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**Violence and Resistance in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988)**

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## **DEDICATION**

To our dearest parents, supportive sisters, and caring brothers,  
your unwavering love and encouragement have been our guiding light throughout this  
academic journey.

Your belief in us fuelled our determination  
and inspired us to reach this significant milestone.

This dissertation is dedicated to you,  
the pillars of our strength and the essence of our being.

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To all women whose stories of resilience and resistance inspire and drive the pursuit of  
equality and liberation.

## Abstract

This dissertation is a comparative study of Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988). The aim of this work is to show the various forms of violence faced by women in Egyptian and Rhodesian societies, and to demonstrate the women's resistance against patriarchal system in both novels. To achieve our purpose, we have relied on Alice Walker's Womanism developed in her collection of essays *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983) and bell hooks' *Feminist Theory From Margin to Center* (1984). The findings of this study reveal that women in *Woman at Point Zero* and *Nervous Conditions* face systemic violence that limits their autonomy and freedom. Both novels highlight various forms of oppression, including physical, sexual, psychological, and domestic violence, while also showcasing acts of resistance. Education, solidarity, and defiance emerge as crucial tools for female empowerment, allowing the protagonists to challenge patriarchal norms. In *Woman at Point Zero*, the protagonist's turn to prostitution is depicted as a means of reclaiming control over her body, while *Nervous Conditions* presents intellectual growth as a path to liberation. Through this study, we conclude that Nawal El Saadawi and Tsitsi Dangarembga share significant thematic concerns regarding women's rights. Through their narratives, they amplify women's voice in opposition to the various forms of violence and oppression they encounter by positioning their female characters as agents of resistance.

**Keywords:** Education, Nawal El Saadawi, Nervous Conditions, Resistance, Solidarity, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Violence, Woman at Point Zero.

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## I. General Introduction

Throughout history, the social reconstruction of gender and the pervasive issue of discrimination have consistently posed significant challenges for women. Despite their vital contributions to society as active members in various domains, Arab and Rhodesian women have long been subjected to subjugation within patriarchal systems that often fail to acknowledge their roles.

Since the twentieth century, numerous feminist writers have explored the themes of women's oppression and rebellion, with Nawal El Saadawi and Tsitsi Dangarembga being prominent figures in this discourse. This paper examines the themes of violence and resistance in two of their notable works: *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and *Nervous Conditions* (1988). Both authors present the struggles of Arab and Rhodesian women against patriarchal systems, offering distinct portrayals of their resistance. We are going to show how both authors portray the Arab and Rhodesian women's struggling in patriarchal societies and how they achieve equality and freedom.

The selection of *Woman at Point Zero* and *Nervous Conditions* is largely attributed to the similar themes both novels address concerning women's struggles within patriarchal societies to attain liberty and freedom. Even though, these works are written in different time periods, languages, and cultural contexts, they share significant similarities in their portrayal of women's desires to achieve equality with men. This affinity between the two works enables a comparative discussion of women's issues specifically in relation to female empowerment and the quest for liberation from oppressive structures.

The value of this dissertation lies in its exploration of the challenges faced by the Arab and Rhodesian women, as portrayed through the experiences of the protagonists in both literary works. It emphasizes the harsh realities of their lives while also examining their transformation

from passive victims to resilient and empowered individuals. This study aims to shed light on the severe oppression women endure in patriarchal societies, while critically analysing the extent to which the protagonists succeed in resisting subjugation and overcoming the adversities they encounter.

## **Review of the literature**

Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) are seminal works that address women's struggles against patriarchal oppression in Egyptian and Rhodesian societies. Both novels have attracted a considerable attention in the world of literature. In examining these novels, we have noticed that both authors and works have faced substantial criticism from different perspectives.

In this literature review, we have selected critics whose analyses provide a comprehensive exploration of violence and resistance in these novels. Gloria Ada Fwangyil and Saddik Gohar examine *Woman at Point Zero*, emphasizing how El Saadawi portrays the systemic violence inflicted on women and Firdaus's acts of defiance against her oppressors. Similarly, Benon Tugume and Pauline Ada Uwakweh analyze *Nervous Conditions*, focusing on the various forms of gender-based violence and the ways in which female characters resist societal constraints. Together, these critics offer valuable insights into how both novels depict oppression as a turning point for resistance and female empowerment.

To start with, Gloria Ada Fwangyil, in her article entitled *Cradle to Grave: an Analysis of Female Oppression in Nawal El Saadawi's Woman at Point Zero* (2012). Her article discusses the female oppression throughout a woman's life. She explores the various stages of the protagonist's life, from childhood to adulthood, highlighting the different forms of oppression she faces. Fwangyil believes the reality that women are discriminated and suppressed because

of the patriarchal structures. She notes that women are only respected when they perform their traditional duties. Additionally, her article delves into Firdaus's acts of resistance against these oppressive forces, demonstrating her struggle for autonomy and dignity in a repressive society.

The author contends:

Saadaawi has shown a deep concern about certain subjugating conditions that women undergo. In her concern are attempts to evoke those subjugating circumstances of women in order to arouse our pity for them and then to emancipate them from such conditions. In the end, what emerges is a positive vision of women different from what has been in existence in the societies that informed the background and setting of the novel (Gloria Ada, 2012).

From the above citation, we understand that Gloria Ada Fwagyil highlights El Saadawi's commitment to exposing and challenging the oppressive conditions faced by women. El Saadawi aims to evoke empathy and raise awareness about these harsh realities, as she draws attention to various forms of oppression, and inspires efforts to liberate women from such conditions.

Moreover, Saddik Gohar's *Empowering the Subaltern in Woman at Point Zero* (2016) discusses Firdaus' journey from subjugation to empowerment and how she and other women are marginalized and oppressed. According to Saddik, the story is about every girl in Egyptian and Arab society, he suggests that Firdaus' story reflects the struggle of Arab women against the oppressive structures of male hegemony. He contends:

The story of Firdaus is a replica of contemporary Arab women struggling against male hegemony, supremacy and stagnant religious heritage. The façade of religiosity and piety epitomized by Friday sermons and ritualistic worship conceals a corrupt and immoral male-dominated society (Saddik, 2016).

Like her Egyptian counterpart, the Rhodesian writer Tsitsi Dangarembga and her novel *Nervous Conditions* have been a subject of a wide range of criticism and a target of many studies. In his piece of criticism, *Depiction of Women's Oppression and Gender-based Domestic Violence against Girls in Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions* (2022), Benon

Tugume examines the systemic oppression and gender-based violence faced by women in the Shona community of Rhodesia. Benon Tugume argues that for Dangarembga being a single woman is a way for women to gain freedom. According to him, Dangarembga skilfully transforms her own life experiences into a novel that is both complex and highly realistic, featuring characters with rich psychological depth.

Besides, Pauline Ada Uwakweh, in her article entitled *Debunking Patriarchy: The Liberational Quality of Voicing in Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions* (1995) explores the impact of patriarchy and colonialism on African women. She states that Dangarembga aims to explore the intricate dynamics of male domination in Rhodesian society. Furthermore, Uwakweh discusses how Dangarembga explores the patterns of female subordination stemming from patriarchy and its interconnectedness with the colonial experience. She illustrates that many African women have suffered double oppression of patriarchy and colonization. She argues: "There are two levels of domination in nervous conditions. These are the economic and cultural domination by imperial forces and the domination of the African female by the male" (Pauline Ada Uwakweh, 1995). Pauline Ada explains in this quotation the two levels of domination, the economic and cultural control exerted by imperial powers and the subjugation of African women by men.

Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* are essential works in feminist literature. These works have received criticism from different critical perspectives. Therefore, the primary aim of this dissertation is to conduct a thorough analysis and comparison of these two novels.

## **b) Issue and Working Hypothesis**

It is evident from the review of literature that both Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) have garnered substantial

criticism. As of the present moment and to the extent of our knowledge, there exists no research that directly compares these two literary works. This dissertation aims to establish connection between Egyptian and Rhodesian literature through a comparative analysis that illuminates the themes of violence and resistance in both novels. The first focus is on how women navigate patriarchal societies, enduring various challenges across different cultural contexts. The second focus explores the portrayal of female characters who actively resist in their pursuit of liberation within these patriarchal structures.

To highlight the significance of this research and fulfil our objectives, we will employ Alice Walker's womanist theory in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983) and bell hooks' *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984). These theories advocate for the emancipation of women, emphasizing their agency in claiming their rights to freedom. They underscore the necessity of valuing women's voices and contributions to social justice and gender equality. Thus, this study seeks to reveal how female characters in both novels confront and resist various forms of violence, utilizing education, solidarity, and prostitution as powerful tools in their struggle for liberation.

### **c) Methodological Outline**

At the methodological level, our research comprises an introduction outlining our objectives, followed by a literature review covering publication on Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988). We then established our research issue and working hypothesis. In the methodology section, we offer an analysis of Alice Walker's womanist ideology as presented in her collection of essays *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983) and bell hooks' *Feminist Theory From Margin to Center* (1984). The material section provides biographies of the authors as well as summaries of the two selected works.

The discussion section will be divided into two chapters. The first chapter will explore the theme of violence in both novels, focusing on the patriarchal system and the various forms of violence experienced by women in Egypt and Rhodesia. The second chapter will focus on the representation of resistance in both works and emphasizes the significance of education and solidarity in empowering women in patriarchal societies. Finally, our dissertation will conclude with a general summary. In this section, we will encapsulate the main ideas developed through the dissertation.

## **II. Methods and Materials**

### **A. Methods**

In this dissertation, we employ two key theoretical frameworks to explore the themes of violence and resistance: Alice Walker's womanist theory as articulated in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983), and bell hooks' feminist theory as presented in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984). Walker's Womanism emphasizes the experiences and struggles of black women. Bell hooks' feminist theory, on the other hand, examines the issues of gender inequality and the need for social change.

### **Alice Walker's Theory of Womanism (1983)**

In her collection of essays *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983), the African-American writer Alice Walker introduced a new feminist theory known as "Womanism". This theory specifically addresses the experiences, struggles, and empowerment of black women. A womanist is a black feminist or feminist of colour as she defines it in her essay (Walker, 1983, p. xi). Indeed, in this dissertation, Womanism offers a comprehensive framework to analyse the struggles of women in *Woman at Point Zero* and *Nervous Conditions*. Through Womanism, we can examine how these women resist gender domination and the patriarchal structures that marginalize them.

Alice Walker explains this concept by a definition of four aspects to clarify what Womanism means, and to identify the features of the black female identity. First, the feminist writer has derived the word Womanism from the black folk term "womanish" (Walker, 1983, p. xi) a word that means responsible, serious girl. It is used by black mothers to describe girls who want to know more and in greater depth.

Second, the next aspect of the definition says: "A woman who loves other women [...]" male and female (Walker, 1983, p. x). Womanism as articulated in this quotation, embodies a

profound love and appreciation for women, encompassing their culture, emotional depth, and strength. It acknowledges and celebrates diverse relationships, including love and connection with both women and men, in sexual and nonsexual contexts. This definition also emphasizes the value of emotional flexibility, embracing tears and laughter as natural expressions of human experience and promoting emotional authenticity.

In addition, the third aspect of the definition identifies the cultural identity of the black women. It highlights the significance of artistic, social, moral, and spiritual matters that womanists find compelling, such as music, dance, the moon...etc. In this context, Walker says: “Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggles. Loves the folk. Loves herself. Regardless.” (p. xii). It demonstrates that womanists hold a deep appreciation for their black heritage, their community, and their unique culture. Moreover, it portrays a holistic and inclusive portrayal of black womanhood. It also signifies that womanists remain devoted to their community without sacrificing their individuality and personal growth (Marwa Mahmoud Mohamed El-Shennawi, 2019).

### **bell hooks’ *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984)**

*Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* is a book written by the African-American writer Gloria Jean Watkins, best known by her pen name bell hooks in 1984. Bell hooks’ writings deal with a range of interconnected topics, primarily focusing on issues of race, gender, and class. This book is divided into twelve chapters, each addressing different aspects of feminist theory and activism. For our dissertation, we will concentrate on those chapters that are essential to understanding the intersectional dynamics of violence and resistance depicted in the novels.

In the chapter entitled *Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression*, hooks states that there has been no clear and accepted definition of feminism. She critiques the mainstream feminist focus on achieving gender equality within existing societal structures, contending that

this approach often overlooks the systemic nature of sexism. Hooks proposes a new definition of feminism “Feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression” (hooks, 1984, p. 26). She advocates for a more radical and transformative approach that addresses sexism and seeks to dismantle the entire system of patriarchal oppression.

*Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women* is another important chapter in this theory. In this chapter, hooks discusses the concept of sisterhood and its importance in the feminist movement. She affirms that women are the group most deeply affected by sexist oppression as she critiques the male supremacist ideology that teaches women to believe their worth is tied to their relationships with men. However, she points how women are often portrayed as enemies, making it difficult to form strong bonds of sisterhood. She contends that challenging this belief is essential for building true political solidarity among women in the feminist movement.

In the eighth chapter entitled *Educating Women: A Feminist Agenda*, bell hooks asserts that encouraging women to pursue education and develop their intellectual abilities should be a primary goal of feminism. She emphasizes that education is not just about gaining knowledge, but also about fostering liberation. She contends that for education to truly empower women, it must be responsive to the needs of all women.

Another interesting chapter to our dissertation is entitled *Feminist Movement to End Violence*. In this chapter, hooks contends that male violence against women is a clear manifestation of male domination and patriarchal control. Hooks emphasizes the need to understand how violence is deeply embedded in patriarchal power structures. She argues for a feminist strategy that is more comprehensive and inclusive, one that tackles the underlying systemic issues and engages both women and men in the collective effort to eradicate violence against women.

## **B. Materials**

### **1. Biography of Nawal El Saadawi**

Nawal El Saadawi, an Egyptian writer, psychiatrist, and feminist activist, dedicated her life to exposing and challenging the systemic oppression of women, particularly in Arab societies. She was born in 1931, in a small village outside Cairo. She was educated and graduated from the University of Cairo Medical School in 1954, specialising in psychiatry. At the age of six, El Saadawi underwent female genital mutilation (FGM), a traumatic experience that profoundly influenced her later work and activism. Throughout her career, El Saadawi confronted patriarchal and political structures that perpetuated violence against women, a central theme in her renowned novel *Woman at Point Zero*. This work based on a real life encounter with a female prisoner, explores the brutal realities of gender-based violence and social marginalization.

Her outspoken advocacy, especially in books such as *Women and Sex*, led to severe repercussions, including her dismissal from government service and eventual imprisonment in 1981 under Anwar Sadat's regime. Despite facing exile, and threats to her life, El Saadawi continued her activism, founding the Arab Women Solidarity Association in 1982 and later campaigning for democratic reforms in Egypt. El Saadawi's literary and political efforts have left a profound impact, with her works translated into over thirty languages and studied worldwide. She remained a fearless advocate for women's rights until her passing on March 21, 2021, in Cairo.

### **2. Biography of Tsitsi Dangarembga**

Tsitsi Dangarembga is a Zimbabwean writer and filmmaker, born in 1959 in Mutoko, Zimbabwe. She has been a powerful voice in depicting the struggles of African women against

colonial and patriarchal oppression. She pursued her education in both England and Zimbabwe, ultimately studying psychology at the university of Harare. During her academic years, she became deeply involved in theatre, using drama as a medium to address social issues.

Her ground-breaking novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988), the first English language novel published by a black Zimbabwean woman, critically examines the intersection of gender, race, and class, highlighting the psychological and structural violence endured by African women. Beyond literature, Dangarembga has used filmmaking to further amplify marginalized voices, founding the International Image Film Festival for Women in Zimbabwe. Her artistic and activist efforts have earned her international recognition, establishing her legacy as a key figure in African feminist discourse.

### **3. Summary of *Woman at Point Zero***

*Woman at Point Zero* is a novel written by the Egyptian writer Nawal El Saadawi in 1975 and published in Arabic in 1977, then, it was translated into English by her husband Sherif Hetata in 1983. Nawal El Saadawi recounts her experiences as a psychiatrist in Egypt, where she conducted research on the psychological impact of imprisonment on female prisoners.

The novel follows the life of Firdaus, a woman who recounts her life story, revealing that she was born into an extremely poor family. From a young age, she has endured hardships inflicted by her family, and as she progresses through society, she encounters increasingly severe forms of oppression directed towards women.

Moreover, marriage offers no refuge as Firdaus's husband, Sheikh Mahmoud, subjects her to further abuse, both physical and emotional, leaving her feeling trapped and powerless. After one bad beating, she flees from her husband. Each instance of violence inflicted upon her by these male figures serves to away Firdaus's agency and autonomy, pushing her into a state of despair and isolation. The turning point in Firdaus's life comes when she meets Sharifa, a

woman who introduces her to the world of prostitution. Sharifa subsequently profits from Firdaus's body, until one evening when her friend Fawzy visits her. She overhears them fighting about who will keep her. So, she flees once again.

As Firdaus continues working in prostitution, initially hesitant, she discovers a sense of liberation and agency over her own body and destiny within this newfound role. Nevertheless, despite appearing empowered, she encounters exploitation and abuse from both clients and pimps. Firdaus was targeted by a pimp who attempted to take control of her life, and for a brief period, she lets him. However, they fight and she kills him, leading to her imprisonment and eventual imposition of a death sentence.

#### **4. Summary of *Nervous Conditions***

*Nervous Conditions* is a novel written by Tsitsi Dangarembga in 1988. The story is set in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) in the late 1960 and early 1970. The novel provides a deep exploration of the struggles of the female characters.

The novel follows the life of Tambudzai, or Tambu, a young girl from a poor rural family. She dreams of getting an education and escaping the traditional roles expected of women in her society. Tambu's parents Ma'Shingayi and Jeremiah have prioritized her brother Nhamo to receive the education opportunity instead of her. However, Tambu's wealthy and educated uncle, Babamukuru, offers to pay for his education at a missionary school, but he tragically dies. The unexpected death of Nhamo profoundly affects Tambu's family, plunging them into a state of deep grief and disruption. But, that was also a new beginning to Tambu at the mission school.

Despite her initial disappointment, Tambu eventually goes to the mission school and begins her education journey. She encounters new challenges, and forms relationships with various characters, including her cousin Nyasha, who has returned from studying in England. Nyasha

introduces Tambu to new ideas and perspectives, challenging her to question societal norms and expectations. Moreover, Tambu has a close and affectionate relationship with her aunts, Babamukuru's wife Maiguru, who serves as a source of guidance for her, especially regarding education and empowerment. She encourages Tambu to pursue her dreams and supports her aspirations for education. In addition, Tambu gains invaluable insights from Lucia, a woman of strength and resilience, through her experiences and perspectives.

Towards the end of the story, Tambu reflects on her transformative journey of self-discovery and empowerment. She comes to understand the sacrifices made by women in her family, particularly her mother and aunts, as they navigated patriarchal structures. Tambu also realizes the power of education in challenging traditional roles and empowering individuals.

### III. Results

This comparative study of Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) has yielded significant findings. The research demonstrates that both novels, despite their different cultural and geographical contexts, offer profound insights into the themes of violence and resistance faced by women. Both authors use their narratives to highlight the systemic oppression of women and their various forms of resistance. Our research relies on Alice Walker's womanist theory *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983) and bell hooks' *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984).

In the first chapter, this study finds that Nawal El Saadawi and Tsitsi Dangarembga both depict the pervasive nature of violence against women in their respective works. In both novels, the patriarchal system is shown to be a dominant force that exploits and oppresses women, severely limiting their opportunities and freedom. The female characters in these works experience various forms of violence, which are used to control and subjugate them. Both authors, highlight how this violence is not just a product of individual actions, but is deeply embedded in societal and cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality.

In the second chapter, it is significant that both authors portray their female characters as empowered womanists who use several forms of resistance to confront and challenge oppressive systems. In both novels, education emerges as a crucial means for empowerment, enabling female characters to challenge oppressive systems. Additionally, solidarity among women is portrayed as a powerful force in both works, with mutual support and collective strength being essential components of their resistance. The emphasis on education and solidarity highlights their significance in the broader struggle for women's autonomy and liberation.

Throughout this comparative study, Nawal El Saadawi and Tsitsi Dangarembga reveal both significant similarities and notable differences in their treatment of violence and resistance. Both novels powerfully depict the multifaceted oppression faced by their female protagonists. They also highlight the crucial role of education and solidarity in empowering women to resist and overcome patriarchal constraints.

## **IV. Discussion**

In this section of our dissertation, we will examine the status of women in oppressive societies as depicted in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988). Our discussion is divided into two main chapters. In the first chapter, we will explore the various forms of violence women face in patriarchal societies, as portrayed in these novels. This will involve an analysis of the oppressive conditions imposed on women notably in Egypt and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). The second chapter will focus on the theme of resistance through education and solidarity, and how these factors contribute to the development of female identity in both works.

### **Chapter one: Violence in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988)**

In this chapter, we will explore the several forms of violence experienced by African women, as portrayed in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988). Both authors shed light on the profound challenges that women face and highlight numerous forms of violence that serve as significant obstacles to women's emancipation. *Woman at Point Zero* explores themes of physical and sexual violence, while *Nervous Conditions* focuses on the impact of domestic and psychological violence. These works provide valuable insights into the struggles that women endure as they strive for empowerment.

#### **A. Types of violence in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975)**

Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* vividly portrays the harsh realities of violence faced by its protagonist. This section explores the physical and sexual violence depicted in the novel, focusing on practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage. It

also addresses sexual violence, illustrating how it functions as a mechanism of control and oppression. These forms of violence are not only severe but also deeply entrenched in the patriarchal system that dominates the narrative.

## **1. Physical violence**

Physical violence defined as the use of force to inflict harm or injury on another individual through actions such as hitting and punching, it is a central theme in *Woman at Point Zero*. This theme is intricately tied to the patriarchal structures that dominate the society depicted in the novel, where women are relegated to the status of second-class citizens and exposes them to various forms of physical abuse, as violence becomes a tool of control and domination over female characters. Through the character of Firdaus, the novel exemplifies the brutal realities of gendered violence.

Nawal El Saadawi portrays the pervasive physical violence experienced by Firdaus highlighting the oppressive environment that defines her life from an early age. This environment is marked by relentless suffering, beginning with her father, who embodies the patriarchal structures that dominate Firdaus' childhood (Sulaiman Conita Vidina, 2019). She says: "My father, a poor peasant farmer, who could neither read nor write, knew very few things in life. How to grow crops, [...] how to exchange his virgin daughter for a dowry when there was still time, [...] How to bend over the headman's hand and pretend to kiss it, how to beat his wife and make her bite the dust each night (El Saadawi, 1975, p.10).

Additionally, Firdaus's life continues to be characterized by physical abuse, particularly during her search for employment. She becomes a victim of subjugation and exploitation by her friend Bayoumi, who also physically assaults her. The following quotation shows the horrible condition that Firdaus lived.

I was speaking in low tones, and my eyes were fixed on the ground, but he jumped up and slapped me on the face, saying "How dare you raise

your voice when you're speaking to me you street walker, you law woman?". His hand was big and it was the heaviest slap I had ever received on my face. My head swayed first to one side then to the other. The walls and the floor seemed to shift violently. I held my head in my hands until they grew still again, then I looked upwards and our eyes met (El Saadawi, 1975, p. 52).

Firdaus experienced a profound disillusionment with her friend Bayoumi, whom she initially perceived as a saviour. Contrary to her expectations, he subjected her to physical abuse and sexual exploitation rather than aiding her in securing employment. Consequently, El Saadawi portrays men as creature who disregard women's existence within a patriarchal framework, relegating women to the roles of servitude and the fulfilment of male desires.

### **1.1 Female Genital Mutilation**

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) remains a significant concern, particularly in some African communities where it has been historically practised. According to The World Health Organization, FGM is a harmful traditional practice that involves the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia organs for non-medical reasons. The Egyptian Nawal El Saadawi addresses the issue of FGM in her work, where she explores the devastating consequences of patriarchal oppression on women's bodies and autonomy. Diana Royer in her book entitled *A Critical Study of the Works of Nawal El Saadawi, Egyptian Writer and Activist* asserts that El Saadawi recounts her personal experience with female circumcision at the age of six in her novel *The Hidden Face of Eve* (1977). She described the fear, confusion, and sense of betrayal over her mother, she confesses:

I screamed with pain despite the tight hand held over my mouth, for the pain was not just a pain, it was like a searing flame that went through my whole body. After a few moments, I saw a red pool of blood around my hips. I did not know what they had cut off from my body, and I did not try to find out. I just wept, and called out to my mother for help. But the worst shock of all was when I looked around and found her standing by my side. Yes, it was her, I could not be mistaken, in flesh and blood (El Saadawi, 1977, p.14).

The description of pain and the subsequent sight of blood powerfully convey the physical trauma of the procedure. In spite of that, the disillusionment with her mother that El Saadawi expressed can be seen as a reflection of the betrayal she feels by the very figures who are supposed to protect and nurture her.

However, in *Woman at Point Zero*, Nawal El Saadawi poignantly highlights the prevalence of practices that inflict suffering upon girls from an early age. Therefore, her personal experience deeply influenced her work and activism against FGM. The narrative is channelled through the experiences of Firdaus, who, having undergone FGM at the young age narrates her harrowing odyssey, as it is shown in this passage below:

Sometimes I could not distinguish which one of them was my father. He resembled them so closely that it was difficult to tell. So, one day I asked my mother about him. How was it that she had given birth to me without a father? she beat me. Then she brought a woman who was carrying a small knife or maybe a razor blade, they cut off a piece of flesh between my thighs. I cried all night (El Saadawi, 1975, p. 12).

The novel presents a moving and harrowing depiction of Firdaus' traumatic encounter with FGM. Her sense of confusion and betrayal is revealed in the moment when she cannot recognize her father among other men, symbolising the lack of a protective paternal figure and the suppression of individuality under oppressive societal norms. Furthermore, Firdaus' experience serves to highlight FGM as an instrument of patriarchal control, showing how it benefits men by asserting dominance over women's bodies and identities.

## **1.2 Forced marriage**

Forced marriage is a prevalent practice in Africa. As documented by Fwangyil, Gloria Ada (2012), this tradition often serves as a means for a girl's family to transfer the perceived burden of her upkeep. In Nawal El Saadawi's novel, the narrative confronts the subject of coerced matrimony through the ordeal of Firdaus. At the age of eighteen, she is compelled into marriage with Sheikh Mahmoud, a wealthy widower in his sixties. This union is orchestrated by her

uncle, with the connivance of his spouse. Eventually, she finds herself in a tumultuous marriage with Sheikh Mahmoud who treats her more like a servant than a wife. He often beats her for a small mistake that may not be able to be considered as a mistake. This can be proved by the following quotation below:

And if I pressed a little more firmly than usual on the spoon as I took ghee of the teen for cooking, he would scream out in anger, and draw my attention to the fact that its contents were diminishing much more rapidly than they should. When the dustman come to empty the refuse from the bin, He would go through it carefully before putting it out on the landing. One day he discovered some leftover scraps of food, and started yelling at me so loudly that all the neighbours could hear. After this incident he got into the habit of beating me whether he had a reason for it or not (El Saadawi 1975, p. 46).

Nawal El Saadawi depicts Firdaus as a woman of limited means, endured a harrowing ordeal of physical abuse at the hands of her spouse, devoid of affection from her partner she reached breaking points and sought refuge with her uncle. However, her plight was met with the assertion that religion doctrines permitted her husband's actions (Conita Vidina Sulaiman,2019), the following quotation vividly shows the horrible condition that Firdaus lived in, she asserts:

On one occasion he hit me all over with his shoe. My face and body became swollen and bruised. So I left the house and went to my uncle. But my uncle told me that all husbands beat their wives, and my uncle's wife added that her husband often beat her. I said my uncle was a respected Sheikh, well versed in the teachings of religion, and he, therefore, could not possibly be in the habit of beating his wife. She replied that it was precisely men well versed in their religion who beat their wives. the precepts of religion permitted such punishment. A virtuous woman was not supposed to complain about her husband. Her duty was perfect obedience (El Saadawi, 1975, p. 46).

The citation highlights Firdaus' experience of physical abuse in her forced marriage, reflecting the broader oppression of women in patriarchal societies. Her husband uses violence to dominate her, while her uncle dismisses her suffering, claiming that all husbands beat their wives. This normalization of violence reflects deeply ingrained cultural beliefs that women must endure abuse and exhibit obedience.

## 2. Sexual violence

Sexual violence refers to any form of non-consensual sexual act or behaviour that is forced upon an individual without their consent. It includes acts such as rape, sexual harassment, and any other forms of sexual activity that occur without the agreement of all parties involved. The existence of sexual violence is due to the societal norms that view men as dominant and women as passive. This perspective often leads to the tolerance of sexual violence, as women are seen as having to submit to men. In fact, sexual violence is unfortunately a common experience for many women. This behaviour stems from the assumption that women are psychologically and physically weak and vulnerable (D. L. Sari & M. Sufanti, 2023). This harmful assumption has become ingrained in the society and can be perpetuated by some individuals.

Nawal El Saadawi's novel, powerfully exposes the harsh reality of the various forms of injustice and abuse that women endure within societies. However, sexual violence and harassment is depicted through the experiences of the main character. Tragically, Firdaus injured multiple instances of sexual abuse throughout her life, starting from a young age and continuing until her death. Men in her life subjected her to these acts of harassment, and she even experienced sexual molestation by one of her playmates called Mohammadain.

A little boy called Mohammadain used to pinch me under water and follow me into the small shelter made of maize stalks. He would make me lie down beneath a pile of straw, and lift up my galabeya. We played at "bride and bridegroom". From some part of my body, where exactly I did not know, would come a sensation of sharp pleasure. Later I would close my eyes and feel with my hand for the exact spot (El Saadawi, 1975, p.12).

Mohammadain exploited the situation, taking advantage of Firdaus while she remained unaware of the impropriety. She did not receive any guidance or education regarding the topic of sexual harassment, because of the absence of communication within her family. This traumatic event not only marks the beginning of Firdaus' encounters with sexual abuse but also

highlights the vulnerability of a young girl to such acts of violence (Benoumhani & Yallaoui, 2021).

Furthermore, Firdaus frequently experienced sexual harassment from the people closest to her. She was being touched by her own uncle in her childhood. She shares the painful and traumatic details of these acts. “My galabeya often slipped up my thighs, but I paid no attention until the moment when I would glimpse my uncle’s hand moving slowly from behind the book he was reading to touch my leg” (El Saadawi, 1975, p.13). Firdaus journey is marked by a series of harrowing experiences of sexual violence in the public sphere (Hidayati, N et al., 2018).

After enduring violence from her husband, she makes the difficult decision to escape and ends up on the streets. However, her choice ultimately leads her to a life of misery and further hardship. During her stay in Bayoumi’s house, Firdaus endures the deplorable exploitation of her body, as Bayoumi uses her solely for his own sexual pleasure. “I felt the sudden touch of him, like a dream remembered from the distant past, or some memory that began with life” (El Saadawi, 1975, p.51). And when she requests employment from Bayoumi, he permits his friends to engage in sexual activity with her.

He would come back in the middle of the night, pull the cover away from me, slap my face, and then bear down on me with all his weight. I kept my eyes closed and abandoned my body. It lay there under him without movement, emptied of all desire, or pleasure, or even pain, feeling nothing. A dead body with no life in it at all, like a piece of wood, or an empty sock, or a shoe. Then one night his body seemed heavier than before, and his breath smelt different, so I opened my eyes. The face above me was not Bayoumi.

‘Who are you? I said.’

‘Bayoumi, he answered’

I insisted, ‘You are not Bayoumi. Who are you?’

‘What difference does it make? Bayoumi and I are one’ (El Saadawi, 1975, p.53).

In the hands of Sharifa, who is a professional prostitute, Firdaus finds herself employed as a prostitute. She describes her experience as being constantly on the bed, feeling utterly

powerless as men come in and exploit her body. “Day and night I lay on the bed, crucified and every hour a man would come in” (El Saadawi, 1975, p.61). This passage portrays the unbearable circumstances Firdaus faces, feeling as though she is crucified on her bed, enduring constant abuse by the men who enter her space every hour. Due to Sharifa’s actions, the protagonist faces numerous difficulties as she experiences both suffering and limitation on her freedom. The power imbalance in their relationship is evident, with Sharifa holding authority and control over Firdaus. Indeed, Firdaus shows resilience and inner strength despite the challenges she encounters, revealing her enduring spirit.

Firdaus’ suffering from sexual violence can be analysed through bell hooks’ feminist theory, which highlights that the concept of sexual preference inherently assumes that anyone of the preferred sex has the right to access one’s body, she asserts:

Implicit in the idea of sexual preference is the assumption that anyone of the preferred sex can seek access to one’s body. This is a concept that promotes objectification. In a heterosexual context it makes everyone, especially women, into sex objects. Give the power differential created by sexist politics. Women are likely to be approached by any man since all men are taught to assume they should have access to the bodies of all women (hooks, 1984, p. 155).

This quotation effectively highlights how societal sexist beliefs can distort sexual relationships by objectifying women. It underscores the importance of viewing women as autonomous individuals with their own desires, rather than as mere tools for male objects.

## **B. Types of violence in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* (1988)**

Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* explores the pervasive presence of violence in the lives of its characters, shedding light on the various forms it takes and the profound impact it has on individuals and communities. This section examines the types of violence depicted in the novel, including domestic and psychological violence. Through the experience of the characters, Dangarembga portrays how these forms of violence are deeply connected with the patriarchal system that dominate their society.

## **1. Domestic violence:**

In the novel, the author analyses the different forms of violence that hinder women's freedom, with a focus on domestic violence that occurs within a domestic or intimate individuals. Tsitsi Dangarembga captures this form of violence faced by women through the experiences of the female characters in Shona society. The novel explores the challenges and struggles of Tambu, Nyasha, Maiguru and Ma'Shingayi encounter due to societal norms and expectations.

A key aspect of this oppression is gender inequality, which is prevalent in many African households. Its impact extends beyond the physical realm, deeply affecting the mental well-being of girls. This inequality often leads to feelings of inferiority within the family dynamic. The novel portrays this gender inequality through the character of Tambu, whose father, Jeremiah, obstructs her educational aspirations. Tambu faces numerous barriers due to patriarchal norms that restrict her educational opportunities, while her brother Nhamo is encouraged to pursue education as a means of uplifting the family from poverty. In this context, Jeremiah states: "Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 15). In fact, in many African homes, there is a tendency to prioritize educating boys over girls. This is influenced by the idea that a girl's education mainly serves her future family. As a result, girls are often taught domestic skills, instead of being supported in their education, reinforcing the belief that their main role is to be prepared for marriage (Adaobi Juliet Chukwuma, 2024).

Tambu's path towards education was opened due to her brother's death, this allowed her to pursue her education. Without this event, she might have been confined to the traditional roles expected of her gender, reflecting her mother's experiences. Tambu's father, Jeremiah believed that a girl is expected to belong to someone else, once she gets married. Therefore, he

considered spending money on a girl's education was futile. He asserts: "Tambudzai's sharpness with her books is no use because in the end it will benefit strangers" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 56). This quotation indicates that Tambudzai's academic abilities and intelligence are disregarded due to societal norms that limit the benefits she can derive from her education. The idea that her knowledge will only serve strangers suggests a lack of opportunities to her personal advancement.

Furthermore, these gender inequalities portrayed in *Nervous Conditions* indeed result in the male domination of female characters. Women are often marginalized from community engagement and confined to the domestic sphere, limiting their growth into well-rounded, innovative, and intellectually independent individuals. Thus, this situation hampers their ability to fully integrate into society and develop their creative potential. This is shown in the quotation below:

He did not like to see me over-absorbed in intellectual pursuits. He became very agitated after he had found me several times reading the sheet of newspaper in which the bread from margosa had been wrapped as I waited for the sadza to thicken. He thought I was emulating my brother, that the things I read would fill my mind with impractical ideas, making me quite useless for the real tasks of feminine living (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 34).

In this citation, Tambu describes how a male figure in her life becomes upset when he notices her engaging in intellectual activities, such as reading. His agitation stems from the belief that, by reading and seeking knowledge, Tambu is stepping outside the traditional role expected of her as a woman. He fears that these intellectual pursuits will fill her mind with impractical ideas, diverting her from the domestic duties and responsibilities typically assigned to women.

Moreover, Nhamo is taught to assert domination over his sisters, subjecting them to his control by leveraging his perceived masculinity. It is evident that Nhamo manipulates Tambu

and his other sisters to do tasks for him. She points out that Nhamo is essentially following society's expectations by embodying patriarchal roles.

When he was being himself he would smirk that minding children was not a man's duty and Netsai, who was young although big for her age, would strap the baby to her back in order to fetch the luggage. Once or twice, because there was too much for her to manage on her own, I went with her. Knowing that he did not need help, that he only wanted to demonstrate to us and himself that he had power, the authority to make us do things for him, I hated fetching my brother's luggage (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 9-10).

From the citation above, Dangarembga highlights the gender dynamics and power struggles within the family. The male figure rejects the idea that child care should be considered a man's responsibility, smirking as he makes a young girl manage both the baby and the luggage. The narrator recognizes that the male figure's insistence on this arrangement is not about needing help, but about demonstrating his authority and control over the family.

This dynamic is reinforced by the patriarchal system in the novel, which dictates that each family must have a leader who exerts control over everyone. In her *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, bell hooks affirms: "Patriarchy allowed all men to completely rule women in their families, to decide their fate, to shape their destiny" (hooks, 1984, p.120). Babamukuru assumes this role as the head of the family. He is a wealthy and only educated man. Babamukuru embodying the masculine authority in the narrative, exemplifies the typical dominance of men whose education failed to shift his perspectives on the opposite gender. His behaviour, attitude and interactions with female characters subtly reveal his belief in the superiority of men over women (Ouahmiche and Boughouas, 2016).

Babamukuru asserts control over his wife Maiguru, despite her education and her high level of master's degree. Babamukuru takes her monthly teaching salary without her permission, uses it to support his extended family, and makes decisions in the house and community without considering Maiguru's input.

Similarly, Nyasha, like her mother, faces marginalization and unfair treatment. In the novel, she is the character who embodies a deep love for life, even in the face of intense struggles. She has a passion for music and dance, which represents her desire for freedom and self-expression. In this regard, Alice Walker in her womanist theory *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* affirms: "Woman loves music, loves dance [...] Loves struggles" (Walker, 1983, p. xii). However, Nyasha endures physical violence for minor mistakes. She even receives criticism for her reading choices, clothing, behaviour and friendships.

Do you see the kind of books your daughter is reading?' Maiguru asked my aunt, taking Nyasha's copy of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* from the dresser and showing it to my uncle. Babamukuru was distressed, looking sad, then hurt, then ultimately annoyed. 'Tss!' he shook his head. 'I don't know what's wrong with our daughter. She has no sense of decency, none whatsoever.' So saying, he took the book and left the room, returning a minute later without the offending volume. 'You think she shouldn't read it?' Maiguru asked. 'I thought so too, but Nyasha is intelligent, and a good girl, and that is only a book, I thought' 'If I let you Ma'Chido, you would spoil these children. No daughter of mine is going to read such books (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 81).

In this context, Babamukuru the patriarch of the family gets involved in every aspect of those female's life as he embodies a strict form of male dominance over women. This distressing scenario has been inherited across generations, implying that women are expected to adhere to the established hierarchy where they are supposed to acknowledge their place as subordinate to men (Ouahmiche and Boughouas, 2016).

In the novel, domestic violence is a crucial element that reflects broader patterns of patriarchal oppression. Dangarembga demonstrates how this violence is a manifestation of systemic issues, including patriarchy and highlights the need for transformative social change. In this regard, hooks redefines feminism as "the struggle to end sexist oppression" (hooks, 1984, p. 26). According to her, feminism stands as the only solution to eradicate male dominance and seeks to dismantle these oppressive structures and create a more equitable society to attain gender equality between both sexes.

## 2. Psychological violence

In many African contexts, there is a prevalence of psychological subjugation, reinforced by patriarchal structures and the perpetuation of gender despotism, even by women themselves. According to the Council of Europe's (2011) definition, psychological oppression encompasses any action that inflicts psychological harm upon an individual. This encompasses a range of behaviors including, but not limited to, coercion, defamation, verbal insult, and harassment. The literary work of Tsitsi Dangarembga may be interpreted as an authentic portrayal of the tribulation experienced by women in Rhodesia.

In her novel, Tsitsi Dangarembga exposes the profound psychological violence imposed upon African women, a violence that erodes their mental autonomy. The text is a poignant reflection of the systematic negation of the women's cognitive freedom, illustrating the psychological subjugation experienced by the female protagonists through the nuanced depictions of Tambu and Nyasha.

However, Tambu was subjected to derision by her brother, Nhamo, who relegated her to the butt of his jokes. Culturally confined to a role that thwarted her aspiration beyond the domestic sphere, Tambu faced systematic barriers to advancement. In stark contrast, Nhamo enjoyed privileges and opportunities solely by virtue of his gender, while the psychological of such gender based inequality weighed heavily upon her.

Consequently, the dynamics between her and her brother were significantly strained due to the prevailing gender inequality. Nhamo's actions such as pilfering Tambu's maize, were indicative of his attempts to assert male dominance and subjugate her. Conversely, Tambu developed a profound animosity towards her brother, so much so that his demise elicited no sorrow from her, contrary to societal expectation, she confesses:

I was not sorry when my brother died. Nor am I apologizing for my callousness, as you may define it, my lack of feeling. For it is not that act at all. I feel many things these days, much more than I was able to feel in the days when I was young and my brother died, and there are reasons for this more than the mere consequence of age. Therefore, I shall apologize but begin by recalling the facts as I remember than that led up to my brother's death (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 1).

In the quotation above, Tsitsi Dangarembga intricately maps out the emotional terrain of Tambu, the central character. The absence of mourning for her brother's demise does not signal a lack of feeling; rather, it signifies a significant transformation in her mental state. The text implies that Tambu's emotional range has matured, encompassing a wider array of sentiments than was possible in her earlier years. However, the lack of sorrow for Nhamo's death repudiates the mental torment he imposed on her, stemming from his gender-based inequality.

Furthermore, Tambu is not the sole figure to endure psychological distress at the hands of male characters. Her cousin, Nyasha, also falls prey to the tyrannical dominance of her father, Babamukuru. His stringent regulation of her speech, clothing and reading choices, coupled with physical abuse, has had a detrimental impact on her psychological well-being (Benon Tugume, 2022). As it is depicted on the following lines:

I expect you to do as I say. Now sit down and eat your food.' Sulkily Nyasha sat down and took a couple of mouthfuls. 'Excuse me,' she said. She rose from the table, her food unfinished.

'Now where are you going?' Babamukuru demanded.

'To my bedroom,' replied Nyasha.

'What did you say?' cried Babamukuru, his voice cracking in disbelief. 'Didn't you hear me tell you I don't want to hear you answer back? Didn't you hear me tell you that just now? Now sit down and eat that food. All of it. I want to see you eat all of it. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 83-84).

The citation illustrates a moment of tension between Nyasha and her father. The command "I expect you to do as I say" (p. 83) reflects an authoritative tone, which can be interpreted as a form of psychological control or violence. Consequently, Nyasha's endeavor to liberate herself

from her father's conventional expectations culminates in a tragic outcome as she develops anorexia nervosa or bulimia. This occurs in the context of her efforts to assert autonomy over her existence.

In addition, Tambu becomes aware of her uncle Babamukuru's endorsement of sexist ideologies, which is evident in his harsh treatment of his daughter Nyasha. This observation leads Tambu to a deeper understanding of the gender biases ingrained within her family and society. She comments on:

Babamukuru condemning Nyasha to whoredom, making her a victim of her femaleness, just I had felt victimized at home in the days when Nhamo went to school and I grew my maize. The victimization, I saw, was universal. It didn't depend on poverty, on lack of education, or on traditions, It didn't depend on any tings. I had thought it depended on. Men took it everywhere with them. Even heroes like Babamukuru did it. And that was the problem. You had to admit Nyasha had no tact ... But what I didn't like was the way that all conflict came back to the question of femaleness. Femaleness as opposed and inferior to maleness (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 115-116).

The quotation above reflects the psychological ramification of sexism on female identity. It highlights the emotional and mental strain experienced by women who are forced to navigate a society that consistently undervalues and marginalizes them based on their gender. Tambu's assertion that "Men took it everywhere with them" (p.116) implicate even the most revered individuals in the perpetuation of gender inequality. The conflict Tambu identifies is rooted in the systemic devaluation of the feminine in comparison to the masculine, which she perceives as inherently privileged.

To conclude, through their respective works, the authors highlight the suffering that the Egyptian and Rhodesian females encounter from different types of violence. These authors portray the multifaceted violence endured by women through the lives of the female protagonists with a particular focus on the influence of traditional structures in both societies.

## **Chapter two: Resistance in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988)**

In this chapter, we shed light on the theme of resistance in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988). Both novels present powerful narratives of female protagonists who confront and resist the oppressive forces of patriarchy in their respective societies. They highlight how education serves as a tool for empowerment and resistance, and how solidarity among women promotes a collective strength against these oppressive systems.

### **A. Forms of resistance in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975)**

Nawal El Saadawi's novel presents a compelling exploration of resistance against systemic oppression. Firdaus embodies various forms of resistance as she navigates a life marked by abuse, exploitation, and patriarchal control. Her journey from subjugation to defiance reflects a broader critique of the societal structures that oppress women. This section examines the diverse forms of resistance portrayed in the novel, it will explore how Firdaus employs education, solidarity, and even prostitution as strategies of resistance.

#### **1. Education**

Education is a crucial subject that many feminists discuss and emphasize. Indeed, in patriarchal societies, only men are viewed as deserving education. They believe that women should only stay at home and not pursue their own dreams and aspirations. In *Woman at Point Zero*, the theme of education is incredibly important and has a profound impact on the protagonist's life. Despite the limited opportunities she has, education plays a crucial role in her journey of self-discovery, defiance and empowerment.

El Saadawi depicts the challenges that Firdaus experiences as she strives to obtain education, highlighting the numerous barriers and difficulties she confronts on her path. During her childhood, Firdaus expressed her desire to obtain an education. Thus, her uncle taught her to read and write. She states:

My uncle would put a chalk pencil between my fingers and make me write on a slate: Alif, Ba, Gim, Dal... Sometimes he made me repeat after him: 'Alif has nothing on her, Ba's got one dot underneath, Gim's got a dot in the middle, Dal has nothing at all.' He would nod his head as he recited from the thousand-verse poem of Ibn Malik, just as though he was reciting from the Koran, and I would repeat each letter after him, and nod my head in the same way (Nawal El Saadawi, 1975, p.14).

After her parents' death, her uncle permitted her to receive education at school in Cairo, where she passed her secondary education. Firdaus developed a love of books; with every book, she learned something new. Yet, Firdaus endured a great injustice when her uncle denied her the chance to pursue her studies at university, simply because she is a woman and that university was for men. He affirms: "To the university? To a place where she will be sitting side by side with men? A respected Sheikh and man of religion like myself sending his niece off to mix in the company of men?!" (Nawal El Saadawi, 1975, p. 37).

This denial highlights the essential role of education in empowering women; as it helps them to become independent, and enables them to contribute to society in meaningful ways. For Firdaus, her academic journey was transformative; it developed her ability to analyse and question the societal norms that perpetuate the oppression of women. This intellectual empowerment allowed Firdaus to recognize the injustices imposed on her. In fact, Firdaus' education at the secondary level helped her to understand the patriarchal structures that restricted her life. Her academic experiences contributed to her refusal to accept an arranged marriage, a common practice that limits women's autonomy. By rejecting this arranged marriage and leaving her abusive husband, Sheikh Mahmoud, Firdaus not only defied social expectations but also asserted her right to choose her own path. Her actions demonstrate her

resilience and challenges the oppressive norms of her society. Thus, bell hooks in her eighth chapter entitled *Educating Women: A Feminist Agenda*, highlights the crucial role of education in liberating women. She asserts:

Encouraging women to strive for education, to develop their intellects, should be a primary goal of feminist movement. Education as “the practice of freedom” will be a reality for women only when we develop an educational methodology that addresses the needs of all women. This is an important feminist agenda (hooks, 1984, p. 114-115).

In the quotation above, bell hooks argues that one of the primary goals of the feminist movement should be to motivate women to pursue their education. She considers education as a means of freedom and believes it will only become effective in liberating women when it is designed to meet the needs of all women.

Moreover, Firdaus’ ability to imagine a future that she can shape according to her own wishes arises from the self-awareness and confidence she develops through education. The knowledge and abilities she acquires empower her to defy the oppressive forces in her life. She believed:

For the future was still mine to paint in the colours I desired. Still mine to decide about freely, and change as I saw fit. Sometimes I imagined that I would become a doctor, or an engineer, or a lawyer, or a judge. And one day the whole school went out the streets to join a big demonstration against the government. Suddenly I found myself riding high up on the shoulders of the girls shouting, ‘Down with the government!’ When I got back to school my voice was hoarse, my hair in disarray, and my clothes were torn in several places, but all through the night I kept imagining myself as a great leader or head of state. I knew that women did not become heads of state but I felt that I was not like other women nor like the other girls around me who kept talking about love or about men (El Saadawi, 1975, p. 24-25).

From this quotation, El Saadawi explores the dreams and aspirations of the protagonist Firdaus. She highlights her desire to pursue careers traditionally dominated by men. The demonstration against the government symbolizes her resistance and determination to challenge societal

norms. Firdaus continues to imagine herself as a great leader or head of state, defying the limitations placed on women.

In *Woman at Point Zero*, education serves as a crucial tool for Firdaus's empowerment. Through education, she gains a deep understanding of her rights, the injustices faced by women, and the oppressive forces in her life. It allowed her to see beyond the confines of societal expectations and challenge the norms that limited her. Education empowered Firdaus to recognize her own worth, assert her independence, and fight for her liberation. It also gave her the knowledge and tools to navigate the world with confidence and advocate for equal opportunities.

## **2. Women's Solidarity**

In Nawal El Saadawi's novel, the theme of female solidarity emerges through the characters Firdaus and Sharifa who share a common struggle as Egyptian women. Upon their meeting, Sharifa recognizes a reflection of herself, having endured similar patriarchal oppression, she understands that this struggle primarily concerns men, she says: "Any of them, it doesn't make any difference. They're all the same, all sons of dogs. Running around under various names, Mahmoud, Hassanein, Fawzy, Sabri, Ibrahim, Awadain, Bayoumi" (Nawal El Saadawi, 1975, p.55).

Sharifa generously provides Firdaus with shelter, assuming the roles of both sister and a mother. This newfound care and affection from Sharifa contrasts sharply with Firdaus's own parents, who failed to offer her warmth and love (Chaima Benoumhani, 2021). In fact, her solidarity with Firdaus challenges the notion that women are natural enemies as they are considered by male supremacists, bell hooks argues:

Male supremacist ideology encourages women to believe we are valueless and obtain value only by relating to or bonding with men. We are taught that our relationships with one another diminish rather than

enrich our experience. We are taught that women are natural enemies, that solidarity will never exist between us because we cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another. We have learned these lessons well. We must unlearn them if we are to build a sustained feminist movement. We must learn to live and work in solidarity. We must learn the true meaning and value of sisterhood (hooks, 1984, p. 43).

Hooks asserts that women must challenge and unlearn these ingrained beliefs. Instead, they need to focus on building connections with one another. By cultivating solidarity and sisterhood, women can find strength in their experiences, support each other in their struggles, and empower one another.

Similarly, Alice Walker, in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* exposes the important role of women's solidarity. In one of her powerful reflections, she asks: "What did it mean for a black woman to be an artist in our grandmother's time? In our grandmother's day? It is a question with an answer cruel enough to stop the blood" (Walker, 1983, p.402). This quote illustrates how despite the suppression of their voices and dreams, black women found ways to guide future generations, as it highlights how women, despite oppression, support and empower one another.

However, Firdaus finds solace and relief from her misfortunes, experiencing a sense of rebirth, she affirms: "When I opened my eyes and looked into the mirror I realized that now I was being born again with a new body, smooth and tender as a rose petal" (Nawal El Saadawi, 1975, p.57). Moreover, Firdaus experiences a moment of profound self-awareness and acceptance. This pivotal instant marks her recognition of intrinsic value and her rightful claim to dignity and respect. Sharifa's influence empowers Firdaus to awaken, effect change, and reject the oppressive patriarchal system, she adds:

I discovered I had black eyes like a magnet, and that my nose was neither big, nor rounded, but full and smooth with the fullness of strong passion which could turn to lust. My body was slender, my thighs tense, alive with muscle, ready at any moment to grow even more taut. I realized that I had not hated my mother, nor loved my uncle, not really

known Bayoumi, or any other man who belonged to his gang (Nawal El Saadawi, 1975, p. 58).

Furthermore, Sharifa persistently encourages Firdaus to recognize her inherent value as a woman. She emphasizes that Firdaus should actively assess her worth and set a price for herself. This guidance underscores the importance of self-valuation and empowerment in a society that often diminishes women's worth (Conita Vidina Sulaiman, 2019), as it is seen in the following lines:

Sharifa said to me one day, 'Neither Bayoumi nor any of his cronies realized your worth, because you failed to value yourself highly enough. A man does not know a woman's value, Firdaus. She is the one who determines her value. The higher you price yourself, the more he will realize what you are really worth, and be prepared to pay with the means at his disposal (Nawal El Saadawi, 1975, p. 58).

The novel underscores the significant of female solidarity to achieve woman's independence and empowerment, embodied by the character of Sharifa, who serves as a mother, sister and guide to Firdaus, Sharifa's mentorship facilitates Firdaus's self-discovery and recognition of her own value.

### **3. Prostitution**

In Nawal El Saadawi's novel, the protagonist Firdaus seizes every opportunity to protect and liberate herself from male oppression that haunts her. Prostitution is one of the strategies she employs to achieve self-reliance and financial independence. Firdaus recounts her descent into the world of prostitution, guided by Sharifa. This path was borne out of her enduring domestic and sexual abuse at the hands of every man she encountered. In this context, Alice Walker in her essay *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* depicts the devastating effects of patriarchal violence on women's lives. She asserts: "He saw them enter loveless marriages, without joy and become prostitutes, without resistance" (Alice Walker, 1983, p. 402). This quote reflects how Firdaus's situation mirrors Walker's description of women trapped in roles

that deny them joy and self-fulfillment. However, Sharifa not only offers Firdaus a safe and comfortable refuge but also imparts valuable guidance on navigating her interaction with men (Chaima Benoumhani & Ahlam Yallaoui, 2021).

Moreover, Firdaus's decision to engage in independent prostitution led to her empowerment a sense of agency. Through this choice, she achieved financial independence, earning her own income and relying on no one for support, as she reports:

The warmth of good food ran through my body with the blood in my veins, the rest of the ten pound note nestled safely in my pocket. My footsteps on the dark tarmac road struck the ground with force, with a new elation, like the elation of a child that has just pulled a toy to pieces and discovered the secret of how it works (Nawal El Saadawi, 1975, p. 73).

The quotation represents Firdaus's transformation from vulnerability to empowerment, the imagery of warmth and financial security contrasts with her past struggles with the oppressive society. As it is reported in Nenden Syahbana Mandakini's & Dr. Ali Mustofa, M.Pd's thesis *Dismantling Prostitution as an Institution in Nawal El Saadawi's Woman at Point Zero*, Firdaus strategically resists being objectified by men. Rather than allowing herself to be a sexual object, she asserts her autonomy. She becomes the one who decides which men can access her sexual services. By setting a high price for these services, she positions herself as a subject rather than a mere object, distinguishing her approach from that of other prostitutes, as it is seen in the citation below:

A man came up to me and whispered. I looked him straight in the eye and said 'No'. Another man came up to me and muttered something in a secretive voice which could barely be heard. I examined him carefully from head to toes and said, 'No'. He enquired: 'why no?' I replied: 'Because there are plenty of men and I want to choose with whom to go.'

So he said, 'Well then, why not choose me?'

'Because your finger nails are dirty, and I like them to be clean.'

A third man approached. He pronounced the secret word, the key to the riddle I had solved. I asked,

'How much will you pay?'

‘Ten pounds.’

‘No, twenty’

‘Your wishes are my order,’ and he paid me on the spot (El Saadawi, 1975, p. 73-74).

In the citation above, Firdaus asserts her agency in a society that devalues women. Her rejection of the first two men and negotiation with the third reflects her refusal to be as an object and her ability to take control over her body. Furthermore, Firdaus challenges the oppressive norms around her, reclaiming her autonomy and resisting patriarchal exploitation. She also commands respect due to her success, she says: “One day, when I donated some money to a charitable association, the newspapers published pictures of me ... whenever I needed a dose of honor or fame, I had only to draw some money from the bank” (El Saadawi, p. 99-100).

In the novel, prostitution emerges as a form of resistance adopted by Firdaus to shield herself from an oppressive society that objectifies women. Having endured physical and sexual abuse from men throughout her life, Firdaus finds solace and empowerment in prostitution. It becomes a means for her to assert her autonomy and gain confidence, ultimately allowing her to exert control over men through her work as a prostitute.

## **B. Forms of resistance in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* (1988)**

Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* depicts the several forms of resistance against the intersecting forces of patriarchy and social inequality. The female protagonists in the novel employ different strategies to challenge the oppressive structures that constrain their lives. This section analyses the diverse forms of resistance portrayed in the novel, focusing on how education and solidarity among women serve as powerful tools for confronting and overcoming systemic oppression.

## 1. Education

Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel is a captivating explanation of the challenges women face in a colonized Zimbabwe. The novel sheds light on the theme of resistance through education, portraying how the pursuit of knowledge becomes a powerful means for the female protagonists, Tambu, Nyasha, Maiguru and Lucia. Indeed, education serves as a form of resistance for these characters to confront the various forms of violence they encounter during their journeys.

In the novel, Tambu embodies the resistance from the very beginning. She stands up against the oppressive circumstances, not just for herself, but also for other women. As she shares her story focussing on liberation, including her own escape with Lucia, her mother and Maiguru's confinement; and Nyasha's act of rebellion. She argues: "My story is not after all about death, but about my escape and Lucia's, about my mother's and Maiguru's entrapment, and about Nyasha's rebellion" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 1). This quote reflects Tambu's determination to break free from the entrapment faced by the females as she fight for her own independence.

Tambu becomes aware of how her culture affects her gender and society. She decides to liberate herself from strict adherence to these rules while still respecting her culture. She challenges the traditional African expectations of female obedience and submissiveness; one of the first instances where she recognizes the effects of male subjugation is when she is forced to leave school so her brother can continue his education. Despite facing financial hardships, Tambu is determined to finish school. Thus, she announced to her parents that she should go to school again. Then, Tambu decides to cultivate crops to earn money for her school fees. She declares: "I will clear my own field and grow my own maize. Not much. Just enough for the fees" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 17). Tambu's behaviour reflects Alice Walker's traits of a womanist, particularly through her sense of responsibility and seriousness. She claims: "a word

that means responsible, serious girl” (Walker, 1983, p. xi). This highlights Tambu’s initiative and willingness to work hard to achieve her educational goals as it represents her initial response to overcome subjugation. Indeed, her determination to work and save money for her education mirrors the feminist belief in the power of economic independence as a path to liberation.

In this regard, bell hooks discusses the feminist argument that work outside the home is essential for women’s freedom. Furthermore, the economic independence was seen as a means to resist and overcome sexist domination. She states:

Work outside the home, feminist activists declared, was the key to liberation. Work, they argued, would allow women to break the bonds of economic dependency on men, which would in turn enable them to resist sexist domination. When these women talked about work they were equating it with high paying careers; they were not referring to low paying jobs or so called menial labour (hooks, 1984, p. 95).

The mission school marks a significant turning point in Tambu’s life. It represents her transition from a life constrained by poverty and limited opportunities to one where she can access broader horizons and new possibilities. Therefore, she considers her clear and uncomplicated aspirations regarding her education and future. She believes: “Consciously I thought my direction was clear: I was being educated. When I had been educated, I would find a job and settle down to it, carrying on, in the time that was available before I was married into a new home” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 151). This passage reflects Tambu’s initial comprehension of her path in life. She believed that education would lead her to find a job and settle down before getting married. These goals were well-defined for her, sharpened by the expectations of her family and the desire to contribute to the family’s development.

Even though Tambu receives a scholarship to continue her education at a convent, Babamukuru hesitates to grant her permission and relinquish control over her. Despite Tambu’s educational accomplishments being the reason for this scholarship, her achievements are

credited to Babamukuru, who is praised by the family. However, Babamukuru eventually realized the benefits of Tambu's opportunity and gives her permission. She states: "I was to take another step upwards in the direction of my freedom. Another step away from the flies, the smells, the fields and the rags" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 183). This shows Tambu's determination and the significance of each step she takes towards her freedom.

Furthermore, while Tambu's resistance through education is marked by her determination to escape poverty and gain empowerment, Nyasha's resistance is characterized by open rebellion and intellectual defiance against patriarchal norms. Nyasha's education, especially her time spent in England, broadens her worldview and sharpens her critical thinking skills. As it is seen in her return from England, she and her brother have lost much of their native language, Shona, due to speaking English for an extended period.

Sarah Miller in her article entitled *Self-Destructive Education in Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions* (2018), illustrates that reading plays a significant role in the cousins Tambu and Nyasha's exposure to the English language. Certainly, Tambu's preference for fictional stories with positive outcomes brings her a sense of optimism. She uses these stories as a way to link her academic experiences influenced by Western culture with her roots in Rhodesian family. However, Nyasha finds resonance in non-fiction literature that delves into violence, challenge and international oppression. Through education, Nyasha's readings have had a profound impact on her. She is experiencing a mix of emotions, including horror and anxiety, as she delves into the world of oppression beyond her own. The knowledge she is gaining through her readings is opening her eyes to the negative outcomes of oppression.

In addition, Maiguru's advanced education gives her a completely new level of intellectual independence that sets her apart from other women in her community. Initially, like her daughter, she was submissive to her husband, Babamukuru. However, her education empowers

her to question societal expectations and reject the notion of being submissive. She refuses to accept the traditional gender roles imposed on her and instead asserts her own agency and independence. In this context, hooks argues:

It is the freedom to decide her own destiny; freedom from sex-determined role; freedom from society's oppressive restrictions; freedom to express her thoughts fully and to convert them freely into action. Feminism demands the acceptance of woman's right to individual conscience and judgment (hooks, 1984, p. 24).

This quotation emphasizes that women should have the right to shape their own lives and reject roles defined by their gender. By advocating for freedom from societal limitations, Hooks supports women's ability to express and act on their ideas.

Finally, Lucia, Tambu's aunt, cleverly uses Babamukuru's desire to establish himself as a patriarchal figure to her advantage. By persuading him to find her a job, Lucia gains financial independence and the opportunity for upward mobility. Instead of succumbing to societal pressure to marry Takesure, she chooses to pursue her own path through night classes. Lucia's approach highlights the power of utilizing the oppressive system to bring about change.

## **2. Women's Solidarity**

In the novel, Dangarembga highlights female solidarity as a vital tool that African women use to navigate their challenging circumstances and improve their lives collectively. Dangarembga underscores the importance of women's unity by emphasizing the positive outcomes of such solidarity. This theme is explored by Christine Sizemore in her analysis of Nervous Conditions in *Negotiating Between Ideologies: The Search for Identity*. Sizemore examines this dynamic focusing on Tambu's resilience and the role of female solidarity in empowering her to confront patriarchal oppression. She contends that despite her brother's and father's efforts to drive her into silence, Tambu has enough support from the women in her

family to maintain her belief in her ability to achieve. Indeed, the strong support Tambu receives from the women in her life helps her to resist the suppression of her voice

Throughout the narrative, despite the difficult situation they face, the female characters consistently support one another in resisting oppression and striving for liberation, as Tambu says: “ My story is not after all about death but about my escape and Lucia’s, about my mother’s and Maiguru’s entrapment, and about Nyasha’s rebellion” (Tsitsi Dangarembga, 1988, p. 1). From this quotation, Dangarembga reflects on the condition of female in the novel and the diverse strategies women employ to resist oppression. In this regard, bell hooks reflects on the concept of true sisterhood and solidarity between women. She envisions a life where women naturally come together to support, protect, and deeply care for each other. She asserts: “I had not known a life where women had not been together, where women had not helped, protected, and loved one another deeply (hooks, 1984, p. 11).

Furthermore, the novel exemplifies female solidarity through Nyasha’s support of Tambu during her educational journey. Upon arriving at the mission, they develop a close bond. Moreover, Nyasha’s intellectual insight and rebellious spirit profoundly influence Tambu, challenging her to think critically and assert her own identity, as it is seen in the following lines:

Nyasha gave me the impression of moving always 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. And being so young, time measured, in hours and half hours, was important, so I did not want to spend three whole weeks away from my cousin. Knowing I would be at a loss without her (Tsitsi Dangarembga, 1988, p. 152).

The quotation represents Nyasha as a crucial source of encouragement and guidance for Tambu. For instance, Nyasha aids her in improving her academic performance by sharing study techniques and fostering a disciplined approach to her studies. However, their bond grows substantially stronger, leading to a mutual dependence on one another, as Nyasha confirms in

her letter to Tambu: “But the fact is I am missing you, and missing you badly. In many ways you are very essential to me in bridging some of the gaps in my life, and now that you are away, I feel them again. I find more and more difficult to speak with girls at school” (Tsitsi Dangarembga, 1988, p.196). This passage exemplifies the strong female solidarity and companionship between Tambu and Nyasha. Nyasha’s heartfelt expression of missing Tambu underscores the depth of their emotional bond. Despite being physically apart, their connection remains essential to both of them, their complicity lies in shared secrets, emotions, and experiences, and their solidarity manifests in mutual support during challenging time.

In the novel, Lucia emerges as a mysterious and strong-willed womanist who refuses to tolerate women’s oppression. Defying societal norms, she disregards expectations that demand women remain silent and obedient. Instead, she is outspoken, ambitious, as she is described by Babamukuru: “she is like a man herself” (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 171), this quotation represents a comparison of a woman to a man highlights her defiance of traditional gender roles and societal expectations. Lucia’s strength is demonstrated in the novel when she reclaims her agency and acts against the punishment imposed on Tambu, as it is seen in the quotation below:

When eventually Babamukuru came, Lucia was blunt with him. She told him quite openly that I should not be punished so severely. ‘Did you ask her what was on her mind?’ she demanded. ‘Did you ask my sister whether she wished her daughter was present? Even the wedding. Did you ask my sister if she wanted that wedding? I do not see that the child did you so much wrong by preferring not to be there (Dangarembga, 1988, p.171).

The quotation above represents Lucia’s confrontation with Babamukuru as a pivotal moment that highlights her strong sense of justice and unwavering support for Tambu. When Babamukuru decides to punish Tambu harshly, Lucia boldly intervenes, expressing her disapproval directly to him. This act of defiance demonstrates Lucia’s courage and her willingness to challenge authority figures to protect those she cares about, by speaking out against Babamukuru’s treatment of Tambu. Lucia not only provides emotional support but also

underscores the theme of solidarity within the novel. Indeed, Lucia's support for Tambu and her resistance against Babamukuru exemplify the kind of solidarity and sisterhood bell hooks describes in her chapter entitled *Sisterhood: Political Solidarity Between Women* when she contends: "We can be sisters united by diversity, united in our struggle to end sexist oppression, united in political solidarity" (hooks, 1984, p. 65).

Another instance demonstrating Lucia's strength, support, and solidarity with other women is illustrated by her assistance to her sister Ma'Shingayi during a challenging period. Ma'Shingayi, who is subjected to various forms of oppression, receives Lucia's unwavering support particularly during her post-pregnancy phase. Lucia's actions can be described as womanist in nature, reflecting the "outrageous, audacious, and courageous" (Walker, 1983, p. xi) qualities that define the term. Her commitment to female solidarity is evident, as Tambu asserts: "My mother slept in the early hours of the morning, waking at ten o'clock to find Lucia had prepared her porridge and had made it with milk to make it rich and sustaining. Lucia stayed two more days to see my mother well on her way to recovery before she returned to the mission" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 186).

Finally, the female characters of the novel refuse to remain oppressed and actively resist the system. Their determination to work together underscores a theme of female solidarity in the face of adversity, illustrating their resilience and shared commitment to overcoming societal constraints. This theme of resistance is supported by Alice Walker's exploration of solidarity in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. Walker reinforces the idea that through unity and shared struggles, women can find strength in each other, which reflects the resistance seen in both novels.

To conclude, this chapter highlights how the protagonists in *Woman at Point Zero* and *Nervous Conditions* navigate and resist the violence they face. Through their actions and

choices, the authors reveal the transformative power of individual and collective resistance in challenging and disrupting oppressive systems. Nawal El Saadawi and Tsitsi Dangarembga demonstrate that confronting systemic violence is not only a struggle for survival but also a quest for broader societal change and personal empowerment.

## V. General conclusion

This research has explored the themes of violence and resistance as portrayed by the Arab and Rhodesian writers Nawal El Saadawi in *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and Tsitsi Dangarembga in *Nervous Conditions* (1988). Our study critically examined the various forms of oppression faced by women globally under male domination and exposed their struggles against patriarchal societies. To achieve our objectives, we drew upon two key theoretical frameworks: Alice Walker's womanist theory as presented in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983) and bell hooks' feminist theory as articulated in *From Margin to Center* (1984).

Our study of the novels reveals that, despite the authors different languages and nationalities, they both employ their writings as a means to liberate women from social constraints and provide them with a voice to articulate their experiences. *Woman at Point Zero* and *Nervous Conditions* share a unified perspective on oppression, patriarchy and violence.

We began our study by exploring the central issues affecting women that create a connection between the novels. Our research indicates that in patriarchal societies, women are subjected to various forms of violence, marginalization, and oppression by men. These challenges, though common, are represented differently by the two authors. Nawal El Saadawi and Tsitsi Dangarembga, each convey women's struggles in their own unique ways, shaped by their respective cultural and societal contexts. The female characters in the novels serve as a means to illustrate the pervasive oppression of women in both Egyptian and Rhodesian societies. The two authors depict the harsh realities of the lives these women endured, shaped by a societal structure dominated by male control.

We then examined the theme of women's resistance in both novels, focusing on their fight and struggle against male domination. Nawal El Saadawi and Tsitsi Dangarembga express

their advocacy for women's rights by portraying female characters who resist oppression and patriarchy. Through their works, these authors give voice to the female characters, empowering them to stand against the injustices they face and to raise their voice against the violence they endure. Through the narrative of the protagonists, the novels reveal how women can confront those who seek to deprive them of their freedom and rights. The authors convey a powerful message that women empowered by education and united in solidarity, will no longer fear injustice or remain silent in the face of oppression.

While both authors highlight the struggles of women under patriarchal rule, they also illustrate the different paths to liberation taken by their protagonists. In *Woman at Point Zero*, Firdaus reclaims her autonomy through an act of ultimate defiance killing her oppressor choosing death over submission and thereby asserting control over her fate. In contrast, in *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu's liberation is rooted in education and self-awareness, as she gradually distances herself from oppressive traditions and embraces her own intellectual and personal growth.

Indeed, Both Nawal El Saadawi and Tsitsi Dangarembga employ their writing to articulate a strong female voice that demands independence and liberation from the harsh constraints of a patriarchal society. Through their literary works, they endeavor to free women from the restrictive lives imposed by these societal structures, challenging the forces that seek to control their destinies.

To conclude, our piece of research did not permit an examination of additional issues within Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), despite these topics offering substantial opportunities for further investigation. Therefore, we encourage future researchers to explore other dimensions.

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