she begins to make it, she only pays attention to the satisfaction that it entails in the end, no matter if it is exhausting for her to put its resultant benefits at her relatives' service later. Furthermore, Tambu learns that she cannot abuse of water very much, because this element may drown her baobab tree or get it uprooted in the way of a flood. Therefore, she has to be careful with excess and be critical of some aspects related to Western education, since totally surrendering to its properties means neglecting both her family and her cultural identity. This is the reason why she always adapts to the poor circumstances of her homestead, whenever she visits her parents and sisters on holiday, and she still tries to find any pleasure in going to Nyamarira; a symbol of colonial changes and progress that cannot escape its African past though.

As for the trunk, it carries with it the legacy provided by the initial seed, that is, its female and native characteristics. Of course, it also resorts to humus and water in order to grow and finally produce branches and leaves. With respect to water, the baobab's trunk has the special function of storing it so as to better endure shortage during dry seasons. Therefore, water is to be found inside baobabs almost always. In the same way, the five women in the novel constituting the sorority of the baobab tree have to coexist with Western education or at least with its consequences on their environment. From the moment that Europeans entered their continent and Africa was



forced to abandon its virgin isolation (underground roots), natives could not avoid the effects of Western influence (water) on their lives.

In addition, the baobab's trunk grows upwards as in an attempt to reach the sky. The sky is a symbol of happiness and the five female characters try their best to have access to it or, at any rate, not to be overcome by their surrounding circumstances. However, the trunk's growth involves a very problematic process, as it is the first part of the tree that gets out of the earth and confronts the many threats of the external world. It is to be remembered that the baobab of womanhood in the book is socially stigmatised by two principal characteristics: its native roots and, above all, its femaleness:

. . . I [felt] bad for her and [thought] how dreadfully familiar that scene had been, with Babamukuru condemning Nyasha to whoredom, making her a victim of her femaleness, just as I had felt victimised at home in the days when Nhamo went to school and I grew maize. The victimisation, I saw, was universal. It didn't depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition. It didn't depend on any of the things I had thought it depended on. Men took it everywhere with them. . . I didn't like . . . the way all the conflicts came back to this question of femaleness. Femaleness as opposed and inferior to maleness (118).

Tambu immediately realises that, in her family, men prevent their women from emancipating due to gender-based prejudices. She also perceives that this is not an isolated case in the world, because women undergo the consequences of their sex everywhere. Nonetheless, it is obvious that, although African ascendancy is not an essential condition for female victimisation, it is an important element for women to be pushed further into the background. After all, certain traditions relied on some sexist bases in patriarchal societies and colonisation brought with it a kind of sexism to the continent that also contributed racist discrimination.

Besides, the trunk is the toughest part of the baobab. In spite of the fact that water in the form of torrential rain (Western education), wind (sexism) and other meteorological phenomena intend to knock it down and restrain its growth, the trunk still performs its primary commitments, those of sustaining the whole tree and connecting roots (ancestors) with leaves (new generations) by conducting nutrients from the former to the latter. Hence, the trunk and its functions represent the main powers of the female sorority constituted by Tambu, Mainini, Nyasha, Maiguru and Lucia: resistance (not resignation) and solidarity. Although these five characters belong

to different age bands, their womanhood as well as their African origins join them together so closely as to foster a strong bond among their fears, necessities and longings. This confluence of feelings inevitably encourages a common education for life that relies on morals drawn from conscious instruction and especially from their daily experiences in order to be effective. Therefore, even though external incidents succeed in splitting the tree's unity in different branches or personalities, women such as Tambu and Lucia, who belong to the above mentioned sorority, are able to learn how to make the most out of resistance and solidarity so as to forge their future existence.

If the baobab's trunk fosters unity, branches represent separation, as each of them can be identified with one of the five women in the novel. This split is due to the impact that Western education has on the lives of protagonists, since different ways of approaching it contribute to create very distant characters. As for the size of these branches, it is believed that the longer they become, the closer they are to the sky or happiness. Then, it is logical that the shortest boughs, Mainini and Lucia, yearn for the growth rate of the longest ones, Tambu, Nyasha and Maiguru. After all, the former often consider that the latter underestimate them, because they have not had any access to formal training and so they are far from reaching the sky, a misrepresentation of happiness as a high social status similar to that of colonisers. This tension inside the sorority of the tree of womanhood destroys its fundamental spirit, African female communion, and it also encourages rivalry and estrangement among women. They do not seem to realise that they are all victims of their innate nature, since both their sex and race have been so much denigrated by men, both European and African, as to become scourges that condemn them to isolation and, what is worse, that ruin any sign of solidarity among them.

For instance, there is a passage in the novel that recovers the moment in which Takesure, Babamukuru's cousin, falsely accuses Lucia before the family's patriarchy (Babamukuru, Jeremiah, Babamunini Thomas and Tete Gladys<sup>51</sup>) of both sexually seducing Jeremiah and him and refusing to leave the former's house as a way of solving the problem of having been impregnated by the latter. Meanwhile, as Lucia is denied the opportunity to defend herself in front of the patriarchal tribunal for being a woman and for not directly belonging to the parental family, all her female relatives join together to criticise the injustice of the proceedings. However, although she probably

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<sup>51</sup> Although she is a woman, she has patriarchal status, because she belongs to the family's paternal side.

agrees with such a pertinent denounce, Maiguru refuses to get involved in the incident and states nothing about the matter. She knows that she is going to be disapproved of anything she says, either for being considered disrespectful toward the family's patriarchy or arrogant toward her female relatives. In the end, both her silence and her subsequent refusal to give her opinion on the incident are interpreted by Mainini, Tambu's mother, as an attempt of showing her detachment and superiority; a superiority that she attributes to Maiguru's exposure to academic education:

. . . [I]n what way am I not restraining myself? I am only saying what I think, just like she did. She did tell us, didn't she, what she thinks, and did anyone say anything! No. Why not? Because Maiguru is educated. That's why you all kept quiet. Because she's rich and comes here and flashes her money around, so you listen to her as though you want to eat the words that come out of her mouth. But me, I'm not educated, am I? I'm just poor and ignorant, so you want me to keep quiet, you say I mustn't talk. Ehe! I am poor and ignorant, that's me, but I have a mouth and it will keep on talking, it won't keep quiet (143-4).

Maiguru's access to formal training results in the emergence of envy and jealousy among those women such as Mainini who have never had the opportunity to be educated in the European way and who mistakenly associate this education with the acquisition of female power. Whereas Mainini has a complex about her illiteracy and feels underestimated for that, Maiguru considers that she is marginalised for not being the stereotyped women that African tradition expects her to be. This is a generation conflict that has a lot of to do with sexism. Although many native people cannot attend schools because of the high fees that are demanded to them, African girls have always been deprived of the possibility to receive any instruction, as it is only for sons' promotion that a family is prepared to invest money in Western education and girls are made to remain at home doing the housework and looking after their children.

Therefore, in spite of the fact that they all should protect their womanhood and confront gender-based discrimination together, the effects of Western education turn to be so influential as to annihilate the strength of their sorority and separate its members. Besides, it is not to be forgotten that Mainini is resentful. She assumes that Englishness has killed her son and that Maiguru is to be blamed for his death. After all, it was Babamukuru and she that introduced her son Nhamo into European education at the mission, far from his mother tongue, his traditions and his family. What is more, it is precisely this experience, Nhamo's loss, that restrains Mainini's growth toward

happiness. She is so convinced that academic education has a hand in his son's death, at least in his emotional death due to the fact that he relinquished his native identity, as to shelter herself in her African roots and reject any positive aspect of Western education for Tambu:

She-is-a-witch. She steals other women's children because she could only produce two of her own, and you can't call those two people. They're a disgrace to decent parents, except that Maiguru is not decent because first she killed my son and now she has taken Tambudzai away from me. Oh, yes, Tambudzai . . . You think that your mother is so stupid she won't see Maiguru has turned you against me with her money and her white ways? You think I am dirt now, me, your mother. Just the other day you told me that my toilet is dirty. "It disgusts me," that's what you said (144).

Mainini resorts to African tradition, even to one of its sexist foundations, in order to discredit Maiguru. She calls her sister-in-law's femininity into question by suggesting that she is not fertile enough to give birth to more children herself and that she has needed to appropriate Nhamo and Tambu for compensating for her barrenness. Furthermore, Mainini attributes Tambu's appreciation of the deplorable state of the homestead's toilet to her daughter's recently acquired white sophistication, while Tambu, after her experiences at the mission, only realises, as never before, the extreme poverty of her family. Mainini's regressive attitude to life gets graphically depicted in the image of any baobab tree in *Summer*. When branches are bare of leaves, English travellers assert that baobabs seem to be planted upside-down in Africa and that their boughs actually turn to be their roots again. This picture of reality represents Mainini's backward movement toward tradition that results in her permanent separation from happiness.

At this point, when branches begin their way to the sky separately, it is important to emphasise the role played by the sun. Together with humus (African education) and water (European education), it constitutes the group of elements that most influence the baobab's growth. In this case, the sun embodies hybrid education due to the fact that it nourishes itself from the opposite poles created by gender (female and male) and culture (African and European) so as to illuminate the inconsistency of fixed extremes and the possibility of reconciling them in an in-between space: "For it is living on the borderline of history and language, on the limits of race and gender, that we are in a position to translate the differences between them into a kind of solidarity"

(Bhabha 1990, 320). Consequently, it is only to be regarded as true growth people's ability to recognise the existence of conflicting points of view in life and to treat the configuration of existence presented by them as relative, not as absolute perspectives.

In terms of the baobab of womanhood, growth is definitively attested when leaves and flowers can be observed in the tree. Green leaves represent the birth of new generations that brings some kind of hope and renovation to the whole baobab, especially due to the influence of sun and chlorophyll and, of course, of photosynthesis. Xylem sap (*savia bruta*) is a substance composed of water (European education) and nutrients (mainly those extracted from humus or African education) that is absorbed through the tree's roots and that goes upwards up to the leaves. Once there, xylem sap undergoes a chemical reaction as a consequence of the effects of sunlight that changes it into phloem sap (*savia elaborada*)<sup>52</sup>. Then, phloem sap goes downwards the tree and releases organic compounds until arriving at roots anew.

In the novel, Maiguru, Nyasha, Tambu and, to a certain extent, Lucia can be said to experience a kind of photosynthesis. First, they cannot avoid their innate nature (their female sex and native origins/roots) and they are educated both in the African and European manner (humus and water). Therefore, they make their way upwards (xylem sap) to the sky (happiness) where they become hybrid as a result of the power exerted by the sun (hybrid education). Second, after several experiences with the African and European worlds, they begin their way downwards (phloem sap) and they come back to their point of departure. Part of their education has to be put at their family's service and this is one of the best means not to forget their initial roots.

For instance, Tambu learns how to coexist with her hybrid upbringing and succeeds in making the most out of it. She demonstrates it in her reflection at the end of the book:

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. Quietly, unobtrusively and extremely fitfully, something in 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

<sup>52</sup> I have decided to translate the English terms *xylem sap* and *phloem sap* into Spanish, because I believe that it is precisely in this latter language that it can be perceived the existence of a metaphorical relationship between photosynthesis and the process of education. In this context, *bruta* involves a kind of education that comes from the outside as input, but that is not complete yet (the way upward the baobab tree and the action of sunlight); *elaborada* involves a kind of education that results from hybridity, after a period of reflecting about the input received, and that is afterwards applied to a reality that is still connected with the necessities of the past (the action of sunlight and the way downwards the baobab tree).

story. It was a long and painful process for me, that process of expansion. It was a process whose events stretched over many years and would fill another volume, but the story I have told here, is my own story, the story of four women whom I loved, and our men, this story is how it all began (209).

The protagonist shows readers that she has matured. She is conscious of her hybrid condition, because she calls things into question (especially after her refusal to accept her parents' marriage). In addition, she does not neglect her origins and she is neither seduced by colonial life to the full. This critical attitude is widespread among the individuals who live in the middle of two cultures and so Tambu demonstrates that she has also entered this *Third Space*. Besides, she has been able to accept her *otherness* and isolation as a consequence of not embracing fixed points of identification.

In addition, this quotation is metaphorically related to the baobab's growth too. As above mentioned, this tree's white night-blooming flowers are to be associated with both the traditional stories born out of fictional storytelling and with a blank future that brings hope for women, but that is still to be written in the present. Therefore, Tambu's decision to resort to this practice (her grandmother's legacy) in order to report her photosynthesis or educational process points at different aspects that unite the past, the present and the future. First, she does not forget storytelling as an African tradition and a female domain. Second, as understood from her account, African stories are always conceived to teach a lesson to the new generations ("a long and painful process for me, that process of expansion"). Third, she has been able to welcome modernity without underestimating the value of her past. Thanks to literacy (academic education), she has adapted an oral tradition such as storytelling to a new written genre ("I can set down this story") that allows everybody in the world and especially her descendants to know "the story I have told here", "my own story", "the story of four women whom I loved", "the story . . . [about] how it [her educational process] all began".

However, although Nyasha and Maiguru apparently undergo the photosynthesis the same as Lucia and Tambu, they finally turn to be victims of the sun, their hybrid upbringing. When they go to England, they advance upward the baobab as they first receive humus (African education) and water (European education) in the second place. Nevertheless, when they are forced to come back to Africa and they have to accept their true destiny, they are unable to move downward the tree and complete their educational process, applying their new knowledge to the poor situation of their mother country. They have been so close to their female emancipation in England that the key element

to gain it, their hybridity, has destroyed them psychologically in Zimbabwe, the same as the sun can dry the baobab's branches in the end, if they grow more than expected from them.

On the one hand, Nyasha cannot adapt to her new circumstances, to an environment where nobody seems to accept her hybridity and, as a consequence, she becomes alienated. Anorexia is the result of her desperation, a European illness in the African land as a metaphor of her hybridity. On the other hand, Maiguru better confronts the reality of occupying the interstitial space between cultures. She is also marginalised for her Western manners in certain aspects of life, but she still gives proof of the fact that she remembers the obligations as a woman in Zimbabwe. Nonetheless, she cannot conceal her frustration when she discovers that her merits are recognised neither in Europe nor in Africa, mainly due to the sexism imported by Western colonisers everywhere. An example of the impossibility to escape the way traced for her by womanhood is her rebellion against Babamukuru. In spite of contradicting him, giving voice to her opinions for the first time and finally abandoning their common household, she takes refuge at her brother's home in the end, another man.

Hence, although Nyasha and Maiguru are assumed to be the baobab's longest branches due to their prolonged exposure to Western education, that opportunity does not involve that they really reach to happiness. Alienation and self-destruction are for them the true effects of realising African women's fate everywhere: "Women 'translate themselves' into the language of patriarchy, migrants strive to 'translate' their past into the present" (Simon 1996, 134). Nyasha and Maiguru are aware of the fact that they will always be submitted to the restrictions imposed by their sex in a patriarchal context and by their hybrid condition both in the European and African worlds.

To sum up, it is to be stated that the quintet of female characters in the novel does represent a baobab and that the gradual formation of their personalities is equivalent to the tree's growth. The five protagonists belong to a particular sorority where the experiences contributed by each of them turn to be essential for learning how to confront a reality full of obstacles for African women due to their race and sex. However, although they aim to reach to happiness and overcome the adverse circumstances of their immediate environment, not all of them can attain their long-awaited emancipation due to the alienating effects of certain cultural aspects, always associated with sexism at least indirectly. It is the sacrifices, both physical and psychological, made by Mainini, Maiguru, Nyasha and Lucia that teach Tambu how to

make her way to liberation. Assuming hybridity is for her the answer to achieve self-fulfilment and, in this way, represent the African female community in a patriarchal world, manipulated by Western people.

**The Quintet of Female Characters in *Nervous Conditions*:**

*Nervous Conditions* mainly elaborates on African femaleness. Therefore, it is logical that the number of women appearing in the novel fully exceeds that of men. Although there are a lot of aspects that could be commented on each female character, it is especially five that deserve special attention, since they represent the above described baobab tree of womanhood. These five protagonists, who are introduced to readers by one of them, Tambu, take part in a common educational process intended to show them the difficulties of surviving in a world defined according to (European) patriarchal patterns. Consequently, apart from sharing their African upbringing, the youngest women in the sorority try to learn a moral from the experiences of their older female relatives as far as life in this harsh context is concerned. The youngest women in this group, Nyasha and Tambu (teenagers), create an education for themselves that combines lessons transmitted by their mothers and aunts with many other that they personally draw from events of the present period they are living in. In addition, those other women who cannot be considered to closely belong to this sorority make an external contribution to the formation of the five protagonists, but it is really in the configuration of Tambu's personality that they actively participate (Tambu's grandmother, friends, sisters and paternal aunts). In spite of the fact that there is an emphasis on the common education of female characters, their ways separate at a certain point due to academic education and sexism. These two elements precipitate a series of events that causes severe conflicts inside characters and, even though these worries turn to be educative in the end, they provoke a separation in the sorority that leads to a more significant stress on the individual development of each woman. However, despite their specific evolutions, it is finally demonstrated that the five female characters in the book cannot evade a common point of departure that usually deprives them of the possibility of emancipating themselves: their sex and race.



### Englishness as the Definite Source of Mainini's Life Usurpation

Among the five female characters constituting the sorority in the novel, it is Tambu's mother, Mainini, the one that best represents the prototype of a traditional African woman. In fact, one of the first images that readers get from her points at a woman that fulfils all the expectations marked by her education both as a recipient and a producer of it. Therefore, she clearly shows that she has learnt her obligations as a female member of her community and, in addition, that she is able to teach all of them to her own offspring: ". . . [A]t the fields . . . [m]y mother, lips pressed tight, would hitch little Rambanai more securely on her back and continue silently at her labours. The ferocious swings of her arms as she grabbed and stripped a maize stalk restrained Netsai and me from making the slightest murmur of rebellion" (7-8). On the one hand, this quotation gives proof of the fact that motherhood is the first commitment required from a good wife<sup>53</sup>. Tambu, Netsai and Rambanai are the evident consequences of it. On the other hand, it is reflected that hard labour is demanded from African women as a necessity resulting from motherhood. Because it is women that give birth to children, they are also assumed to take charge of the family's survival. Hence, motherhood and manual work can be said to be intimately connected as essential parts of female education. In fact, this is particularly depicted in the nice portrait of Mainini with Rambanai on her back, as their physical closeness symbolises a process in which the former introduces her daughter into her future duties and the latter contributes to her mother the love and strength that she needs to continue her daily fight for the subsistence of the new generations. Even Tambu and Netsai, when observing the previous scene, demonstrate their admiration toward their mother's potential and, before having any contact with academic instruction, they are convinced that they should follow Mainini's steps. Without resorting to any word, the four of them, Tambu, Netsai, Rambanai and their mother appear to know that they are all participating in an act of female communion that shapes their true future as African women.

Despite entailing physical sacrifice, manual labour is not the worst outcome of an education orientated to foster motherhood. The psychological effects of a different kind of concessions related to it turn to be more harmful. For instance, Mainini is

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<sup>53</sup> Although this character is called Mainini Ma' Shingayi, she is constantly referred to as only Mainini. Dangarembga may have decided to shorten her name, because Mainini means *little mother* in Shona and, therefore, she can stress on the fact that Mainini sacrifices her life as a consequence of the burdens imposed on her by motherhood and so she becomes *little*; without any true prominence in her family.

impregnated by her husband before getting married. For that reason, in exchange for an insignificant *roora*, she is forced to accept Jeremiah as her partner and submit her whole existence to a foolish man that enslaves her economically and spiritually, although she is much more industrious and open-minded than him. As she knows the possible consequences of her impudence beforehand, she cannot avoid her will being transferred from his father to a more suffocating man, his husband and the future father of her children. Thus, it can be asserted that Mainini is a victim of motherhood to a significant extent, since Nhamo's birth precipitates her resigned acceptance of an *unhomed* condition that is fostered by her stupid husband as well. Since they are very little, girls are taught that a union with a man constrains them to abandon their parents' household as well as their little freedom of speech and participation in order to be welcomed in their partner's clan:

Having been married for only eight years, [Mainini Patience] still had enough identity left not to feel disloyal to Babamunini Thomas for agreeing with my mother. "We all know that hearings are not private affairs," she went on. "But this family we have been married into! I don't know what frightens them about coming out in the open, but everything they do is hushed up and covered. Hidden. Even from us, as though we were children. Do they think we will curse them? . . ." (140-1).

Tambu's mother complains about the impossibility of all women entering her husband's clan to give their opinions or take any decision as far as important aspects is concerned. Many of her female relatives agree with her in this respect.

As regards submission, Mainini devotes her entire existence to satisfy men: her father, her husband and, chiefly, her son. Since this latter is the only one who is granted access to Western education, he represents the hope for a better future for the family. Consequently, his mother believes that, if he learns a profession at the mission, Nhamo will contribute to improve the poor conditions of his original home. That is why, in order that Nhamo can study without interruptions at the homestead, she always makes her youngest daughters serve him willingly and tolerates his frequent exploitation of them. In spite of the fact that Mainini adores her first-born son and that she wants him to obtain the highest marks, the main reason for her to satisfy all his demands and to force her daughters to be at his entire disposal is that she needs to feel that Nhamo's birth means any advantage for her in the end. When Jeremiah impregnates Mainini of Nhamo, she mortgages her life forever. Therefore, it is essential for her to be sure that her son's academic achievements are going to compensate for the big failure that

represents her life of self-denial. However, she does not seem to realise that, so as to forget her misery, she is educating her daughters to subject themselves to his brother, a man, and that she is tracing a future of resignation for them that is similar to hers. In this sense, she is not an educator, but her daughters' executioner:

“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; you have to start learning them early, from a very early age. The earlier the better so that it is easy later on. Easy! As if it is ever easy. And these days it is worse, with the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other. Aiwa! What will help you, my child, is to learn to carry your burdens with strength” (28).

Mainini tries to show Tambu that she has to forget her aspirations immediately. African women are always expected to sacrifice all their dreams for the sake of both the family's benefit and their own mental stability as well. When Mainini intends to instil resignation in her daughter, it is obvious that she is thinking of her own circumstances. She does not hesitate to point at children (at Nhamo subtly) as the main reason for a woman to be subjected to male tyranny. In this case, Tambu does not want to renounce her opportunity to go to school for being a girl and a projected mother in the future. However, she is forced not to attend it, as fees are only going to be paid for her brother. As a result, Nhamo and sexism turn to be responsible for the tribulations of both his mother and his sister. For Mainini, it is clear that gender is the main brand that represses women forever. Nevertheless, she also recognises that, in those days, blackness is a problem that prevents women from emancipating as well. Hence, she appears to be convinced of the fact that the sooner her daughter becomes conscious of the obstacles that she is going to meet in her way to adulthood, the better for avoiding part of her suffering. As above mentioned, Mainini is underrating Tambu's courage to confront life, without allowing her to experience it first-hand.

If her traditional upbringing deprives Mainini of the opportunity to conduct her life as she desires to, her indirect contact with academic education has worse effects on her, since she quite loses her control over good sense as a result of Nhamo's death at the mission. As already indicated, her son is her primary reason not to completely abandon herself to desperation. After all, Nhamo embodies a future success that can

also be attributed to her, his mother, to a certain extent, in a context where recognition only reaches women through male actions. Nonetheless, when her son dies at Maiguru's home, Western education is regarded as responsible for both his decease and for his mother's physical and psychological deterioration (nervous condition).

In spite of the fact that the idea of educating Nhamo in the European manner is supported by all members of the family, even by his mother, Mainini soon turns to disapprove of this decision secretly. Her son begins to come back home fewer times and when he does visit her parents and sisters, he does not conceal his disgust to live in poverty and among illiterate people. He acts like a European in an African environment that he considers to be inferior. Besides, his behaviour toward women becomes sexist in the colonial way. For example, he uses his sister Netsai as his porter, a job that was usually performed by Africans when serving their white masters. What is more, he often strikes his sisters, when they refuse to accomplish his commands. However, the definite proof of Nhamo's degradation as a consequence of Western academic education is perceived by Mainini and Tambu when he changes Shona for English as his first language of communication. At the beginning, he cannot avoid code-switching between these two tongues; he uses English to talk about unimportant issues and to show off in front of his family and he unconsciously resorts to Shona in order to discuss about significant subjects that really interest him. Nevertheless, he gradually loses this habit and he even answers in English to those people who have previously addressed him in Shona. Therefore, Nhamo undergoes a transformation in his personality that gets reflected linguistically. This is partly due to the rules imposed at many schools during the colonial period, where pupils, as Emecheta recognises, are made to pay a fine if they are caught speaking in their *vernacular* (96).

When Nhamo totally replaces Shona with English, it is evident that he has finally relinquished his true identity and that he has become a divided mimic whose European mind is trapped in an African boy's body (*Black Skin, White Masks*<sup>54</sup>). As this special type of hybrid is unnatural, represents both kinds of *otherness/Otherness*<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Black Skin, White Masks* is the title of a book written by Frantz Fanon in 1952 that partly elaborates on those African people such as Nhamo that were black, but who had colonial aspirations for their lives and, as a result, they imitated Europeans and rejected their origins.

<sup>55</sup> As indicated in previous chapters, there is an essential difference between the *other* and the *Other*:

In post-colonial theory, [the other] can refer to the colonized . . . who are marginalized by imperial discourse, identified by their difference from the centre . . . . [T]he Other . . . can be compared to the imperial centre, imperial discourse, or the empire itself, in two ways: firstly, it provides the terms in which the colonized subject gains a sense of his or her identity as somehow

and so is not socially accepted either by colonisers or the colonised, he has to disappear and he metaphorically dies of mumps. Mainini reacts as follows, when she is informed of her son's death:

Maiguru came to my mother to hold her, but my mother pushed her violently away. "You want to hold me, you," she hissed. "Now, when it is too late, that is when you are concerned. You pretend. You are a pretender, you. First you took his tongue so that he could not speak to me and now you have taken everything for good. Why are you keeping quiet! Why are you not speaking? Because it is true. You bewitched him and now he is dead. Pthu!" She spat at Maiguru's feet. "And you too, Babamukuru! Pthu! I spit at you! You and your education have killed my son" (54).

From the moment that Mainini knows that her son and her hope have both deceased, she realises that all the sacrifices that she has done during her life do not have sense anymore and, as a result, she does not hesitate to accuse Englishness of being the source of destruction. She now becomes alienated and all the illnesses that she begins to have turn to be the physical consequence of a mental perturbation caused by her desolation. It can be stated that she stops growing, that she actually shrinks, because she refuses to accept the opportunity that Western education still offers her family through Tambu. She knows that her daughter would willingly go to the mission instead of Nhamo. After having fought hard for it, Tambu has once succeeded in avoiding her destiny as an African girl. Despite obstacles such as poverty and womanhood that condemned her to stay at home, she was able to earn enough money with her cobs in order to come back to school. Therefore, due to this past experience, Mainini is now convinced of the fact that her daughter will leave the homestead without reservation for embracing a new education and she fears that her determination can also result in her death, if, as her brother, she falls into Englishness's hands.

Even if it was Western education that contributed a lot of harm to Mainini, tradition also associates with it in order to ruin her life even more. Nhamo was the only male of Mainini's children and, as a result, when he dies, she turns to be regarded as barren by men, although she later gives proof of the fact that she is not. It is to be remembered that African women are only deemed to be fertile, if they give birth to

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"other", dependent; secondly, it becomes the "absolute pole of address", the ideological framework in which the colonized subject may come to understand the world. In colonial discourse, the subjectivity of the colonized is continually located in the gaze of the imperial Other, the "grand-autre" (170-1).

boys. Hence, when Lucia goes to her sister's homestead in order to comfort her for her son's death, Jeremiah begins to think of the idea of proclaiming her sister-in-law his second wife, as a surrogate mother. Babumukuru does not allow this to happen, because bigamy is a kind of marital relationship that goes against the precepts of Christianity. However, although Jeremiah is not allowed to have two wives, he harasses Lucia the same until she concedes to have sex with him. In spite of the fact that Mainini does not say anything about it, she once explodes and demonstrates her rage against her sister, reproaching her for these encounters. Although fraternal love between them is very strong, their complicity gets damaged at this moment. This is a significant evidence of the power that tradition and sexism has on individuals, even on those who suffer the unfair costs of it. Mainini knows that her sister is sexually liberated and she actually defends her for this condition, but she cannot avoid censuring her and not her husband for her treason. She does not appear to become aware of the fact that it is Jeremiah the true abuser of her and her sister, that they are being separated as a result of a manipulation traditionally woven by men in the interests of their tyranny's maintenance.

Besides, among the consequences of Nhamo's decease, Tambu's final departure to the mission also affects her mother so much as to be the main source of friction among the female relatives constituting the sorority. Mainini chiefly blames her daughter's attraction to Western education on Maiguru. She considers that Babamukuru's wife represents a model that Tambu wants to follow against all odds. After all, Maiguru is an African woman educated in the European manner that has apparently achieved her emancipation as a female in a patriarchal world, whereas she is only a victim of her circumstances: tradition, sexism, poverty, racism and illiteracy. It is obvious that Mainini feels inferior to her sister-in-law and, therefore, she translates her complex into a resentment that she justifies by both accusing her of killing Nhamo and manipulating Tambu at the mission and by arguing that Maiguru betrays African female solidarity due to her Western arrogance. For so discrediting Maiguru, Mainini takes advantage of a gathering at Christmas where, in front of the female members of the family, Babamukuru's wife refuses to be involved in a discussion concerning Lucia, Takesure and Jeremiah. The youngest women who are present at this incident believe that Mainini has been cruel with Maiguru, but there are some other voices, much more connected to traditional education, that seem to agree with Tambu's mother criticism against her. Anyway, this event polarises each woman's position inside the sorority,

especially Mainini's and Maiguru's ones, but it also gives proof of the fact that, despite in a different way, they all suffer their Africanness and their womanhood. However, a separation of the sorority is inevitably prompted, as the five members of it has to begin their own ways to happiness, taking the lessons extracted from this confrontation as their point of departure. As for Mainini, this division only fosters an increase in her self-pity, but she still does nothing so as to improve her situation. She reflects on her whole life, but she only resorts to resignation in order to calm the affliction that this hindsight causes in her:

“Lucia.” . . . Does it matter what I want? Since when has it mattered what I want? So why should it start mattering now? Do you think I wanted to travel all this way across this country of our forefathers only to live in dirt and poverty? Do you really think I wanted the child for whom I made the journey to die only five years after it left the womb? Or my son to be taken from me? So what difference does it make whether I have a wedding or whether I go? It is all the same. What I have endured for nineteen years I can endure for another nineteen, and nineteen more if need be. Now leave me! Leave me to rest” (156).

After Mainini's argument with Maiguru, all women are informed of the solution that the family's patriarchy has found to come to an end with the *sinful* relationship existing among Lucia, Takesure and Jeremiah<sup>56</sup> and this solution obviously involves Mainini as well. It has been decided that Jeremiah and Mainini are to finally get married as instituted by Christianity. Although Tambu's mother does not recognise it, this decision entails another failure for her. Everybody seems to establish what is convenient for her without asking her opinion; her future is again being written for her and this only encourages her unhappiness. It is also Englishness, represented in a Christian wedding (another trace of an obsolete rite), that undermines the last glimmers of hope and pride that are left in her life.

As a conclusion, it can be asserted that, for its female condition, Mainini is a clear victim of both African and European educations. In fact, she becomes aware of her submission to tradition, when Englishness assaults her existence, taking her son's life by force. What is more, she does not have resources so as to combat the effects of

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<sup>56</sup> Lucia goes to the homestead in order to help her sister Mainini with her problematic pregnancy. Once there, Takesure, Babamukuru's cousin, impregnates her, but she attributes the child to Jeremiah, Mainini's husband, because she thinks that he can be a little better father than Takesure. Besides, Jeremiah wants Lucia to become his second wife, as he deems her to be much more spirited than Mainini. Therefore, Babamukuru does not approve of this threesome, as it implicates two men having sex with the same woman.

these two phenomena, since directly sexism and indirectly racism deprive her of any access to empowerment. Besides, Englishness calls her ability to be a good educator into question, since her children's future is decided for her without counting on her opinion. It is precisely this underestimation of her skills to be a gifted mother that results in her definite self-destruction. She turns to believe that she has been unable to protect Nhamo from a new world codified in English that interposed itself between her and her son. However, although it is sad reparation, Mainini finally plays her role as an educator of modern times. Her alienating experiences with both traditional and colonial education teaches Tambu not to resign before gender-based injustice and her condemnation of Englishness as a dangerous source of degradation also makes her daughter be cautious with European manipulation.

#### **Maiguru's Isolation as the Result of an Inopportune Background that Annihilates her Present and Future**

Maiguru<sup>57</sup>, Tambu's aunt and Nyasha's mother, is the first woman in the family that gets access to Western academic instruction and has the opportunity to study in South Africa and even in England as well. However, despite sharing with her husband the same exposure to Western education, she cannot avoid being a victim of the effects of African tradition as a result of her female sex. The first proof of it can be observed the day that Babamukuru, his wife and their children come back to Jeremiah's homestead, after having been abroad for long:

Babamukuru stepped inside, followed by a retinue of grandfathers, uncles and brothers. Various paternal aunts, who could join them by virtue of their patriarchal status and were not too shy to do so, mingled with the men. Behind them danced female relatives of the lower strata. Maiguru entered last and alone, except for her two children . . . . Dressed in flat brown shoes and a pleated polyester dress very much like the one Babamukuru bought for my mother the Christmas before he left, she did not look as though she had been to England (37).

Once in Zimbabwe, it is evident that Maiguru has to relinquish the respected position that she earns in England both as an educated person and as one of the heads of her own

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<sup>57</sup> Dangarembga may have decided to call Maiguru in this way, because Maiguru means *big mother* in Shona and, consequently, she can stress on two different aspects. On the one hand, Maiguru is married to Babamukuru, the educated man in the family, and so he shares some of his honours with his wife. On the other hand, Maiguru is believed to be an emancipated or *big* woman by the rest of her female relatives as a result of her European education.



family. The experiences of her immediate past in Europe do not have sense anymore in Africa and, therefore, she again has to submit herself to old traditions that make her recover the lowest status in society. In this case, she has to show deference to the family's patriarchy by entering the homestead the last one and by poorly dressing herself, just with "flat brown shoes and a pleated polyester dress".

On the one hand, it is her husband, Babamukuru, the person who subjugates Maiguru the most. Although he is assumed to be a cultured man who has learnt to modernise his mind in England, he demonstrates that his education abroad does not make him reflect on the unfair structures that govern women's life in his continent. He takes advantage of his opportunity to surmount the barriers established by racism on education for Africans so as to get an academic training that is only useful for his own social and economic promotion. Therefore, he turns to be an absurd mimic of European men whose acquisition of power through education is used for improvements that can be bought with money and for the imposition of a psychological tyranny on those women that surround him. Whereas he is a pupil in Europe, he now feels the necessity in Africa of re-educating Maiguru in the repressing traditional fashion. Although he does not seem to use physical violence against Maiguru, it is evident that she fears his reactions very much. She is constantly at her husband's beck and call, she supports all his decisions despite frequently disagreeing on them and the most characteristic proof of her submission to him is the way in which she addresses him, presenting herself as a child and showing a false satisfaction at her unbalanced relationship with him ("baba", "daddy-dear", "daddy-pie" and "daddy-d" among others).

On the other hand, it is some of her female relatives that want Maiguru to be more subjected to the sexist obligations of every African woman. In fact, it is not really that they wish Maiguru to be much more physically exploited by men, because she actually participates in doing the housework that is required from her in all occasions and she also kneels to worship men when it is expected from her. All these women would only like to perceive that Maiguru is immersed in a kind of misery similar to theirs, that is, a misery due to the many restrictions that they experience due to their sex and race and that prevent them from attaining true happiness. Mainini is the torchbearer of this movement against Maiguru out of a jealousy born to her own dissatisfaction. She believes that, mainly as a result of her education, Maiguru has all the essentials to be happy in life. Besides, she thinks that Babamukuru's wife feels superior to the other women in the family, because she does not have the same immediate preoccupations as

them such as survival. Furthermore, she is convinced of the fact that Maiguru feels as a redeemer who finds pleasure in turning Tambu into an individual similar to her; someone that forgets her origins and even her mother tongue as it happened to Nhamo who was killed by this daring.

Nevertheless, Mainini does not appear to realise that her sister-in-law experiences the consequences of her womanhood the same as her, but in a slight different manner owing to her particular circumstances. Nyasha also tries to show this evidence to Tambu by advising her to be constantly critical of everything that surrounds her in order not to fall into submission and resignation, if she turns to be a victim of any injustice as Maiguru was with sexism:

“You have to keep moving,” she said. “Getting involved in this and that, finding out one thing and another. Moving, all the time. Otherwise you get trapped. Look at poor Mum. Can you imagine anything worse? If it weren’t for Chido she’d go stark raving crazy. I could imagine many things worse than being Maiguru, did not have to imagine them because I had seen them. I told Nyasha so, and she agreed with me but said it was all relative and that it all boiled down to the same thing [womanhood and sexism], although she was not terribly clear what that thing was” (98).

For example, as already stated, Maiguru serves his husband’s family in all those duties that he asks her to. What is more, she hardly complains about spending a money that is also hers on improving the poor situation of her parental relatives. In addition, she has to lend Mainini what she considers to be her only private property: the veil of her own wedding gown. Therefore, she is forced to make a series of concessions without objection that reveals her lack of authority in the family and, as it is obvious, the fact of discovering the effects of sexism, that her judgement is always undervalued despite having cultivated it so much, severely affects her self-esteem as it happened to Tambu’s mother.

As for her education, this is a question that also manifests the existence of common points in Mainini’s and Maiguru’s suffering. Maiguru has both a Bachelor’s and a Master’s Degree the same as her husband, but she has to abandon all her aspirations for life in favour of his promotion. First, Babamukuru is the man and it is essential that he can enjoy the best opportunities that England grant him as far as his education is concerned. Second, Maiguru is the woman and it is essential that she assumes all the responsibilities that result from motherhood, mainly her total dedication

to children. Hence, Maiguru has to abandon her further studies in order to stay enough time at home to look for Chido and Nyasha and, with a lot of diligence, she also dedicates herself to save her husband from making any other effort apart from studying. Hence, it is evident that, in spite of confronting different situations, the result for both Mainini and Maiguru is the same, frustration as a consequence of sexism and motherhood. They are deprived of emancipating themselves, as sacrifice is always expected from their part.

However, although Maiguru consents to do without a lot of things that could have yielded her any satisfaction, nobody seems to recognise her merits and achievements. When she arrives in Zimbabwe again, she perceives that her academic success in England is almost unknown in her environment, that people believe that she left her mother country to only look after her husband. Furthermore, in spite of the fact that she works hard as a teacher, she does not get any money for it. Tambu asks her about it:

“You must earn a lot of money,” I breathed in awe. My aunt laughed and said she never received her salary. I was aghast.

“What happens to your money?” I asked. “The money that you earn. Does the Government take it?” For I was beginning to understand that our Government was not a good one.

“You could say that,” my aunt laughed, forcing herself to be merry again but not succeeding (103).

Even though, in that period of time, there might be cases in Zimbabwe in which the government deprived women of their salary, the widespread tendency was to give them a lower amount of money for their services. Therefore, the Government here is a metaphorical way of identifying Babamukuru with a despotic entity that has the power of seizing his wife’s salary in order to administer it as he only wants to. Maiguru’s weapon so as to combat her public underestimation as well as the abuses that she is submitted to is the same as that of Mainini: resignation.

Nonetheless, although Maiguru appears to be so strong as to bear any kind of exploitation and denigration, there is a moment when she explodes and rebels against Babamukuru, the principal source of her misery, and reproaches him for conducting her life as he and his family only wants to. She finally decides to run away from her tormentor and Nyasha, her daughter, feels proud of her mother for the first time:

She thought there was a difference between people deserting their daughters and people saving themselves. Maiguru was

doing the latter and would be available to her daughter when she was needed . . .

“Sometimes I feel I’m trapped by that man, just like she is. But now she’s done it, now she’s broken out, I know it’s possible, so I can wait.” She sighed. “But it’s not that simple, you know, really it isn’t. It’s not really him, you know. I mean not really the person. It’s everything, it’s everywhere. So where do you break out to? You’re just one person and it’s everywhere. So where do you break out to? I don’t know Tambu, really, I don’t know. So what do you do? I don’t know” (177).

Nyasha supports her mother’s decision to escape Babamukuru, as she also feels suffocated by him and his gender-based prejudices toward them. However, although Maiguru’s initiative constitutes a symbol for a better future for both mother and daughter, Nyasha cannot avoid being pessimistic about it, since she is convinced of the fact that sexism is so powerful everywhere as to prevent any woman in the world from emancipating herself, especially if she is also marked by Africanness as they both are. In the end, Nyasha proves to be right when calling into question her mother’s enterprise, because she afterwards discovers that Maiguru takes refuge at her brother’s house. Therefore, she again submits to a man and, what is worse, she later experiences the humiliation of coming back home when Babamukuru and his brother-in-law agree on it. From that moment onwards, Maiguru eliminates certain childlike expressions from her language as a way of remembering her timid attempt at rebellion. Nevertheless, the nervous attack that encourages her to run away involves her single and last challenge to her husband’s sovereignty. She would not be able to grow as a free woman anymore, since it is obvious that dreams for female emancipation in Africa are all frustrated.

As a conclusion, it can be asserted that Maiguru turns to be a sad victim of hybridity. When she is in England, she can contemplate that, despite certain obstacles imposed on her by her race, many women do have the opportunity to show their potential through their education and that the consciousness of being able to demonstrate it contributes a lot of satisfaction to them. However, she is banned from participating in this process toward her liberation, since her origins chain her to a traditional upbringing that establishes that women’s aspirations are not a priority at all. It is her husband who has to continue his studies and it is her children who meanwhile make her stay at home and, when she realises that she is trapped by the different manifestations of sexism, she is forced to come back to Zimbabwe. Once in her mother

country, there is no way out. It is this time her European manners that condemn her to isolation. Although she submits herself to the obligations expected from her as a native woman, her female relatives do not accept a strange personality born to a combination of different inputs: the European and the African one. Her interests and preoccupations have nothing to do with those of the women in her environment and, as a result, she is considered a foreign individual, because she actually believes her to be a foreigner. Nonetheless, it is finally a fact that her sex and race lead her to unhappiness the same as the rest of women in her family. Coming back to Africa entails a return to hell for Maiguru. Tambu learns from her aunt's experience very much, but Nyasha, despite trying hard to avoid it, becomes a victim of her hybridity as her mother.

#### **Lucia's Challenge to Tradition as the Key to her Final Independence**

Lucia, Tambu's aunt, is the best instance of how an African woman can manipulate her traditional upbringing as well as the colonial education that she receives in order to obtain a benefit for herself. In fact, it is precisely the way in which she exploits her limitations as a native and a woman that allows her to emancipate herself in the context of modernity that Zimbabwe is entering. She is the prototype of the new African woman who learns how to survive alone, because she has decided to be independent and free from a man that could establish her destiny without her permission.

As for her personality, the first description of it that appears in the book reflects the opinion of those obsolete voices that condemn Lucia for not concealing the voluptuous side of womanhood that men do not want to celebrate in public, but that they do demand in private: "But look at Lucia! Ha! There is nothing of a woman there. She sleeps with anybody and everybody, but she hasn't borne a single child yet. She's been bewitched. More likely she's a witch herself.' Thus poor Lucia was indicted for both her barrenness and witchery" (129). Hence, Tambu's aunt is hypocritically censured for enjoying her sexuality as she only resolves to. What is more, they intend to precipitate her isolation by accusing her of being a witch as a consequence of an invented barrenness. Despite all this defamation, Lucia is strong enough not to fall under the yoke of any man in order to achieve a social integration that would only contribute her denigration, submission and exploitation as it happens to her sister. Consequently, it can be asserted that, although Lucia is a victim of her wild femininity, she proves to be so intelligent as to turn it into the main key for her liberation. As it will

be afterwards indicated, she constructs herself by making fun of the sexist prejudices that denounce her behaviour with men.

In spite of the fact that Lucia is unfairly presented as a woman who only lets herself be carried by her carnal instincts, the truth is that her womanhood also provides her with the power to claim for the rights of all the members of her sorority one way or another. She even dares to confront the family's patriarchy, when she considers it necessary to achieve any advantage for her female relatives:

Those men! They never realised that Lucia was a serious person. Her laughter, like her temper, was hearty and quick but never superficial. And she thought a lot, did Lucia; although she laughed at herself, thinking was a slow painful process for her because her mind had not been trained by schooling to do it quickly. In the days after the *dare* she had thought a lot about whether to leave, but she knew that her actions had consequences and was not frightened by the fact . . . . So Lucia stayed on to look after her sister, and because her body had appetites of which she was not ashamed, she moved back in with Takesure. She did not make excuses for herself (156).

After the *dare*, Lucia announces Babamukuru that she is prepared to leave the homestead with Mainini, if her sister and she are not going to be respected by Jeremiah and Takesure. She reflects a lot on this possibility, because she knows that, if she goes away with Mainini, Tambu would have to abandon the mission in order to look after her father and sisters. Besides, she is aware of the fact that Mainini is not spirited enough to begin a new life far from her household. Therefore, she finally decides to stay, since it is obvious that her departure would have adverse effects for her niece and sister and because she realises that she still can benefit from the conflict there in the long-term. In fact, she early makes the most of the situation, as she takes advantage of Takesure's sexual weakness in order to satisfy her own desires.

Although it seems that Lucia disregards her traditional upbringing, she actually accepts some of the obligations that it entails especially for women. For instance, she co-operates with her female relatives in the performance of any duty deriving from the family's encounters. Besides, she proves to be so strong as to be considered one of the best workers in the fields. In addition, she does not hesitate to come to her sister's aid whenever she is ill or she has a difficult pregnancy and do all her housework. Then, she is always ready to help with manual labour, but her willingness is not really motivated by her submission, but by her solidarity with those women that need her assistance.

On the other hand, despite subjecting herself to tradition in order to help her female relatives, she is clever enough to make the most out of her good knowledge of the outdated aspects of her education. For example, she has a very highly developed maternal instinct and, the same as the rest of African women, she also sacrifices her lifestyle for devoting herself to motherhood and for guaranteeing Farai, her son, a prosperous existence. Nonetheless, she does not relinquish certain elements of her past, if it is not for obtaining any better benefit for her present and future. First, even though she has been impregnated by Takesure, who always satisfies her as far as sex is concerned, she dares to accredit her son to Jeremiah, since she is conscious of the fact that he will be at least a slight preferable father for her kid. Second, instead of regarding motherhood as the end of all her aspirations for life, she takes advantage of her pregnancy to claim for certain rights that would ensure her dignity as a single mother. She knows that as a native woman, she is expected to submit to her partner in everything that she is required from him. However, she does just the opposite, she does not pay attention to him and disobeys all his commands. In fact, she uses Takesure's sexual harassment so as to demand to Babamukuru a job and a place to live and thus begin a new life for her son and her. He agrees on her proposal, because he fears having a *sinful* relationship inside his family in the eyes of Christianity and because he hopes that both Mainini and Jeremiah return to their routines again. When Lucia thanks her brother-in-law for his intervention in providing her an opportunity at the mission, she ululates and kneels before him in the pre-colonial manner. This is again a mockery of tradition and men, since, whenever she is sure that she can get any benefit from it, she tries to show an expected humiliation that she does not feel as such. Therefore, it can be stated that, in this case, as Lucia knows the precepts of her traditional education very well, she flagrantly breaches them or simply manipulates them in order to make of motherhood her passport to the chances that modernity grants women.

As for Lucia's contact with Western education, she receives the first proof of the possibility of having access to it through Maiguru. She makes of Nyasha's mother a model that she has to imitate, because she admires her sophistication and everything that she has achieved in life as an African woman. However, Lucia also discovers that Maiguru is not happy as the rest of the people believe her to be. Her academic cultivation as well as her experiences abroad have distanced her from the reality of her female relatives so much that she cannot integrate into a group of women that does not share with her any preoccupation, interest or aspiration. Consequently, although Lucia

is rejected by Maiguru, the former defends the latter from Mainini's attacks, as she is aware of Maiguru's suffering for her maladjustment. What is more, Lucia realises that Maiguru is not an emancipated woman as she thought her to be. Marriage, as conceived by the African tradition, has condemned her to coexist with a man that does not respect her at all for being a woman. Hence, Lucia feels proud of her celibacy, because she comes to understand that it is sexism through marriage the blight that enslaves all women in Africa, no matter their status or their education:

“ . . . Lucia, . . . children must be obedient. If they are not, then they must be taught. So that they develop good habits. You know this is very important, especially in the case of girls. My wife here would not have disobeyed me in the way Tambudzai did.”

“Well, Babamukuru,” said Lucia, preparing to leave, “maybe when you marry a woman, she is obliged to obey you. But some of us aren't married, so we don't know how to do it. That is why I have been able to tell you frankly what is in my heart. It is better that way so that tomorrow I don't go behind your back and say the first thing that comes into my head” (175).

Lucia is convinced of the fact that, if she receives academic education as she finally has the opportunity to, she will be completely free in the patriarchal world that she is living. However, her assumption does not prove to be true, as she perceives that, Maiguru, despite her intellectual cultivation, is trapped by her sex the same as Mainini and the other female relatives. Lucia learns that she is actually a much more independent woman than the rest surrounding her due to three main causes. First, she cleans and cooks at a hostel and she is given a salary for it that she only administers and that saves her from poverty. Second, she attends her lessons at school that stimulate her reasoning and her ability to reflect on her environment. Third, as she lives just by herself, she can express her opinions whenever she wants to, because there is not a sexist censor waiting for her at home who intends to deprive her of her right to talk. Therefore, her confrontation with Babamukuru as a result of the punishment that he imposes on Tambu for not going to her parents' wedding is decisive so as to observe that Lucia is one of the female characters who grows most as a person and that, within the limits established by her background and milieu, she achieves her emancipation.

As a conclusion, it is to be asserted that Lucia does reach to happiness. She is conscious of the restrictions entailed by her roots and femininity, but she is able to turn them into her weapons to find the way to her objectives for life. She is not a hybrid woman, because she does not know a reality different from hers and her exposure to



Western education is not so high as to become manipulating. Hence, she does not feel different or isolated, but lucky enough not to be condemned to submission as it happens to her female relatives as a consequence of their illiteracy and their tyrannical husbands. Although it is not resignation at all, she very well knows which her true aspirations can be and so she does not consider the possibility to dream about getting those female rights that she is actually ignorant of. It is evident that she is satisfied with all those achievements that, thanks to her efforts and rebelliousness, she has finally gained in a patriarchal world just by herself.

### **Nyasha's Alienation as the Devastating Consequence of Dualism**

Nyasha, Tambu's cousin, is the best representation of a hybrid African. She has to accomplish a process of adaptation to her new African environment that is really difficult, since it involves social rejection and, as a result, much suffering for her. Nyasha has to assimilate that she does not live in England anymore and that the fact of being a woman (a teenager) with a liberal education in Zimbabwe is not very well considered either by her female schoolmates or amazingly by his father himself. Although she is assumed to have African roots, she cannot avoid the influences of her foreign input on her behaviour, especially because, in order to be accepted by the people surrounding her, she is not willing to surrender to certain injustices of sexist nature that condemn all women in her mother country. However, her non-conformist attitude toward life is understood by only a few people and she suffers the mental consequences of her maladjustment and, what is worse, of the consciousness of it, as it is physically and mentally depicted by her anorexia: a European disorder in an African context.

At the beginning, when Nyasha arrives in Zimbabwe, she turns to be a complete foreigner for her relatives. Tambu is the first person who becomes aware of the distance that, at that moment, separates her cousin from her, since Nyasha has even forgotten Shona and, as a consequence, any connection with their common past:

I had not expected my cousins to have changed, certainly not so radically, simply because they had been away for a while. Besides, Shona was our language. What did people mean when they forgot it? Standing there, trying to digest these thoughts, I remembered speaking to my cousins freely and fluently before they went away, eating wild fruits with them, making clay pots and swimming in Nyamarira. Now they had turned into strangers. I stopped being offended and was sad instead (42-3).

Nyasha does feel herself as an outsider too. Hence, she tries hard to remember her origins so as to integrate into the African society again. The same as Tambu, she realises that the essential condition for coming closer to her environment is to learn Shona anew, as “[c]ulture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next” (Ngũgĩ 1997, 15). Therefore, she intends to recuperate her forgotten language in order to communicate with the members of her family. She hopes that this close contact with them will help her to recognise the pillars that sustain her African background. Nevertheless, despite her attempts at understanding a different mentality that she is expected to adopt, she realises that the Shona that she is trying to learn is among the few elements that she has in common with her family. Furthermore, her relatives do not make an effort to accept her *Otherness* at all, as they censure her both for her physical appearance and her European whims, without reading beyond these superficial signs of her inner conflict. As a result, Nyasha begins to develop a miserable and unpredicted character that confuses people and that afterwards results in the source of her self-destruction.

Although it is a fact that, at first, Nyasha is not conscious of the limitations that poverty imposes on her relatives, she gradually becomes capable of recognising them and she shows her sensitivity toward the problems arising from it, contributing her assistance in everything that she is required to readily. For example, at Jeremiah’s homestead, as there is not piping, she fetches fresh water from the river, she also cleans the pitiable toilet with her cousin without complaining or, due to a lack of space, she sleeps in the kitchen with all the female members of her family. Nonetheless, after her initial endeavours to approach African traditions, she also realises that these rely on a basis that she fully refuses to accept, female submission:

“I know,” she interrupted. “It’s not England any more and I ought to adjust. But when you’ve seen different things you want to be sure you’re adjusting to the right thing. You can’t go on all the time being whatever’s necessary. You’ve got to have some conviction, and I’m convinced I don’t want to be anyone’s underdog. It’s not right for anyone to be that. But once you get used to it, well, it just seems natural and you just carry on. And that’s the end of you. You’re trapped. They control everything you do” (119).

Nyasha confesses to Tambu that she does want to integrate into her new society, but that she is not willing to relinquish her freedom and femininity or to accept any relationship with men that entails sexist inequality. Resignation toward this kind of discrimination leads to the annihilation of women and to their total dependence on men. Nyasha especially learns this lesson, after an unpleasant experience with her father. Since Babamukuru comes back to Zimbabwe, he behaves like a tyrant. First, he proves to be a European mimic that patronises his relatives by paying all their necessities in the name of his Christian charity. Second, he imports from England an inferiority complex caused by racism that he translates into a series of sexist prejudices toward African women. Third, he combines his European sexism with that already existing in Africa as a result of tradition. Consequently, Maiguru and Nyasha turn to be the first victims of his despotic philosophy of life. Except for a single occasion, the former always resigns herself to being treated in a humiliating way, but the latter does not want to tolerate any degradation and she rebels against his father, as she demonstrates when she punches him an eye, after he has called her a whore and fiercely hit her, only because she spends a few minutes talking and dancing with a boy at night in front of her house.

As regards Nyasha's rebellious nature, it is mainly due to the modern education that she has received in England. Her opportunity to acquire an academic formation constitutes a point of departure for transcending theory and establishing a series of principles that makes her be critical of her environment. For instance, the books that she reads reflect all her worries and interests and the evolution of her preferences shows her different concerns at each moment of her life. When she arrives in Zimbabwe, she finds pleasure in reading novels that stimulate her femininity and, as a result, she learns both to accept it and be proud of it. Afterwards, she concentrates on analysing books that deal with historical events taking place in real life and so she commits herself socially. Therefore, Nyasha reveals herself as an individual who censures inequality in any of its manifestations. For example, she does not like to be the only African family that lives in a house painted in white at the mission, as she considers it a symbol of a European mimicry that she does not practice and, what is more, of a superiority that she does not feel. In addition, she detests any African woman kneeling when addressing to a man, since this is a sign of submission that fosters sexism and that reminds of slavery at the beginning of the colonial period.

With respect to Nyasha's social acceptance, Tambu is the only person who learns to admire her. She realises that Nyasha does not passively accept experiences as

they come. On the contrary, her cousin always tries to disclose the message contained by any external input in order to be critical of it and, as a consequence, come closer to the truth of an existence that turns to be manipulated to the detriment of certain sectors of the society (natives and women):

. . . Nyasha's energy, at times stormy and turbulent, at times confidently serene, but always reaching, reaching a little further than I had even thought of reaching, was beginning to indicate that there were other directions to be taken, other struggles to engage in besides the consuming desire to emancipate myself and my family. Nyasha gave me the impression of moving, always moving and striving towards some state that she had seen and accepted a long time ago. Apprehensive as I was, vague as I was about the nature of her destination, I wanted to go with her. I did not want to be left behind (155).

Tambu admits that Nyasha is much more mature than her without problem and she openly conveys her desire to become like her. However, their female schoolmates regard her cousin as an alien that wants to be white by resorting to her English accent when talking and by freely celebrating her liberal actions and thoughts. As already mentioned, her family does not approve of what they consider to be Nyasha's conceited behaviour either, as they are not prepared to assume that she is actually at a level of reflection that they will never reach to, not even Babamukuru with his Western education.

Nevertheless, it is precisely her amazing ability to reflect on everything that surrounds her that leads Nyasha to her self-destruction. As soon as she is back in Zimbabwe, she becomes aware of her hybridity as a result of her European education and her just recovered African background. In fact, she does not hesitate to blame it on her parents, since it is them who have uprooted her and now require a unification of her dualism into a complete African woman:

"We shouldn't have gone," Nyasha was saying, looking disheartened. "The parents ought to have packed us off home. They should have, you know. Lots of people did that. Maybe that would have been best. For them at least, because now they're stuck with hybrids for children. And they don't like it. They don't like it at all. It offends them. They think we do it on purpose, so it offends them. And I don't know what to do about it, Tambu, really I don't. I can't help having been there and grown into the me that has been there. But it offends them- I offend them. Really, it's very difficult" (79).

Although she would like to adhere to her African identity to the full, she cannot avoid remembering her imported social concerns that involve her as a woman in a patriarchal world. Therefore, despite accepting her native origins, she does not want to identify herself with womanhood in Africa, because this female condition is an artificially created gender by men and entails total submission to them. Thus, she feels herself as an African who wants to maintain those rights and freedoms that women have already gained in Europe.

At the beginning, Nyasha is strong enough to defend the interstitial space that she inhabits and whose existence calls into question the biased criteria used to recognise extreme poles of identification such as European *versus* African culture or man *versus* womanhood. In fact, her obsession with studying and getting good marks in her exams symbolically reflects her intention to demonstrate the relative quality of cultural or social identities such as the previous ones that are conceived as static and collective and do not contemplate people's individual particularities and development. However, she soon gets discouraged in her efforts to openly treat these essential categories as inconsistent, because marginalisation is the main consequence of her commitment. For instance, Maiguru is a hybrid woman the same as her daughter, but her dual personality is immediately destroyed when she arrives in Zimbabwe. She is condemned to isolation for her European influences and, in order to integrate into her former community again, she prefers to resign herself and be publicly identified with African womanhood, that is, with the image of a woman who blindly obeys men. On the other hand, Nyasha also turns to be a victim of segregation due to her dualism. In spite of the fact that she studies a lot to prove the truth of her hybridity, she is still rejected by people and has to relinquish all her knowledge of it vomiting, a physical attempt at liberation from an alienation caused by her consciousness of being hybrid and her necessity to fit into a new society.

Nonetheless, Nyasha's anorexia is also an illness of dual or hybrid nature in Zimbabwe, as it is an eating disorder coming from Europe that paradoxically takes place in Africa where people frequently starve to death as a consequence of poverty. Hence, whenever she vomits her convictions, there is an empty space left inside her body and soul that demands more food or input so as to assert her existence as a hybrid in her environment. Then, since people surrounding Nyasha do not know a different world progressing outside Africa and they lack any access to academic education that can stimulate reflection on their existence, they do not grant her any support for

sustaining her dualism. Consequently, she becomes so frustrated and despaired as to precipitate her own mental sanity's death. This endless conflict gets reflected in one of her deliria caused by anorexia:

“They’ve trapped us. They’ve trapped us. But I won’t be trapped. I’m not a good girl. I won’t be trapped.” Then as suddenly as it came, the rage passed. “I don’t hate you, Daddy,” she said softly. “They want me to, but I won’t.” She lay down on her bed. “I’m very tired,” she said in a voice that was recognisably hers. “But I can’t sleep. Mummy will you hold me?” She curled up in Maiguru’s lap looking no more than five years old. “Look what they’ve done to us,” she said softly. “I’m not one of them but I’m not one of you.” She fell asleep (206).

Nyasha refers both to Europeans and men, in general, when she exclaims: “They’ve trapped us”. On the one hand, she intends to say that, during her stay in England with her family, Europeans have subtly deprived them of their original culture with a tempting modernity that has little to do with Africa’s reality. On the other hand, she also wants to state that men have created a patriarchy in the world, where all women are controlled by them. Besides, she insinuates that her rage against his father is due to the ideas that she has absorbed in Europe and that are all related to the preservation of female rights. Therefore, she now refuses to be imposed any obligation that she considers sexist as a result of an African culture that does not seem to respect women at all. Then, when she seeks her mother’s protection, Nyasha demonstrates that she identifies with her and with her suffering, as both of them are hybrid the same. However, she does make it clear that she will not resign herself to male oppression. She is aware of the fact that she is African and not European, but she also knows that she does not want to be an African woman as established by a sexist culture such as the traditional one either.

As a conclusion, it is to be indicated that Nyasha is a victim of her hybridity or dualism as reflected in the devastating effects of her anorexia. She is so eager for discovering her true position in the world that she becomes aware that she is only an outcast who lives between two cultures and two opposed ways of conceiving the role of women in society. She is accepted by nobody for representing the difference, a female rebel in Africa, and the fact of realising herself as an alien that is divided and who cannot achieve her internal unification is really hard for her. Her nervous condition proves to be the immediate result of her inner conflict, but, even in her madness, she

conveys her refusal to give in to injustice or to become a lifeless individual with no opinion at all.

### **Tambu's Hybrid Education, One Way to Emancipation**

Tambu can be considered a character that is beginning to undergo her own process of hybridisation. As opposed to Nyasha, her first influences come from her African upbringing, but, since she goes to the mission, she has to assimilate the implications of both living in an anglicised environment and receiving an academic education. From this moment onwards, she starts judging her surrounding world from a different perspective. At first, she only concentrates on studying a lot and obeying her uncle in order to maintain the pseudo-European status that she has reached to through her academic instruction. However, when she goes beyond her theoretical knowledge and she truly pays attention to the experiences of those women with whom she coexists, especially to her cousin, she cannot continue with her passive character toward life and injustice and she gradually makes her way to emancipation; an emancipation as an African woman in a patriarchal world controlled by Western people.

At the beginning, when Tambu does not have any contact with academic education, she is an African girl whose destiny is directed to motherhood and to the fulfilment of all those obligations expected from a woman in Zimbabwe. Therefore, her existence is assumed to be governed by a series of rules determined by gender; gender as a social category defined according to male criteria. Then, it is clear that Tambu's future is going to be subordinated forever to the sexist bases on which African tradition sustains itself. Although the protagonist lacks any external influence that can prevent her from her fate, she is shrewd enough to predict it and to express her refusal to be trapped by her womanhood:

As children we were not restricted. We could play where we pleased. But the women had their own spot for bathing and the men their own too . . . [W]e were apprehensive about growing so big that we would have to wash there with the women and no longer be able to swim in the deeper, cooler, more interesting pools (3).

Tambu, when talking about her beloved river where they always bathe and wash their clothes, anticipates the separation that exists between the female and male universes in Africa metaphorically. She does not want to become an adult, because she is conscious of the fact that, as a woman, she will not be allowed to satisfy any of her individual

aspirations (“to swim in deeper, cooler, more interesting pools”) and that she will have to devote her entire life to other people’s volition, chiefly men’s. What is more, as colonisation imports the concept of decency with it, Africans, when they grow up, are forced to bathe themselves where people cannot see them. As a consequence, Tambu realises that she will never be able to act freely, since her life is going to be conditioned both by being a woman and a native.

As for Tambu’s introduction into formal education, it begins at the age of seven, since colonisers consider it the appropriate moment for African children to be able to grasp any European knowledge and, as Babamukuru suggests, to be easily manipulated when necessary. However, Tambu’s first attempt at going to school is soon frustrated, because crops are not good enough that year (a symbol of her impossibility to begin a monitored personal growth) and so her parents cannot afford the fees for both Nhamo and her. As Tambu’s parents believe that a woman’s role is to do the housework and look after her children and husband, they decide that it is Nhamo the person who has to continue with his instruction. Hence, Tambu feels disappointed for not being given an opportunity to demonstrate her abilities and she complains about this sexist discrimination to her mother. Mainini advises her to resign herself to the implications of being an African woman, but Tambu refuses to adopt a passive attitude toward her annihilation as a full person:

My mother said that being black was a burden because it made you poor, but Babamukuru was not poor. My mother said that being a woman was a burden because you had to bear children and look after them and the husband. But I did not think this was true. Maiguru was well looked after by Babamukuru, in a big house on the mission which I had not seen but of which I had heard rumours concerning its vastness and elegance. Maiguru was driven about in a car, looked well-kempt and fresh, clean all time. She was altogether a different kind of woman from my mother. I decided it was better to be like Maiguru, who was not poor and had not been crushed by the weight of womanhood (16-7).

Tambu considers Babamukuru and, mainly Maiguru, examples of personal growth and improvement thanks to Western education. She thinks that they have been able to overcome all the obstacles that they have encountered in life due to their race and sex and that they have finally succeeded in achieving happiness. Nevertheless, the image that Tambu has of emancipation at least as far as Maiguru is concerned is very far from that that her own aunt desires. When Tambu matures as a result of her academic



cultivation and experiences, she becomes aware that Maiguru's self-fulfilment is all a fake, that she has not been able to eliminate the barriers imposed on her by womanhood.

Anyway, as Tambu, at that moment, is convinced of the fact that education is the key element for changing her destiny, she decides to fight for having access to it very hard. In spite of being discouraged by her mother's defeatism, her father's opposition and her brother's cunning to steal the cobs that she grows to earn money for her fees, she is lucky enough to come back to school in the end. It is in town, out of white people's charity, that she is able to sell the maize that gains her a place at a classroom and, although this incident gives proof of the dependence that Africans have on Europeans in order to progress in the modern world, it is at least an opportunity to continue her way toward her future emancipation from them. As for her brother and father, she regards her victory as a way of demonstrating them that a woman can be good enough to achieve the goals that she sets herself in life.

Nevertheless, even though Tambu deems sexism to be beaten by this triumph, Nhamo is granted the opportunity to move to the mission with Babamukuru and Maiguru so as to receive his education there. Consequently, whenever he visits the homestead, she has to suffer him making show of his superiority as an exploitative man with his sisters, but also as a pseudo-European (mimicry) who has relinquished his origins and even the language of communication with her anguished mother. Therefore, when he dies of mumps, Tambu does not hesitate to assert that she is not sorry for his decease. She has become conscious of an unfair reality that affects herself as a member of a wider sorority: "The needs and sensibilities of the women in my family were not considered a priority, or even legitimate. That was why I was in Standard Three in the year that Nhamo died, instead of in Standard Five, as I should have been by that age" (12). That is why, when she is informed that she is going to occupy Nhamo's position at Babamukuru's house, she takes delights in observing her father's and uncle's efforts to accept that, as there are no more male descendants in the family, they have no option but to provide a girl with education. Thus, the death of Tambu's brother involves a new future for the protagonist. She is once more able to prove that destiny is not pre-established for women.

As regards Tambu's departure to the mission, she again resorts to a metaphor related to the river in order to express that, although she is sad for abandoning part of her identity and even her childhood there ("my flowing, tumbling, musical

playground”), she is extremely excited about the possibility to leave behind those habits such as water carrying (“heavy on the head even after you had grown used to them”) that tie her to a side of the African upbringing that makes women be under men’s yoke (“waterdrums whose weight compressed your neck into your spine”), but that constitutes the main pillar for sustaining the family’s survival in all its aspects (“constantly in need of refilling”):

Leaving this Nyamarira, my flowing, tumbling, musical playground, was difficult. But I could not pretend to be sorry to be leaving the waterdrums whose weight compressed your neck into your spine, were heavy on the head even after you had grown used to them and were constantly in need of refilling . . . . The point was this: I was going to be developed in the way Babamukuru saw fit, which in the language I understood at that time meant well. Having developed well I did not foresee that there would be reason to regress on the occasions that I returned to the homestead (59).

Tambu thinks that it is time for her to liberate herself and to be prepared to confront another kind of life far from sexism. She is convinced of the fact that Babamukuru will give her an education that will exempt her from returning to a context where women are totally pushed into the background. Consequently, she comes to terms with the idea that she has to obey her uncle in everything that he asks her for, as she cannot miss the opportunity to emancipate herself and take her mother and sisters out of their economic and spiritual poverty.

In spite of the fact that she aims not to be struck by her new environment, Tambu is not able to avoid comparing the mission with heaven: “Babamukuru was God, therefore I had arrived in Heaven. I was in danger of becoming an angel, or at the very least a saint, and forgetting how ordinary humans existed – from minute to minute and from hand to mouth” (70). Therefore, she begins to realise that, as an angel or a saint, she is completely devoted to satisfy Babamukuru (God) with her progress or, better said, with her gradual submission to his manipulated perspective of life, that in which his European or African criteria are always adapted to assert his male supremacy. Furthermore, Tambu also regards herself as a saint, when she becomes aware of the fact that other people such as Anna, her uncle’s maid, starts worshipping her as never done before. Tambu now represents superiority due to the social status that she has attained as a result of Western education and so she deserves a respect that becomes evident in somebody else’s reverences. In addition, Tambu turns to consider

herself a kind of modest redeemer, as she proves to be able to reverse the Manichean philosophy of existence that she has learnt since childhood as a consequence of the colonial invasion of her continent. She forgives white people's ugliness (evil) to the extent of even thinking them beautiful (good). This is a clear reference to a change in the attitude of certain Africans toward their colonisers, when they come into contact with them and try to imitate their manners in order to gain their advantages. Tambu now believes her to be at the same level of those Europeans that live at the mission and thus she feels herself with the capacity of judging them as she wants to. However, her daring at treating whites as equals is due to the fact that those Europeans that mix with Africans are totally uprooted as her own cousins. They are hybrid, because, although they are conscious of their origins, they try to integrate into the place where they live at the moment. Hybridity is a symbol of the possibility of a good interracial coexistence here.

As a result of all these changes in her life, Tambu perceives that she runs the risk of forgetting both the routine and necessities of her family at the homestead. In fact, she does give proof of her detachment with respect to her former reality as, whenever she pays a visit to her parents and sisters, she finds it very difficult both to abandon heaven and feel comfortable in her dirty and dilapidated hell and, especially, to bear the inconvenient distance created between her mother and her since her departure. Mainini censures her daughter's new behaviour as a way of defending herself from that Englishness that killed her son in the past and, although she exaggerates her rejection against any sign of modernity, it is true that Tambu has actually changed as a consequence of her stay at the mission.

On the other hand, even though academic education is conceived by Tambu at the homestead as the main source that can encourage her emancipation, she turns to regard it at the mission as a way of collecting information that she learns by heart in order to become cultured. Consequently, she no longer reflects on the external input that she receives and she accepts her schooling as it comes, without thinking of the possibility that it may be manipulated beforehand or that it can contribute her any significant knowledge for her new life. Tambu recognises her passive and submissive attitude at that moment:

. . . I had grown much quieter and more self-effacing than was usual, even for me. 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. It did not matter to me why things should be done this way rather than that way. I simply accepted that this was so (158).

However, there is an incident that constitutes a turning point in Tambu's personal development. It is Nyasha's clash with her father that reveals that gender-based injustice pervades all contexts, even those that are assumed to be more sophisticated. Hence, although she does not react against his uncle's abuse of her cousin physically, she begins to think of her necessity to commit herself with her surrounding world one way or another. Nyasha sets herself up as her model to be followed, because she is a rebel and she never pays heed to the possible consequences of her acts, if she is convinced that she has to fight against any discriminatory episode such as female kneeling before men.

From this moment onwards, Tambu recovers the sense that academic instruction has had for her in the past, since she becomes aware of the fact that it is her knowledge of events taking place beyond the frontiers of her little territory that allows her to establish useful parallelisms with her situation and to be critical of her own environment. This kind of education together with a series of closer incidents affecting the women of her sorority actually trace her way to hybridity and to her true emancipation as an African woman. For example, Lucia's courage to confront the family's patriarchy in order to defend her interests and those of her female relatives demonstrates Tambu that solidarity and determination are essential elements to overcome the barriers imposed by sexism and achieve a relative happiness. Nevertheless, it is a personal experience that definitely teaches Tambu that she cannot tolerate her life being manipulated as *Others* want to, chiefly as men and indirectly Europeans desire to. Babamukuru, in order to find a solution to what he considers to be a *sinful* relationship between Jeremiah and Mainini, decides to organise a Christian wedding for them. Tambu regards this ceremony as an event that unfairly highlights her family's history as a farce until that moment. In fact, this is a metaphor that points at colonisation, because many Europeans and some of their African mimics such as Babamukuru established that it was Westerners' arrival in the continent and their import of formal education there that conceded any relevance to Africa's existence in the world. Therefore, although Tambu recognises that she fears God's reaction (both Babamukuru and the Christian God) to her rebellion, she does not attend this celebration. This is the most significant proof of Tambu's acquisition of a new identity,

as she finally establishes which the source of her self-effacement is: “My vagueness and my reverence for my uncle, what he was, what he had achieved, what he represented and therefore what he wanted, had stunted the growth of my faculty of criticism, sapped the energy that in childhood I had used to define my own position” (168). This episode reveals that Tambu appreciates the academic education that she is receiving as it is the power that allows her to be critical of the events happening around her, but she confesses that she does not want to betray her African roots, as it is her family and herself that derive from them.

If this event precipitates Babamukuru’s fall as a brave native that has always tried to safeguard his family’s welfare, Maiguru’s open expression of her suffering as a result of her husband’s constant denigration of her definitely shows Tambu that he is a tyrant who adheres to African tradition or European modernity in order to impose his patriarchy. Tambu also perceives his sexist perspective of life, when he at first refuses to send her to Sacred Heart. On the one hand, he states that his niece has studied enough to take a course and that they now have to save enough money for propitiating her a good marriage. On the other hand, he asserts that, if she mixes a lot with white people, she will become a loose woman. It is Maiguru again who gives proof of the few traces of rebelliousness that are left in her personality so as to contradict her husband:

“ . . . Don’t you remember, when we went to South Africa everybody was saying that we, the women, were loose.” Babamukuru winced at this explicitness. Maiguru continued. “It wasn’t a question of associating with this race or that race at that time. People were prejudiced against educated women. Prejudiced. That’s why they said we weren’t decent. That was in the fifties. Now we are into the seventies. I am disappointed that people still believe the same things. After all this time and when we have seen nothing to say it is true. I don’t know what people mean by a loose woman – sometimes she is someone who walks the streets, sometimes she is an educated woman, sometimes she is a successful man’s daughter or she is simply beautiful. Loose or decent, I don’t know” (185).

Maiguru’s intervention turns to be decisive for clearly disclosing her husband’s prejudiced character as well as for raising Tambu’s awareness about the fact that women are everywhere condemned as inferior and too liberal for an innate quality, their sex.

At the time of Tambu’s departure to Sacred Heart, everybody, Nyasha, her mother and friends, urge her not to forget them as a way of preventing her from

betraying her identity. Nonetheless, when she arrives at her new school, she seems not to pay attention to that piece of advice and just concentrates on her present life there. It is only when she comes back on holidays that she is brought down to earth by Nyasha's anorexia. Tambu realises the dangers of her incipient hybridity and, therefore, she learns that she has to be careful with her dualism, as it can result in a social isolation that prompts self-alienation or, luckily, in her emancipation as an African woman in a patriarchal world.

As a conclusion, it can be said that Tambu is a good instance of how mimicry and hybridity are not the same concepts at all. The former can be regarded as a renunciation of African roots for the sake of appropriating European standards, whereas the latter is the condition of those individuals that are exposed to some input coming from both their original and foster cultures and whose identity turns to become dual as a consequence of a combination of values. In the case of the protagonist, although she is sometimes seduced by her European aspirations, she is a clear hybrid who desires to make the most out of her situation in order to achieve her emancipation. Academic education is regarded by her as the main source for her liberation as a woman and as a native, but the truth is that, although instruction stimulates her reflection, the experiences of the female members of her family are crucial for her process of self-education. The four women belonging to Tambu's sorority are the best examples to illustrate the extent to which elements such as tradition, sexism, racism, modernity and even hybridity can frustrate an African woman's progress to happiness. Therefore, Tambu's hybridity, if well managed by her, can be considered so resistant and powerful an identity as to confront a reality where differences of racial and sexual nature are always censured, in spite of the fact that they are actually a constant feature in the modern world too. Then, it is to be asserted that Tambu represents the new African woman who, despite being imposed many obstacles, is nowadays prepared enough to grasp her emancipation through education. In this way, the protagonist pays her personal tribute to all those female ancestors whose frustrating experiences in the past taught her to trace injustice and so fight against it. Hence, Tambu stands as a symbol of hope for a prosperous future that has been fostered by the common efforts of all women in Africa. By way of a metaphor, the main character is the longest branch of a thousand-year-old baobab of female history; the only one that has grown closer to the sky, but that cannot dissociate itself from the whole tree of African womanhood.

## CONCLUSION

It is a fact that hybrid education and contradiction are two elements that are inevitably associated, especially when it is a woman the person who, due to the external influences that she receives, turns to occupy the middle space existing between two poles of identification. An African woman that is considered to be hybrid has to confront the psychological effects of distancing herself not only from the conflicting opposition created between the African and the European cultures, but also from the social antagonism created by gender (female and male). Therefore, she has to doubly endure the consequences of a delicate position that entails much isolation as a result of a dualism that pervades the two main pillars sustaining identity, that is, culture and gender.

First, when an African woman comes into contact with Western education and begins to call her tradition into question, she suffers rejection coming from two different fronts: her original environment and the new context that she is trying to explore. On the one hand, her compatriots believe that she is trying to relinquish her roots in order to adhere to certain characteristics that are not innate to her and that are actually connected with their past oppressor. On the other hand, Westerners frequently accuse her of intending to become a kind of individual that will never be like them due to her skin colour and her native background. Hence, she gets immersed in a contradiction that only allows her to realise that she is a reflection, a reflection of the African woman that she once happened to be and a reflection of the European woman that she intends to know.

Second, an African woman with Western education also has to assimilate the implications of her sex as well as the manipulations that make of this category to be socially termed gender. Thus, when she becomes conscious of the fact that those obsolete traditions condemning her femininity are to be justified under no circumstances, she feels that she is betraying her African community, as she rejects to perpetuate the stereotype represented by her female relatives; that of submissive mothers and wives without any capacity for rebelling against discrimination. As a result, she again experiences the costs of contradiction, since she longs for obtaining those fundamental rights that Western women are already enjoying, but she also wants to feel that she still belongs to her original African sorority.

Therefore, the problem of an African woman that is hybrid is how to come to terms with an identity that is divided, that nourishes itself from different extremes that

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she does not accept to the full, but that are presented as the key to social integration; as the key to her inner unification. Her only option is to recognise her dualism as something natural, because it is progressively demonstrated that the alienation resulting from this quality is a common aspect among population nowadays as a result of the phenomenon of displacement. What is more, social integration is a fake for women everywhere. Sexism is the element distancing any woman from the respected position that she deserves to occupy either in Africa or Europe and from an emancipation that seems to be a little more accessible through hybrid education and through the inherent critical attitude toward life that this special upbringing encourages. Hence, the way to womanhood as a condition to be embraced with satisfaction is still full of gender-based prejudices that hinder female self-fulfilment. Although societies are discriminatory against women to very different extents in the world, inequality cannot be totally associated to the particular nature of those principles supporting certain cultural identities (*developed versus underdeveloped countries*). Sexism is a universal attitude that still dashes women's efforts to become full citizens.

In *Nervous Conditions*, it is obvious that origins condemn the protagonists to subjection in two different ways. On the one hand, they are expected to submit to the foundations of their African traditions without complaining. On the other hand, they are prevented from having access to Western education due to a poverty that is intrinsic to their race. However, it is especially sexism that ruins all their aspirations for life, since womanhood appears to be the perfect excuse for pushing them into the background and disregarding all their necessities for achieving happiness. Although hybridity, prompted by a combination of African and European inputs, is believed to be a condition that allows preparing the way to female emancipation, all the characters in the novel realise that the limitations imposed on them by their sex are so strong as to become insurmountable. Tambu, still a teenager at the end of the book, represents the only hope for a better future for African women. Nevertheless, she could not escape the effects of sexism in the past and it is difficult for her to guess her destiny in the future. Hence, her hybrid education can also be considered a source of contradiction in the sense of her liberation as a woman. Hybridity gives proof of the possibility to bring cultures closer, but it is still unable to approximate the extreme poles of identification created by gender. As a consequence, this separation fostering an asymmetric relationship between women and men highlights that there is still a long way to go in order to recognise the value of womanhood inside societies.



## CONCLUSION

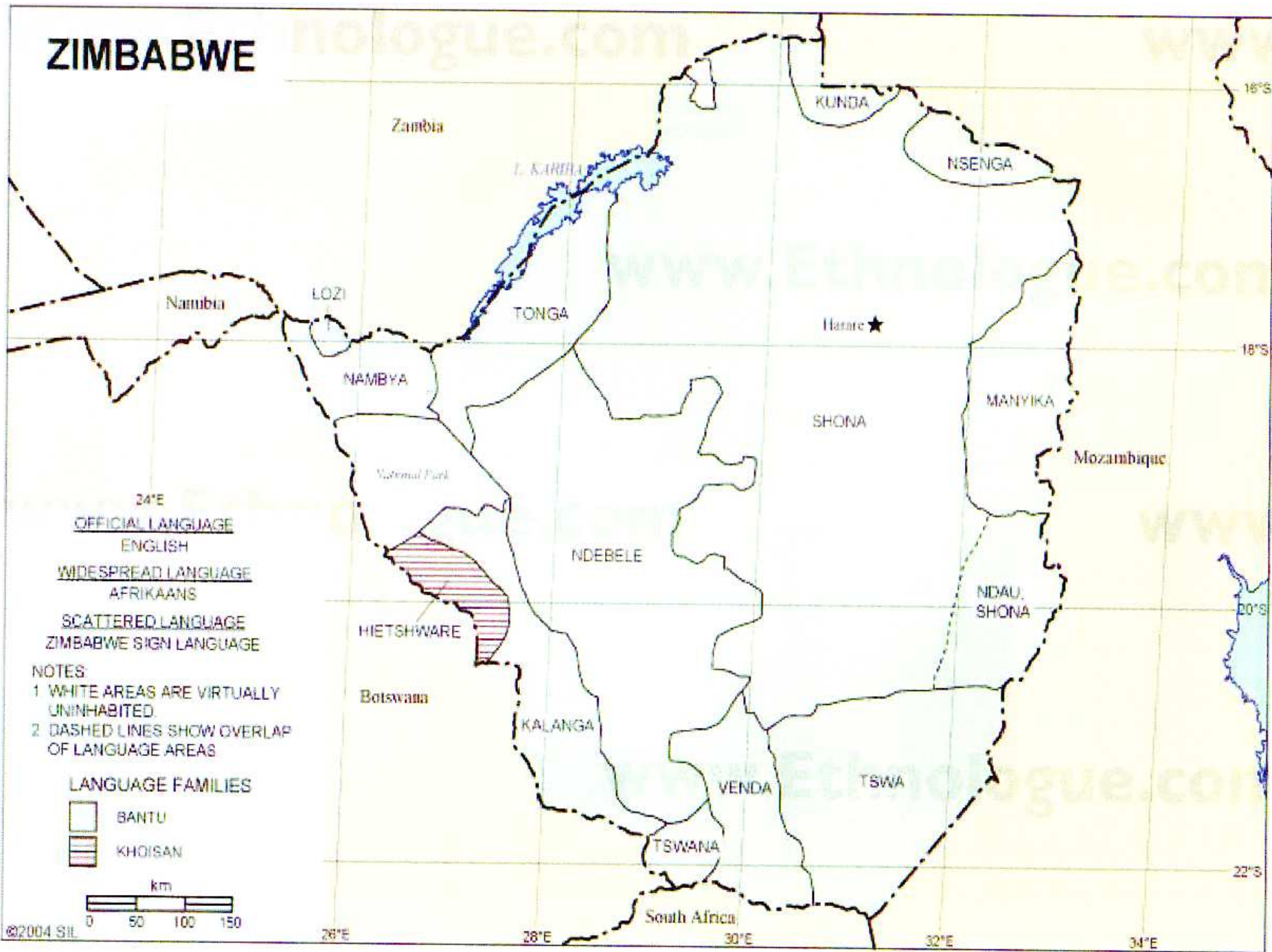
As disclosed by Dangarembga's novel, it can be stated that, in Africa, there are different generations of women coexisting together, whose concerns seem to be quite apart from each other. The element stressing the distance among age bands is the kind of contact that these women have had with Western education, since this factor clearly establishes some of their priorities in life. In the first place, those African women who have never received formal instruction stick on their traditions and show their distrust of foreign influences, mainly of those coming from their former colonisers. In the second place, there are many others who have attended basic lessons in order to be taught how to read and write, but who are still very much linked to their African background and all its implications. In the third place, new generations have learnt all the advantages of modern education and so they are critical of their original environment, but also of the manipulation concealed within Western perspectives of life.

Therefore, the aspirations expected from all these African women are very distant among them. The eldest generations do not know a world different from that they have always inhabited and, as a result, they do not perceive that some of the structures on which their communities rely are anchored in the past. Middle generations have to worry about the daily survival of their families, so their literacy is not a clear stimulus for calling their societies into question. Nonetheless, the youngest generations, despite not being so much submitted to traditions and to the impositions connected to femininity, can be regarded as the group who suffers the burdens of African womanhood the most, at least psychologically. As they have received Western education and some of them have also been abroad, they know a reality that seems to be more promising for female self-fulfilment. As a consequence, they realise the extent to which African women experience privations in their continent not only due to a material poverty that mainly affects the areas of health, sanitation and nutrition, but also due to a spiritual poverty that separates them from the outside world. When referring to a spiritual poverty, it is to be thought that, still at the present time, many women in Africa are ignorant of their essential rights. They neither think of the possibility to demand the respect and appreciation that they deserve for their contributions to their communities, nor denounce the abuses that they experience for their sex and race. Thus, these African women are not free at all, but they do not know what to be free really means either. Hence, hybrid women sadly become aware of the fact that their compatriots are very far from emancipation and they bear the pain of how to import into their mother continent those means that could help them to achieve it.

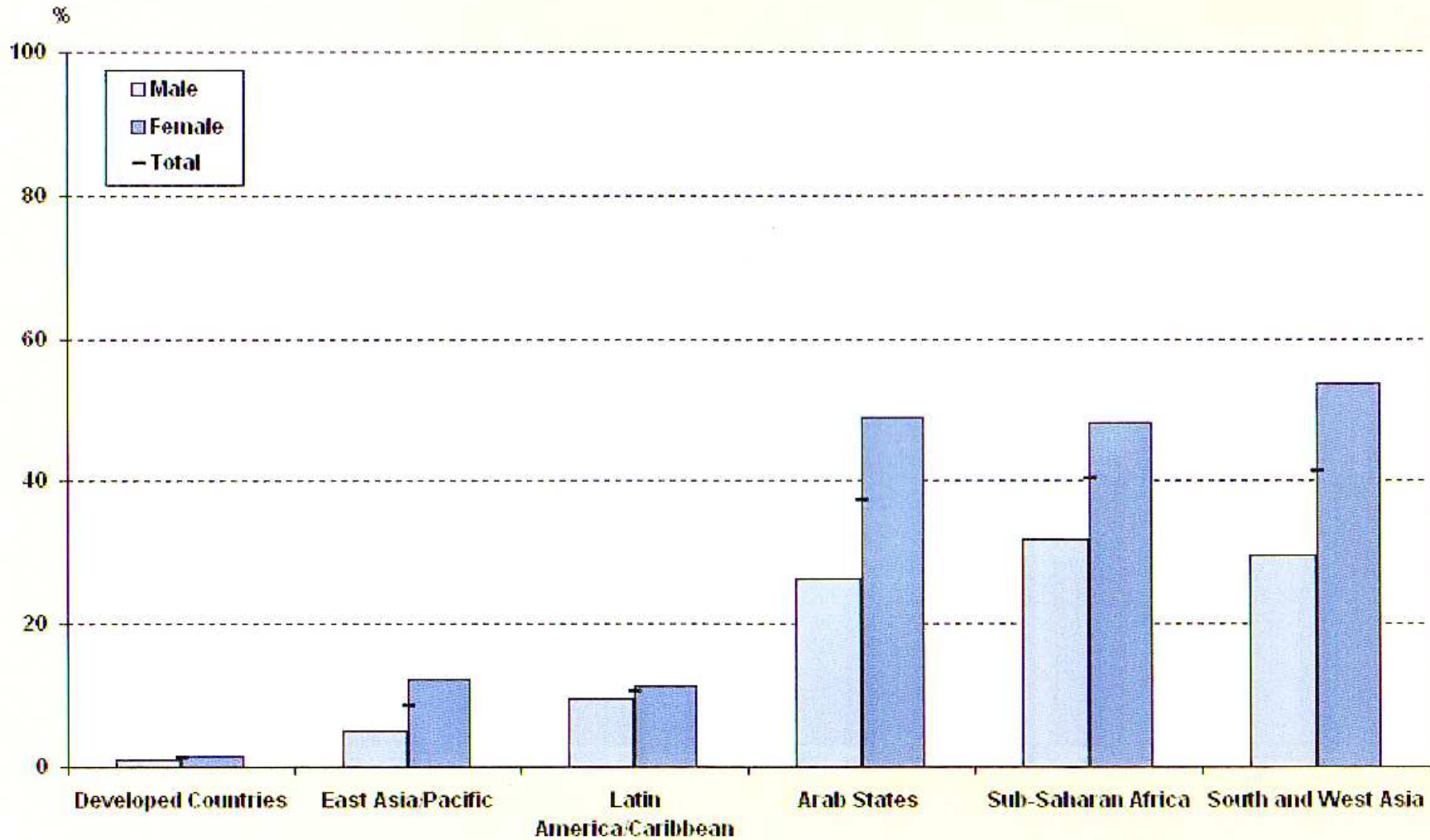
## CONCLUSION

In order to combat this injustice, all women should be educated in Africa. It is not a question of uprooting them from their origins, but of informing them of their right to promotion. Western feminists often accept this commitment as theirs, but it is a fact that they frequently take African women's immediate necessities for granted due to their privileged status. Therefore, hybrid women of native origin turn to be the best individuals in charge of separating their female compatriots from their ignorance and of showing them that there are other aspirations in life different from being considered a good mother and wife. International cooperation, especially economic, is required to accomplish this educational process, but the analysis of literary works such as *Nervous Conditions* is also a useful way of raising Western people's awareness about the poor condition of the African population.

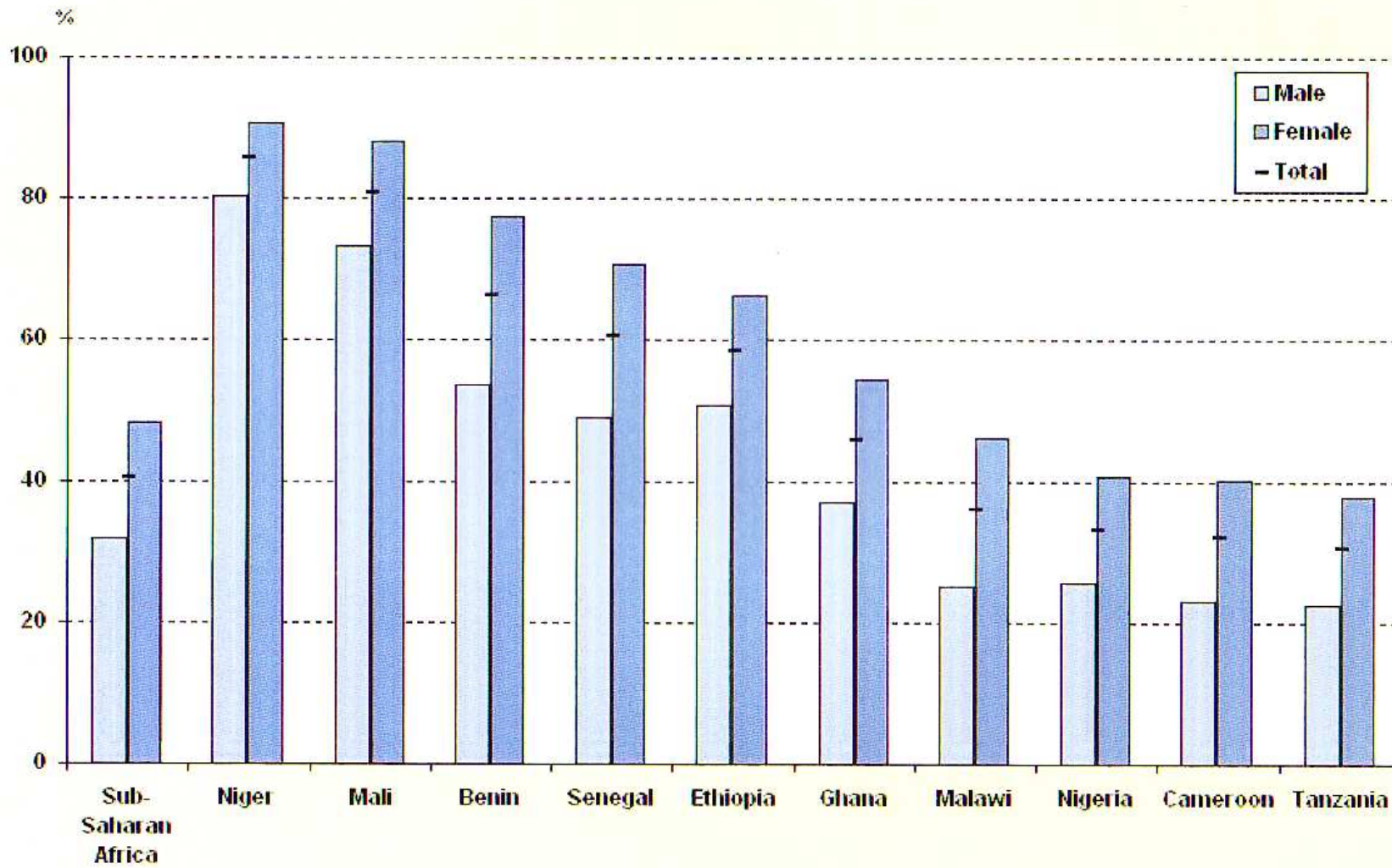
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World Illiteracy Rates by Region  
and Gender 2000-2004



Illiteracy Rates by Gender in Sub-Saharan Africa  
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